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FLARR Pages #68: Autobiography and Travel: Motivation for Writing in World Languages Classes

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To inspire students to write in a foreign language, the most interesting of topics must be chosen!

Autobiography and Travel: Motivation for Writing in World Languages Classes

My idea for motivating compositional skill is to have students write about questions that they will surely be asked when they travel, especially, in my classes, when they travel to Latin America and Spain. Students are most commonly asked about their families; about studies and future plans; about jobs, which are usually Summer jobs; and shortly thereafter about their views on love, courtship, and marriage. I have students write composition about these topics, drafts to be revised three times, and then students arrange the statements on one page, front and back, with illustrations. I then laminate the page for them and they have a tool, a durable tool, to take with them on their travels.

Students who develop these compositions are at the Intermediate level, and many will decide to continue in Spanish. The compositions also provide, then, an opportunity for the instructor to become better acquainted with the students, so that, for instance, the instructor might be able to suggest how study in Spanish could help students in their future jobs and professions. The compositions can also suggest future areas of vocabulary study which can be of use.

Since many of these students are first year students at the college, the topics of the compositions provide an opportunity for them to think through their talents, experiences, studies and future career plans formally, on paper. This is particularly valuable for undecided students. There is also the opportunity to review what they find important about family life, about future relationships, particularly in love, courtship and marriage. Actually students are vitally interested in these issues and they enjoy writing about them.

In the composition on family, language wise, there is much description and vocabulary having to do with family relationships

File under:

- Composition
- Foreign travel and study

and characteristics of family members, including pets. Sometimes students relate their traditional family stories in the past tense, e.g. how mom and dad met. Often experiences in family lead to preferences in Summer jobs and also to life-long interests.

As you can see in the chart, in the column labeled Summer Jobs and Vacations, students took advantage of many opportunities to help others in teaching or caring for the young. Some students were very creative: one, for instance, developed a jewelry designing business. Some criticized their employers for bad decisions, some praised their bosses for their managerial talent. Others had adventures with averting theft and putting out fires. Both work experiences and Summer vacation events are good opportunities for telling tales in the past, using the preterite-imperfect distinctions in Spanish.

In the section entitled Studies and Future, some students express their decisions for certain career paths. At UMM many young people want to enter helping professions, particularly teaching. Yes, they believe that this path will lead to happiness and they are not as impressed with the "race for riches" which, according to some, undergirds American competitiveness. Many are trying to marshal special talents into a career, exploring music, photography, crafts, and the yen for travel.

Regarding love, courtship and marriage, young women seem to know almost exactly what they want and young men, in general, have not concerned themselves too much about the topics, although some are quite thoughtful. Many are wary of rushing into something and they insist on a developing relationship, with time together, over a period of years. Many state that they have high expectations regarding relationships, but some recognize the dangers of expecting too much.

This project provides a stimulating and useful way to work on compositional skills; it encourages students to think; it establishes

the possibility of a rapport between the student and the instructor. The technique could be used as well in advanced classes, and, with modification to short dialogue form, instead of discursive statements, it could have limited use in beginning courses.

If you have any questions, e-mail me at turnerc@morris.umn.edu. Thomas C. Turner, UMM

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Mxxxx's Expectations for Courtship, Love and Marriage:

I have high expectations when it comes to courtship. First there is the man: he has to be handsome, tall, very much a gentleman. He needs black hair, dark eyes, and an excellent physique. He also needs to be nice, thoughtful, and humorous. Secondly there are my needs: he has to take me to the best restaurants and concerts and to the films that I want to see. Also he is to give me gifts and chocolate a lot. He needs to make dates which are interesting and fun. I would like it if he might cook for me, spend time with me, and do special things with me. If he does these things for me, I am going to do these things for him also. In courtship, the couple gets to know each other well. For example the two need to know their favorite things, the names of their friends and family, and the opinions of the other person. It is very important that the "novios" get along with the family and friends of their "novias." The "novia" must know the priority list of the "novio" very well. After two or three years the two are going to know if they are going to get married. In marriage I also have high expectations. The two need to get along well. They have to be in love! They have to have the same goals and the same faults (?). Communication is very, very, important. They need to be good to one another in making their decisions together. The man has to remember that the woman is correct all the time.

Student	Family	Summer Jobs & Vacations	Studies & Future	Love & Courtship & Marriage
Jxxxxx	Basic facts Characteristics Favorites	Teaching swimming Child with Autism Cape Cod; beach/crabs	High School teacher Preferences: Math, History, Happiness	Respect/Loyalty/Time Open to cross-cultural marriage, adv. & disadvan.
Lxxxx	Descriptions California Rel. Pets, Exten. F.	Bath & Body Works \$--Digital Cam., Animals Made jewelry/business	Photography? Math Manage Crafts Store Help kids;	Decision: 5 or 6 dates; Together 2-3 times a week She pays too; Respects fam.
Mxxx	Parent Courtsh. Work important Cousin/v-games	Taco John's good boss Fire in store / \$-college Fishing/Countryside	Music/Trumpet/Jazz Computers	Knows not a lot on courtship St. Ben's girlfriend; Time? High expectations
Cxxxx	Descriptions Cooking/Advice My fam.-my life	Nursury School Stories about kids Bahamas; RV-S.D.	Flute/Swimming Teach child. / Travel God / Happiness	Move slowly/Much time together/best friends; Man: religious, good dad
Exxxx	History of Par. Fam. Problems Swim in flood	Grocery store/backache Caught thieves at store Yellowtone/broken van	Wants to be teacher Elem/Spanish; likes Social Studies	Groups, then best friends, One on one time, don't ignore friends, no perfection
EJxxxx	Humor in family Funny uncles Loves family	Waitress with smile Pays for European trip No new clothes—Travel!	Travel Channel Job Translator/ Guide Travel the World	Slow with patience; two Men share duties; no secrets
Txxxx	Dad: comical Lawyer; Pets, Reading, Music	Goodwill Store frustration: all clothes organized by color—disastrous for sales!	Enjoys vocal music, helped introversion; Confident singer	Explore expectations; slow; be realistic; know each other well, develop trust