

A SET OF SPANISH LESSONS FOR PRIMARY SCHOOLS

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Preparing a set of activities in order to teach Spanish to primary school pupils proved to be quite a different experience from anything we had ever done before. Our intention was to present this language to the children in an informal set up and to make the activities as interesting and educational as possible.

Since these children did not know anything about Spanish, we decided to teach them very elementary expressions and vocabulary and to keep on reinforcing and revising these throughout the whole process. The main objectives were to learn how to greet friends in Spanish, how to give some information about oneself, to learn the numbers from 1 to 10 and some animal names. As a basis for the activities we came up with the idea of a farm. Two children make friends with a farmer and he takes them on a visit around his farm. Through this visit the children learn different things about the animals which live there, as if they are reading a story or watching a video. If one were to continue devising lessons as a follow up to the ones we did, one could continue with the same context and make it seem like a children's "soap opera". We think that this would make the learning of a language more interesting than just presenting it context free.

We tried to keep the lesson content as simple as possible and to channel the activities so that they would reinforce each other. Our emphasis was mainly on the spoken language, giving most importance to pronunciation and understanding, with reading and writing coming later. In the conversation we included the animal sounds as well and this caught the children's attention completely. In Spanish



Activity handout: matching animal pictures to animal names and singing "Old Macdonald had a farm" in Spanish

animal sounds are slightly different and the children found this very amusing. Since there were two of us, the flow of conversation was

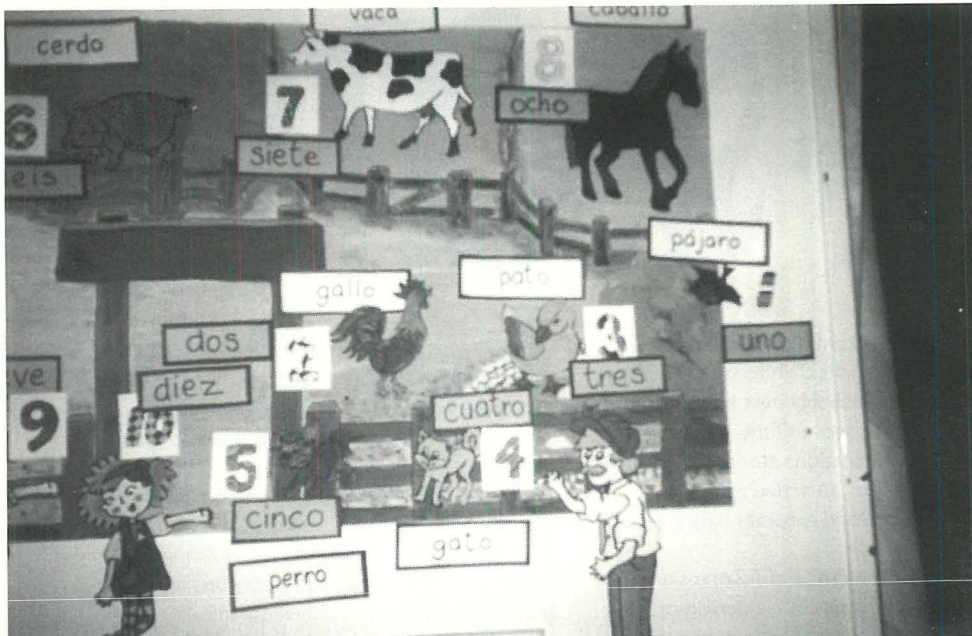


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Sample of conversation cards used to introduce oneself



smooth and the children quickly realised what they were expected to do. The handouts we designed to complement our activities were structured in such a way as to serve also as notes should the children wish to revise what they have learnt in Spanish. They were not difficult handouts but the children needed to show their understanding in order to be able to complete them.

At first some of the children we asked to come to these activities were very anxious about this. They were worried that they would find Spanish difficult and not be able to understand. Another of their preoccupations was that they would be asked to speak and they wished to explain to us before we started the activities that they did not know how to speak in Spanish. They also wanted to know what would happen if they did not understand what was going on. However, as the first activity proceeded they started to lose their inhibitions and soon began smiling and spontaneously asking each other questions (for example: I am from Malta. And you? ...). They started asking for more vocabulary and also showed interest in the differences that they found between Spanish and English or Maltese. (For example, they asked why the "j" has an "h" sound and the "ll" has a "y" sound and they also asked about the "ñ" in España). When we gave them drinks during the break, they wanted to know how to say "thank you" in Spanish. To us this showed their interest and also that they were trying to apply what they had just learnt in other situations. On learning the numbers, they started counting in Spanish and when they were given the handout they wrote the numbers as words rather than just taking the shortcut of writing down the figures only. Both of us felt surprised at this because we had not expected them to take up these numbers so naturally.

The whole session was conducted in

Spanish. Although we were prepared to be lenient and explain some things in Maltese, we found that this was not necessary and we found it quite natural to talk to the children in Spanish. All we had to do was pretend that the conversation was being conducted by the dolls or animals we held in our hands. So we were changing our voices and making animal sounds which also captivated further their attention.

All the children expressed disappointment when the activities were over. They said that the lesson was too short, even though the process took a little more than one and a half hours! When we met one of these children some days after the lesson, we asked him what he still remembered. His reply was: "Almost nothing! The only words I remember are "..." and unknowingly he repeated all the words that appear in the list of vocabulary presented in the activities.

Giving information about oneself

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