

## Visual Arts and Telecollaboration in the Spanish Heritage Language Classroom

The technological advances experienced in the last decades have enabled language educators to think outside the box so as to continue to provide creative and meaningful learning experiences for their students. One such advance that has quickly become an indispensable part of education is video-calling or video-conferencing. Popular software applications, such as Zoom, allow for students and teachers from different locations to connect and interact in real time. In addition to communicating with and seeing each other, these applications also allow participants to share pictures, videos or artwork, which could be used as starting point for telecollaborative group work. Considering that previous work in second and heritage language (HL) teaching and learning has shown that integrating visual arts in the “traditional” language classroom can effectively motivate students and enhance their fluency in the target language (e.g., Bevilacqua, 2017; Eisner, 2009; Card, 2012; Meyer, 2005; Parra, 2013; Parra & Di Fabio, 2015), we wonder whether the same results hold true for telecollaborative environments.

Aligned with and inspired the abovementioned work, this study examines the benefits associated with the inclusion of a visual arts educational project in a Spanish HL classroom in a telecollaborative environment. To this end, a total of 63 Spanish HL learners from two different US universities engaged in 5 weekly Zoom interactions of a minimum of 20 minutes. Each session was designed to encourage students’ learning by using renowned artwork pieces as conversation prompts for the development of critical thinking and personal reflection. For each session, in addition to having access to said artwork pieces, participants were provided with a list of questions that guided their analysis and elicited meaningful conversations beyond merely superficially describing the visual aids. Although these virtual interactions were recorded and transcribed, for the purpose of this presentation we focus on the students’ reflections that were submitted after each Zoom session.

Consistent with previous related findings, our results reveal three important insights. Participants (i) displayed a favorable attitude toward speaking activities rooted in visual arts; (ii) gained confidence in communicating with their peers; and (iii), showed evidence of increased critical awareness of linguistic differences across the two student groups. These insights along with practical recommendations for teachers will be discussed in full.

### References

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