Introducing an oral component and peer review into the writing process using Voicethread

Alicia Suárez Touzón
RGSLL, The George Washington University

Participants & Intervention’s learning outcomes
Seven undergraduate students taking Intensive Advanced Spanish I & II (SPAN 2056), an advanced, content-based Spanish course.

Learning goals:
• develop the linguistic proficiency
• demonstrate knowledge and understanding of Spanish-speaking societies within their historical framework and context (the area will depend on the topic of the article)
• develop analytical, critical, collaborative, and interpretive thinking skills

Procedure
Each student:
- read an article related to class-content (contextualization),
- made an outline using a video recording with VT,
- responded orally on VT (video recording) to two oral proposals from their peers,
- wrote an argumentative essay (blog),
- commented using video recording on two final drafts.

The oral production was not graded, and had the purpose of training the students in the self-reflective process, making them feel part of a group (sense of belonging), and triggering motivation and promoting a better linguistic outcome.

Abstract
A Peer Review for Excellence in Teaching (PRET) was carried out over the course of one semester in a Spanish Advanced class. The goal was to introduce an oral component and peer review into the writing process of the students using Voicethread (VT). VT is an online tool that promotes conversation through the use of visual prompts, and allows students to have ongoing digital conversations built from text, audio, and/or video comments added by small groups of participants. In this intervention, self-reflection, oral production, and peer review were integrated in an assignment that originally only had a written and individual component.

Although no significant improvements were observed in student’s written linguistic skills, modest improvements were observed in the formulation of arguments and the general organization of the blogs. Final interviews conducted by two reviewers during the focus group, and students’ surveys, showed high level of involvement and satisfaction from students.

Images of students using VT

Results
The survey completed by students indicated that 100% felt the intervention helped them think and reflect more critically on their own work. 100% felt that it allowed them to better give constructive criticism. And finally, 60% felt that it helped them improve and develop their collaboration skills.

Sample students’ comments:
• “the intervention was sufficiently challenging to provoke a level of work we had not previously produced, while still remaining engaging”
• “we worked much harder on our blog posts than we had worked on similar blog posts in previous courses where the posts were straightforward individual writing assignments completed outside of class”
• “we noticed things about our peers use of Spanish when watching the videos that helped us reflect on and be aware of our own grammar usage.”

Conclusions
• The combination of the speaking and written skills in one task improved the learning process, and created awareness for the learners.
• Peer-review has a clear impact in second language acquisition, especially in written assignments (Nelson & Schunn, 2009). Research confirms that the exchange of feedback helps writers to clarify and give form to their meaning. It also increases the sense of belonging which is directly linked to the academic success (Strayhorn, 2012.)
• Technology-supported cooperative learning tends to increase achievement, positive attitudes and relationships between the learners.