



Making Language Learning Meaningful and Fun with Collaborative Projects

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Collaborative Learning in the L2 Classroom

- Collaborative learning requires students to actively engage with others, typically fellow students, to achieve a common goal (Nokes-Malach et al, 2015).
- Within the L2 classroom, students work toward language proficiency. The current World-Readiness Standards for Language Learners evaluate linguistic abilities in speaking, listening, reading, and writing but also require that students develop cultural competencies and understanding.
- Oxford posits that within a collaborative learning framework, the notion of community should be extended beyond the language-learning classroom to include the community of those who speak the target language.
- “L2 learning can be a global adventure that involves learning about, understanding, and (at least to some extent) identifying with another culture in which people use a different language, possibly in a completely different part of the world” (Oxford, 1997, p. 449).
- Collaborative learning assignments within the L2 classroom can be used to help students develop both linguistic proficiency in the target language and cultural competencies.

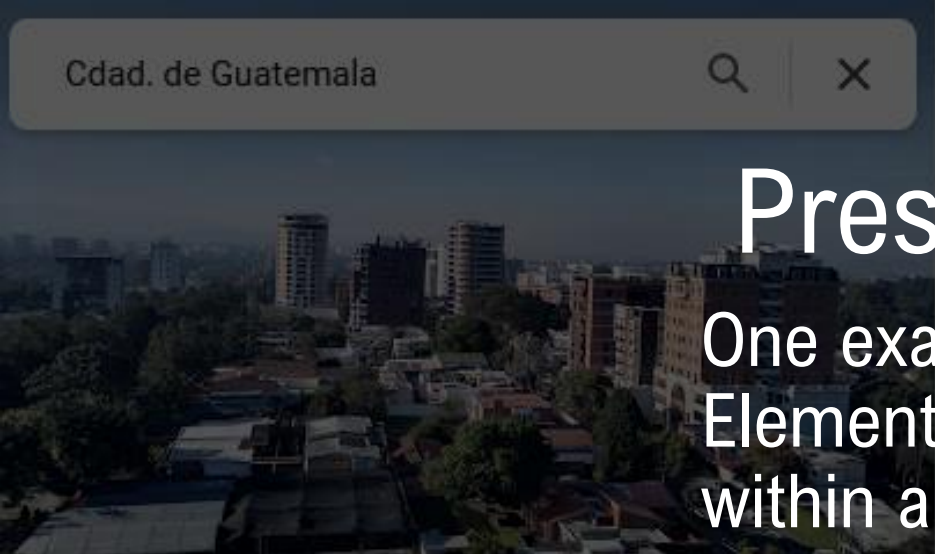
Successful Collaborative Learning

- Collaborative learning activities within the L2 classroom have the potential to aid students in developing both linguistic proficiency and cultural competencies. Nokes-Malach et al (2015) identify cognitive and social mechanisms that lead to group failure and success in collaborative learning.
- Within the L2 classroom, students participating in collaborative projects use several of the cognitive mechanisms for success while practicing and improving their linguistic proficiencies, such as **cueing each other's prior knowledge** of grammar and vocabulary, relying on **complementary knowledge** to fill in each other's linguistic gaps, gaining **re-exposure** to material already covered, and employing **error correction** using the collective knowledge of the group.
- Collaborative assignments that require students to interact with authentic materials from the target language culture also encourage the use of successful social mechanisms, such as the construction of a **common ground** among group members in order to understand the materials and **negotiating multiple perspectives** as group members compare and contrast their own cultural contexts with that of the target language culture.



Methods

Over the course of a semester, I incorporated a range of collaborative learning activities in my elementary Spanish I and II classes. The activities were based on the themes of the chapters covered in the textbook, *¡Anda! Curso Elemental*. These activities encouraged students to develop their linguistic proficiency in the target language as well as their cultural understanding of the countries in the assigned chapters.

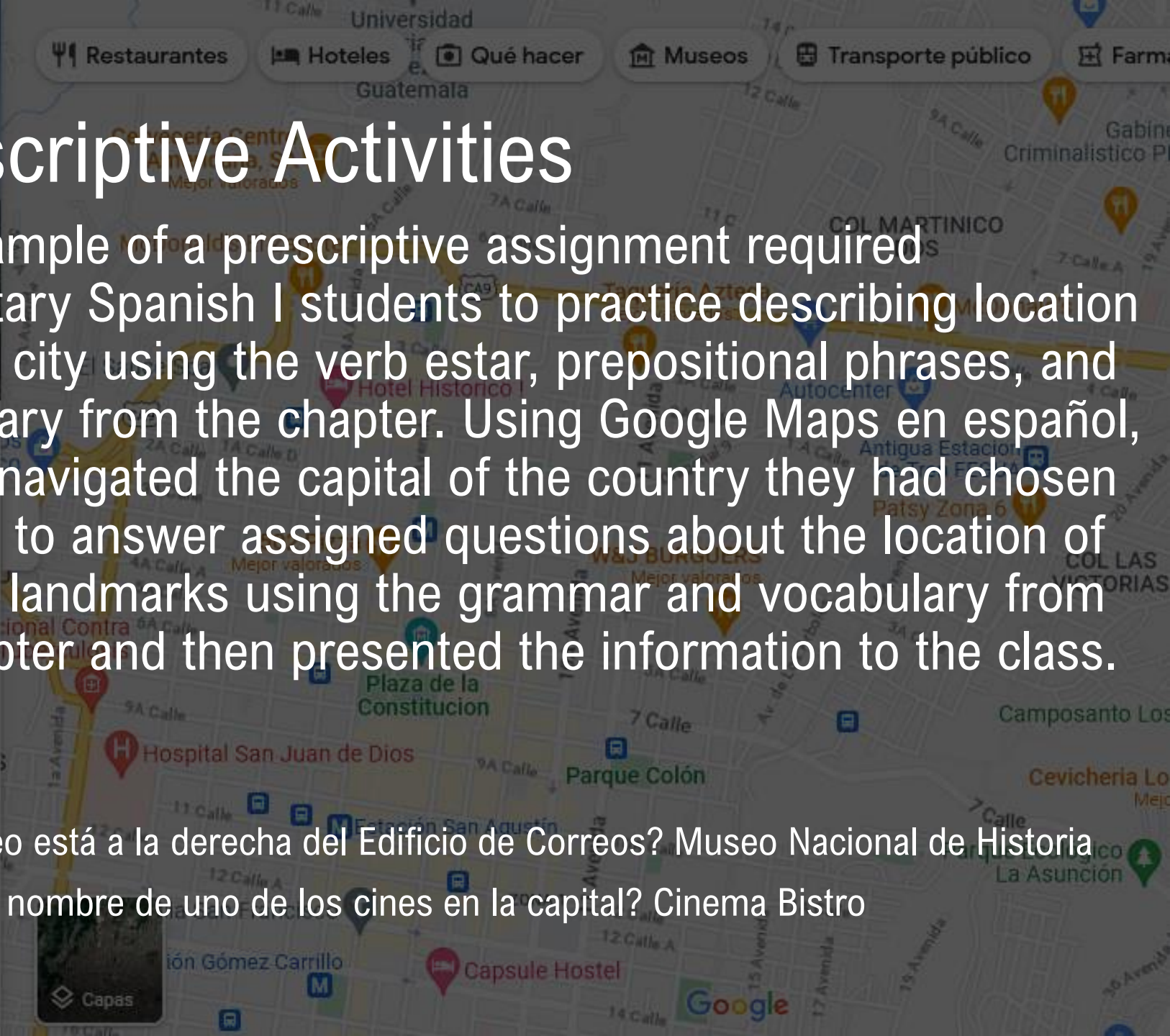


Prescriptive Activities

One example of a prescriptive assignment required Elementary Spanish I students to practice describing location within a city using the verb *estar*, prepositional phrases, and vocabulary from the chapter. Using Google Maps en español, groups navigated the capital of the country they had chosen in order to answer assigned questions about the location of specific landmarks using the grammar and vocabulary from the chapter and then presented the information to the class.

¿Qué museo está a la derecha del Edificio de Correos? Museo Nacional de Historia

¿Cuál es el nombre de uno de los cines en la capital? Cinema Bistro



Cdad. de Guatemala
Guatemala

Información resumida

La ciudad de Guatemala es la capital de Guatemala, en América Central. Es conocida por su historia rica, su ubicación a gran altitud y sus volcanes ce... Más

More Prescriptive Activities



Elementary Spanish II students watched a short video read aloud of a children's book describing the changing location of the character playing hide and seek. In groups, students had to write a similar story about an assigned cartoon character playing hide and seek using the verb *estar* and prepositional phrases they were learning. Then they read their story to the class and the other groups had to draw illustrations that reflected the grammar and vocabulary of the story.

Scooby Doo está al lado de Shaggy afuera de un casa. Scooby Doo está cerca de todos sus amigos, tambien está cerca de los monstruos. Scooby Doo está debajo de la mesa porque tiene miedo de los monstruos. Scooby Doo está a la derecha de su comida, scooby snacks. A la izquierda de Scooby Doo está Velma. Scooby Doo está dentro de el autobús. Scooby Doo está enfrente de un vampiro. Scooby Doo está encima de un arbol.

Open-ended Activities

Elementary Spanish I students worked together in groups to create their collective dream home. Students had to decide on the layout of the home and the number of types of rooms in their dream home. Each group then presented their dream home to the class.

El dormitorio

El dormitorio tiene un acuario con muchos peces.

Tiene dos lámparas.

El dormitorio es pequeño, pero tiene una cama blanca que es muy grande.



La Cocina

La cocina es gris. El suelo es de madera. La cocina tiene dos hornos. Tiene una estufa de gas. Hay dos sillas negras y muchas plantas. La cocina está en la planta baja al lado del comedor.



More Open-ended Activities

Elementary Spanish II students had to create a day's worth of meals for the country their group had chosen and then present their menu to the class. For this assignment, students had to use the food vocabulary they had learned from the chapter and learn additional vocabulary based on the recipes they chose to showcase.

Desayuno:



Huevos Rancheros

Huevos Rancheros container huevos fritos, tortillas de maíz fritos, salsa, y puedes agregar frijoles refritos, queso y carne.

Almuerzo: Las empanadas son un almuerzo popular en Argentina. Las empanadas son pan frito con un delicioso relleno salado. El nombre es del verbo empanar que significa "to bread". Está lleno de varias formas de rellenos de carne, incluyendo carne de res en cubos o molida, jamón o pollo.

(A familiar sight to many Americans, empanadas are fried bread with a delicious savory filling)



Arroz con Dulce (Rice pudding)

Hay muchos buenos postres de Puerto Rico. Nosotros recomendamos probar el **arroz con dulce**. Es muy facil hacer, porque es simplemente:

- arroz con varios tipos de leche, y canela.

(los leches: Sweetened and coconut)

También hay otras especias, pero lo mejor del postre son las pasas encima del arroz con leche.



Conclusions

- In both prescriptive and open-ended collaborative activities, students employed successful cognitive and social mechanisms, such as cueing one another's prior knowledge, error correction, and negotiating multiple perspectives. + ●
- When surveyed, students had mixed feelings about the collaborative learning activities. For example, one student enjoyed doing "constructive and creative things with other people" in groups while another found group work less useful than individual work because not all participants contributed equally. ○
- While collaborative learning activities in the L2 classroom can be valuable, maximizing successful outcomes is a challenge.