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Substitute Salvation: An Online Classroom Resource

Rachel Callaly

Honors Thesis

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Website Address: <https://racheldcallaly.wixsite.com/subsalvation>

Preamble

When I was attempting to figure out what I should do for my thesis project, I just kept coming back to the idea that I wanted it to be something I could use in a practical way. I knew I was going to be working on it while I was interning, so it was going to be hectic. After conversations with my thesis chair, I decided that I needed something I could theoretically use in my classroom. We talked about how as a teacher, if you are sick you have to leave a plan for the substitute. In other careers, if you have to call in for the day off you just call in. As a teacher, there has to be something for the students to do; the whole class does not just stop because the teacher is not there. From that idea, Substitute Salvation was born.

The main point of the website is that if I needed to create a sub plan on incredibly short notice, I could just give the URL address and what activities I wanted done and everything would be set. I would not have to go through a big ordeal of laying out worksheets or giving busy work and my students could potentially learn something new even when I was not in the room. The idea was immediately compelling when it came up in our discussion; I desperately wanted my thesis project to be practical and useful, and what I have made is that. Most teachers have an emergency lesson plan ready in case of something dire coming up, and this website and its activities will be mine. It is equipped with activities for different levels of Spanish on a variety of topics that can definitely fill a class period.

The other perk to this website is that I can use it to teach students topics I might not otherwise get to talk much about in class; I might not always have time to spend full class

periods on topics such as what I have included in the Quirky Spanish section, or a whole lesson just on cognates. This way the students have a way to at least get a taste of those things if my curriculum does not allow enough flexibility to really be able to focus on those during a regular day of instruction. Additionally, a lot of schools today have some type of personal technology for each student. My high school in Illinois gave every student an iPads and the high school I interned at this semester gives Chromebooks to every student. This website is a way for me to embrace the technology the students have been given. The website is also accessible from a smart phone, and students can always share technology if need be. It will be quiet work for them to do when I am not able to do in the room that will also benefit them academically.

My favorite aspect of this project though is that it will constantly be evolving. There is no way that this product is my absolute final product. The ideas that are a part of it have changed so much just over my past four months of intern teaching. I found different points I wanted to emphasize, topics I wanted to explore more, and other subjects that I decided to replace all together, and that was only over four months! Imagine what would happen after my first year of teaching. I can always add more, especially now that I have a formula for it that works well for me. I could add sections on different grammar topics that we go over as a class, put an activity up about a country we are examining, or add new resources to my resource section as new things come out. This website will never be truly finished. This is just my version for right now; I want it to have that ability to change and grow. The website is a living thing, it will never stop developing.

The Works Consulted page is all of the books and websites that I have looked at when trying to come up with exercises, ideas, and vocabulary for the website. None of it is

word for word, but when I was looking at structure, I needed some inspiration for a bunch of new ways to structure my exercises. I used them as a jumping off point for the content that I eventually made myself. I saw what was out there in terms of different content and used it to inspire what I created in terms of question structure and vocabulary topics. Vega (2011) was particularly helpful; it gave me a lot of inspiration in terms of vocabulary and the importance of colloquialisms in the teaching of Spanish. Castro and Diaz (2003, 3004) was a springboard for a lot of the grammar questions in terms of the way that they break questions down step-by-step and then bring it all together. They scaffold the questions in a way that I thought would be useful, so I used that structure for the questions that I wrote myself.

Nassi and Levy (2010) and Gaskell (2014) are both cited directly in the Comida section because they provided considerable incite in that section. They had descriptions of different foods I had never heard of, so it was most definitely necessary to cite them. Other than that, Nassi and Levy (2010) provided a lot of valuable insight in terms of how to view cognates and the different types of cognates that can be found, which then led me to my own search for cognates, both true cognates and false cognates. IMDB (1990) was consulted for almost all of the information regarding the movies and TV shows. It helped in terms of finding ratings as well as the length of different programs that I was unsure of.

A lot of the materials I have been exposed to throughout my time studying Spanish education have been outdated and lacking what students need to become truly interested. The school I interned at this semester barely even uses their textbook because it is so outdated and they have not been able to buy new ones; they have to be creative with their resources. Seeing my mentors and the other teachers in the department do this made me

want to do the same for my own students, which definitely contributed to my motivation towards completing this project to the best of my ability.

Students want more than what can be found in a book; they need content to be explained in a way that they understand and they want to feel connected to the material. The goal of this website is to do both of those things, as well as to make the students interested in learning more about a language I care so deeply about. I plan to use this resource as a way to peak the interest of my students and to make them intrigued to learn more. Furthermore, I fully intend on using it for when I cannot be in the room and need them to work quietly while I cannot be teaching them. However, I know that by using this website I can keep them more engaged and focused than I ever could with a book activity or a worksheet.

Gramática

The Gramática section is for reinforcing of topics we either may be discussing in class, subjects we learned about before, or concepts that just really need extra practice. I picked some different grammar topics to start, but these topics changed a lot over the course of my student teaching. I had never considered putting the difference between saber and conocer on the website until I taught it to my students and realized how much they were struggling with it. The initial eight sections I have on this website are: Expresiones con Que, Género y Número, Gustar, Pretérito/Imperfecto, El Presente, Saber/Conocer, Ser/Estar and Si Clauses. I can already see new sections I will add in the future like direct and indirect object pronouns, por and para, and the subjunctive. However, what I have now is a solid jumping off point. From here I can grow and add new topics as I see my students struggling with them in class.

Each grammar topic has a blurb to explain the topic followed by some sort of numbered practice exercises. I imagine that when I have students do this, I will just have them copy their answers down onto a sheet of loose-leaf paper and turn it in by the end of the hour to keep them accountable for their work when I am not there. The blurbs vary depending on the topic; some of the concepts like ser/estar and saber/conocer have acronyms to use to help the students remember the differences, others, like the present tense, have a more traditional explanation of the conjugations. The explanation that segues into some practice for the students; some of the exercises are fill-in-the-blank, others are choosing between two options. This could be very helpful when I am away because even if the substitute does not speak Spanish (and not a lot of them do), I can still explain the topic I want them to be working on via the website. Furthermore, the website could also work as

a refresher for different grammar topics prior to my students taking their exams. It will always be available to them and the students will know the URL address, so they can access the explanations whenever they need them.

As I stated, some of the topics were chosen because they will be relevant to the course content, but other topics are ones that are reviewed every year in a Spanish class like the present tense, gustar, and the difference between ser and estar. Those will always need more practice, so I am happy to give my students more prepared practice that they can do at home to better their own skills. The exercises are broken down to build skills rather than doing everything at once. For example, in the Género y Número section, there are eight questions just with writing the correct article, eight with making a noun plural, and then eight more where the students have to alter both gender and number.

Most of the exercises are fill-in-the-blank, but the preterite and imperfect got a different treatment. Half of the battle with knowing the difference between the two is just being able to determine the difference in meaning rather than focusing on the conjugation. The exercise will help the students to focus on the meaning because the conjugations are already there for them; they just have to decide between the two. A possible addition I could make to the website would be to add pages about conjugating the two, but for now a focus on knowing the difference between the two will put a magnifying glass on the struggles my students have with that aspect of the concept.

Gramática is meant to be a way to really help my students to hammer home subjects that they might struggle with; as I go into my first real year of teaching, I am sure that I will find multiple other grammar topics that need to be added to this page. It will evolve and I will create new questions to practice with, new tricks for remembering different ideas, and

find better ways to help my students improve. I am interested to see how this will change as I see what my students need from me in terms of additional reinforcement and assistance. It will evolve considerably after my first year of teaching, I am sure of that.

Conceptos Interesantes

Conceptos Interesantes is a title I chose to be purposefully vague; with that title I can put a variety of topics under it and it still makes sense. The three current pages underneath this heading are Vocabulario Nuevo, Quirky Spanish, and Cognatos. Each have a different draw for why I chose to include them, and I think each one will be edited more as I gain more experience and knowledge about cool ideas to add. Quizlet is also used heavily in this section to provide additional repetition and practice of the plethora of new words available to the students.

The new vocabulary lists I have created are words that might not necessarily be taught within the classroom setting. The lists are La Vida Cotidiana, El Cuerpo Humano, La Ropa, Los Días Festivos, La Naturaleza, and Adjetivos Especiales. I compiled each list by searching out a topic and then adding words I felt suited them best. *Painless Spanish* (Vega, 2011) became a source of inspiration for many of the ideas for the basis of the lists, and then words were chosen that best fit under those themes.

La Ropa and El Cuerpo Humano are both topics that are traditionally taught in a Spanish class, but honestly, they are words that a lot of people never remember very well. I forget body part words all the time, so I wanted to make sure my students had a comprehensive list they could refer to if they needed to practice those even more. Clothing words end up getting a similar treatment; some of the words are always remembered, others are always forgotten, and some are totally new to the students hopefully. The purpose of these lists was to include words the students could use casually and in everyday conversation. That is why I created a La Vida Cotidiana list (everyday life); the words might seem monotonous to the students, but I use the word bank account way more than I use

flight attendant, a word that I learned three different Spanish words for in high school.

They are practical, useful words that the students can use that relate to both the workplace and school.

The other lists are mostly topics that we do not get to cover extensively in most classes: nature, holidays, and just a list of adjectives. After reading a lot of essays this semester written by my students, I became hopelessly bored by “simpático” and “inteligente”. I created the Adjetivos Especiales list for the purpose of using it to spice up the writing and speaking of my students so they could push themselves to use new words that were different and more compelling for me as a reader and listener. The point of these lists is to expand the vocabulary of all of my students, and we never just focus on adjectives on a vocab list. This will broaden their horizons and hopefully make their writing more diverse.

Quirky Spanish is one of my favorite sections because of how, well, quirky it is. It is a list of idiomatic phrases and expressions in Spanish that students rarely get exposure to. They do not translate literally to English, which students struggle with, but being able to use expressions like this is the mark of an advanced Spanish speaker. If students even have a couple of these in their back pocket to use in a speaking exam or a writing assessment, it will automatically seem very impressive. It also increases the authenticity of their Spanish, because they are not just trying to literally translate English idioms into Spanish, which are almost never accurate. This list helps students to grow in their conversational Spanish in a way that a textbook might not give them.

Both the new vocabulary lists and the expressions have Quizlet sets made for quick practice. During my semester student teaching, I have realized the usefulness and

convenience of Quizlet. Students can use it on their cell phones, on school-issued technology, or at the school library. I have made a folder labeled Substitute Salvation, and the Quizlet sets for those vocab lists and the Quirky Español list are all in there. There are seven different activities for the students to use on Quizlet: Learn, Flashcards, Write, Spell, Test, Match, and Gravity.

Match and Gravity are both games; they are effective and help the students learn the vocab in a more pared down way because it is not all of the words at once. Learn, Test, and Flashcards are traditional ways of testing vocab; they give you the word and you either have to translate it based on multiple-choice options given or go through traditional flashcards. Spell involves hearing the word pronounced and writing it based on what is heard. Write is the option I recommend to the students; they have to fully type out the word in Spanish to go through the exercise. It is good practice for spelling as well as remembering the meaning of the word. It is more meaningful than just doing regular flashcards and the word is supplied for you; they have to come up with the word themselves and spell it out in full. Quizlet is a great resource for them to use to practice these new words, and it also happens to be the most convenient option for them.

The Cognatos section is the first of a series of sections I imagine will include other topics like synonyms and antonyms; I wanted to start with cognates though because they are so prevalent in Spanish classes. Cognates are words that appear to be similar in separate languages. What I wanted to focus on in this section are the different types of cognates that are common: exact cognates, direct cognates, and false cognates. Each of the three gets an explanation, but the false cognates get the deepest explanation because they can really affect the meaning of a sentence. It is more of a lesson on cognates than actual

practice with them, but it should help students to recognize when they are using a word that might not be what they think they mean.

This section will grow in terms of adding new topics that I would not get to delve into as much as I would like in most curriculums. The Cognatos sections is just step one; I would like to delve into more expressions, accents within different cultures, and other concepts that would be interesting for students to brush up on when I am not in the room. I want their time with a substitute to be more than just a day of worksheets; learning new vocabulary, expressions, or concepts can make my time away from the room exciting and interesting rather than a blow-off class. I will continue to add to this section; I want more vocabulary lists, new expressions that students will find interesting, and other ideas that can use more explanation.

Cultura

Often in schools, culture is what gets the short end of the stick in a World Language class. It gets eclipsed by vocabulary and grammar, mostly due to time restraints. On my website, I wanted to give a cultural experience that I might not have as much time to do in class. My experience in Santander is personal and also an encouraging advertisement for studying abroad. Food, or comida, is an integral part of the culture of Spanish-speakers, so I wanted to put a big magnifying glass on it and the customs associated with food. Finally, to wrap both of those pages together, the activities are there to be the “so what” to reading those pages. They provide things for the students to do that should take up at least one class period, if not more. The students will read the pages, and that is great, but the main purpose is for them to shine in the activities section.

The Santander post is purposefully written in a way that is almost blog-like. I wanted to talk about my most familiar experience in another country, but I also wanted to express what I wish I had known prior to studying abroad. I might teach upperclassmen at some point, and they might possibly study abroad when in college. I want to be able to convey to them important tips, or CONSEJOS as they are known on the website. I explain the wonderful things that happened of course, as well as photos of my trip, but I also give advice regarding things like travel, safety, and host families. I have four headings that I focus on: Host Families, Locals, Academics, and a Final Reflection. Each of those headings has anecdotes as well as advice for studying abroad. I obviously know more about Santander and Spain than any other Spanish-speaking country, so I wanted to share all of my information in writing so I could focus class time on other countries and cultures as well.

The consejos (advice) that I list are important because they are really what I hope my students take to heart. If they study abroad in general they will benefit from following at least some of my tips. I write about topics such as handling the language barrier, the pursuit of a good host family, and the absolute importance of actually speaking the language that you are in the country to speak. I operated on the philosophy that I could either have friends, or speak Spanish because so few of my friends wanted to do so. I want my study abroad story to almost be a cautionary tale for my students so that when they go abroad they can learn and do more than I ever did.

The Comida section is really where my heart lies within this website. Oddly enough, I am not really a foodie at all. However, food is such an essential part of any culture, and the food experiences I had in Spain were so different than what I have experienced in the United States that this section practically wrote itself. I start with a description of the very different eating schedule, followed by an explanation of a sobremesa, a grocery store description, then going into specific Spanish dishes. I also have some traditional Latin American dishes listed, but not as many because I wanted the students to have flexibility to explore more of them for some of the activities I have created. I also just know a lot more about traditional Spanish dishes, so I am able to share that knowledge and then teach them the rest. The section also features photos I took of my meals while in Spain, so while my host parents thought it was strange that I was doing so, it paid off!

The Actividades are what tie the two sections together and make the students produce something to show what they have learned. There are six activities all together; three have instructions written in Spanish, three have English instructions. I imagine that the English instructions will be used for lower-level classes, and the Spanish can be used

for upper levels. The activities differ greatly from each other; some focus on reading, others on writing, and some are presentations so the students have an opportunity to practice their speaking. There are a variety of skills the students will gain, as well as cultural knowledge from various countries. These activities will also keep the students quietly working when a sub is there, because they primarily involve working independently or with just one partner. It will keep them accountable when I am gone, but it is also a step above something that could be considered busy work because they are exploring new topics.

I hope to add more culture sections as I travel to other Spanish-speaking countries. I would love to have at least a couple of more pages like the Santander page to add to give my students a more in-depth look at being abroad and speaking a different language in a new country. I am sure I will have opportunities to do just that, so I want to make sure I add them to this website and further flesh out the Cultura section. I will also continue to edit the Comida section to add new dishes I learn about and try, as well as photos that I take. I want to let this section grow as much as possible to give my students an even broader scope of the culture of the target language that they are working to learn.

Recursos Importantes

Parents always want to know how their child can perform better in class. The Recursos page is my olive branch of all of the things that can help them. It includes recommended movies, TV shows, books, and websites. All of the above are described in detail in terms of rating, usefulness, and why I like it so much in the first place so parents can screen the list and decide what they deem to be the best option for their child.

The list of movies is the largest of the lists, because there are so many films out there that are high quality films in Spanish or about Spanish-speaking culture. Each movie has a description listing the run time, the rating, and the selling points for Spanish, in my opinion. A lot of the movies are ones I have seen shown in schools, some are personal favorites, and others are ones I have heard wonderful things about. I did include a list of a few rated R movies; while I know that to see a movie that is rated R in a theatre a person has to be 18, I had two of the movies in the section showed to me in a school setting (*El Orfanato* and *The Devil's Backbone*). The ratings are mostly for swearing, with a little violence, none of them are for nudity or gratuitous sex scenes. Obviously there are so many more movies that I've never seen that can be added, but that is why I believe the website will always be changing; I will always have more to add.

The TV shows are rated differently because they do not have a rating system that is as easily defined as a movie. Their descriptions are based on length and selling points for Spanish. Not all of them are TV shows that are entirely in Spanish, but they all have to do with Spanish-speaking cultures, whether that be inside of the United States like *Jane the Virgin* and *Ugly Betty*, or exploring those cultures in their native countries like *Passport to Latin America*. There are lots of episodes for the students to explore for each show, so there

is hopefully something for everyone. Again, as more shows that would work well for this section come out, I will add them and hopefully expand it a lot more than six shows.

The section on books is something I am pretty passionate about; a student can learn just about any word they want from a good dictionary. They can practice new skills with a book that has exercises already in it. They can also learn so much just from reading children's books in Spanish; they are at the level of a small child in terms of language development, so their literacy matches perfectly with books written for children. Each book has a description that includes the selling points for Spanish acquisition, the author, as well as the ISBN so it can easily be searched online or in a library. Like I said, parents always want to know how their student can perform better, and having a quality book to refer to is a giant help with that.

I wish I had had a more useful dictionary when I was first learning Spanish, and now my students will have a list of recommended books the second they are put into my class. There are three types of dictionaries alone on the recommendation list; a traditional Spanish-English dictionary, an illustrated dictionary, and what is essentially an encyclopedia written entirely in Spanish with pictures. They are useful for a variety of learners, and all present new and interesting information.

The website list is a mixture of websites we will use often in class (ConJuguemos, WordReference and Quizlet) and others that I just recently discovered, like Mi Mundo en Palabras. Quizlet will be the primary outlet for vocabulary practice, as explained in the vocab section of this user guide. Each website description includes the selling points for Spanish, the web address, and the features that I suggest that the students focus on. WordReference is my online dictionary of choice; it offers a variety of words in phrases as

well as the most comprehensive definitions I have found without being a translator like Google Translate. Mi Mundo en Palabras and Aprendizaje de la Lectoescritura are websites that are more for general Spanish practice rather than specific to what we are learning in class. Students can push themselves to go beyond the classroom with those websites, while enhancing their abilities within the class with the other website suggestions.

Like the other sections, Recursos Importantes will absolutely never stop changing. I added three movies in the past month alone due to films that I saw in class while I was student teaching. New materials will be created that I will want to recommend to my students, and other materials that are already on this list might become too outdated to be useful. I will consistently be editing this list to make it the most effective source of resources for my students as I can. I will take recommendations into account, I will search for new resources myself, and I will continue to evaluate the ones that I already enjoy. This will ensure that this section of my website stays current and helpful at all times.

Contact Me

The Contact section is really just a place to list my contact information so I am accessible to students and parents. I explain the best time to reach me, give my email as well as school phone number, and invite them to contact me if they have any questions, comments, or concerns. I want to make sure anyone who has questions can reach me quickly and conveniently, but also knowing what is the best time to do so. My phone number on this page is obviously fake, but I would want to list the phone number for the phone that is in my classroom, and as I do not have one of those yet, I just put a placeholder in there for now. This section will be updated to reflect my school email and phone number once I have those things.

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