



Have No Fear, Role Plays Are Here

Stewart Steffey



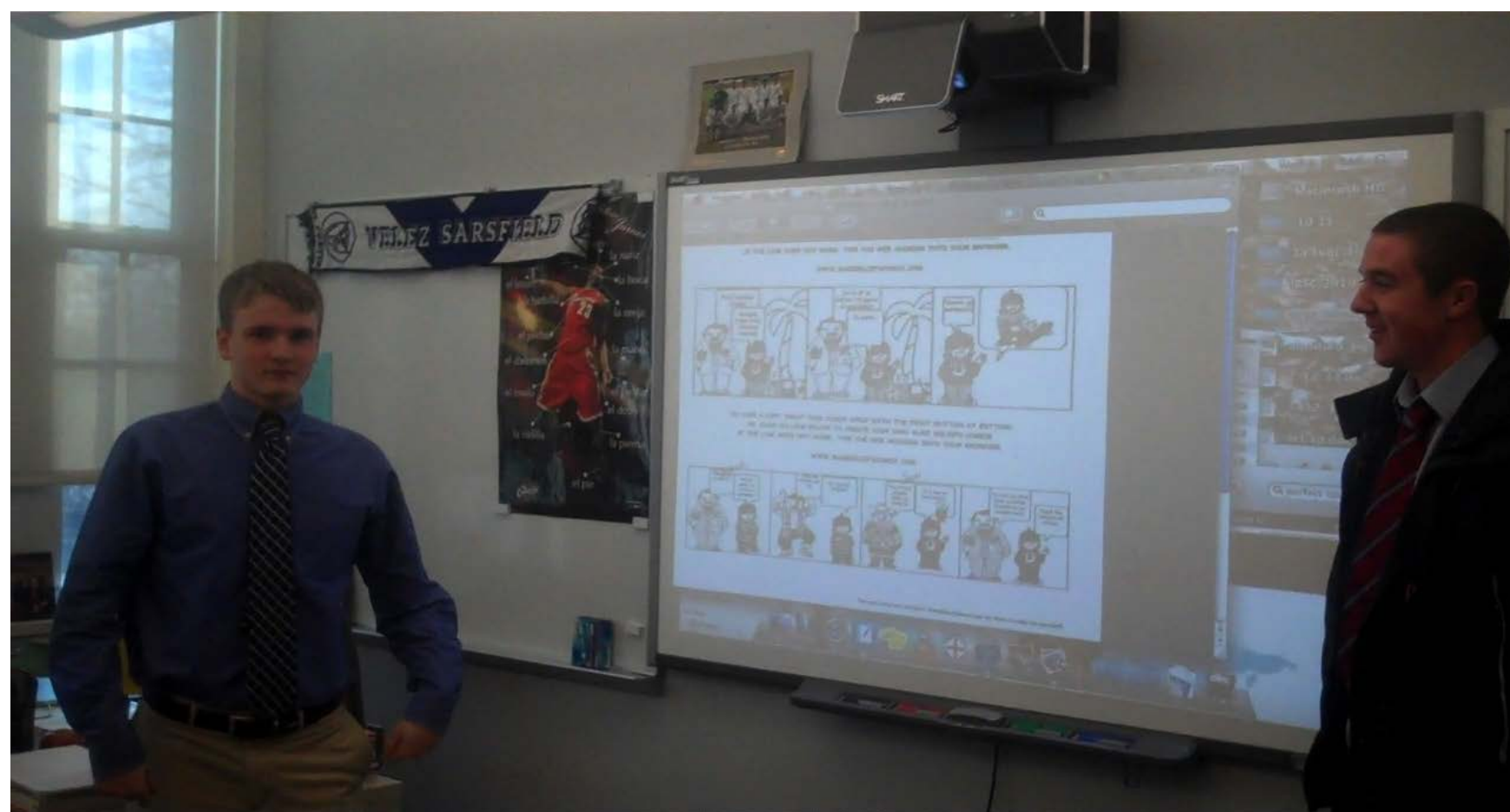
Belmont Hill School, Belmont, Massachusetts, USA

Introduction

The aim of this project was to use role-plays in Spanish class as a way to study both vocabulary and grammar. Twelve boys in Spanish Two worked in pairs to memorize and then present their role-plays on two different chapters.

Belmont Hill School is located in Belmont, Massachusetts. It is a school dedicated to developing boys in mind, body, and spirit. The school challenges and supports students in and beyond the classroom and strives for excellence, honoring clear thinking and creativity, competition and teamwork, tradition and vision. The twelve boys who participated in this action research were drawn from Grades 9 and 10.

Action research was an appropriate method for this project because it involves direct reflection on one's own work. This methodology allows teachers the opportunity to identify an area they would like to improve, implement a theory, and have the students reflect on its viability. As McNiff (2002) contends, the practitioner (in this case, the teacher) is involved in self-reflection the entire time, which allows change to occur almost immediately. The research was undertaken as part of the International Boys' Schools Coalition (IBSC) Action Research Program.



The Action

Over the course of one month, each paired group of boys memorized and then presented two role-plays, one for chapter seven and one for chapter eight. Role-plays were intended to be one and half minutes in length; they needed to include pertinent vocabulary and grammar; and, lastly, through the use of an online comic strip maker, each group projected their dialogues for the class while they were being presented.

Data collection and analysis

•Boys filled out both pre-and post- intervention surveys. Of the sixteen questions, fourteen were quantitative whereas two were qualitative.

•In an effort to keep things transparent, many of the same questions appeared on both pre- and post- surveys in an effort to analyze changed attitudes towards role-plays.

•Lastly, all role-play presentations for both chapters were filmed. The goal was to ascertain differing confidence levels from one presentation to the next.

•With regard to data analysis, there exists the possibility of reinterpreting, misinterpreting, or colonizing people's words, concepts and ideas to ultimately use them for our own conclusions (Stringer, 2004). With that in mind, both pre- and post-intervention surveys were conducted on Survey Monkey to facilitate categorization and coding for the quantitative questions. In terms of the students' written responses, or qualitative questions, trends and themes were noted to see if their experience with role-plays had changed from their preconceived ideas before the intervention.

Results and discussion

Quantitative responses:

•Written and spoken Spanish improved

As a result of role-plays, ten of the twelve boys felt both their oral and written communication abilities improved. Far fewer felt this way prior.

•Inclination to speak Spanish spontaneously

Eight boys answered "constantly" after role-plays compared with "zero" on pre-intervention survey.

Qualitative responses:

•Did role-plays enhance your overall learning experience?

→ "They gave us scenarios where the vocabulary would be used in real life"

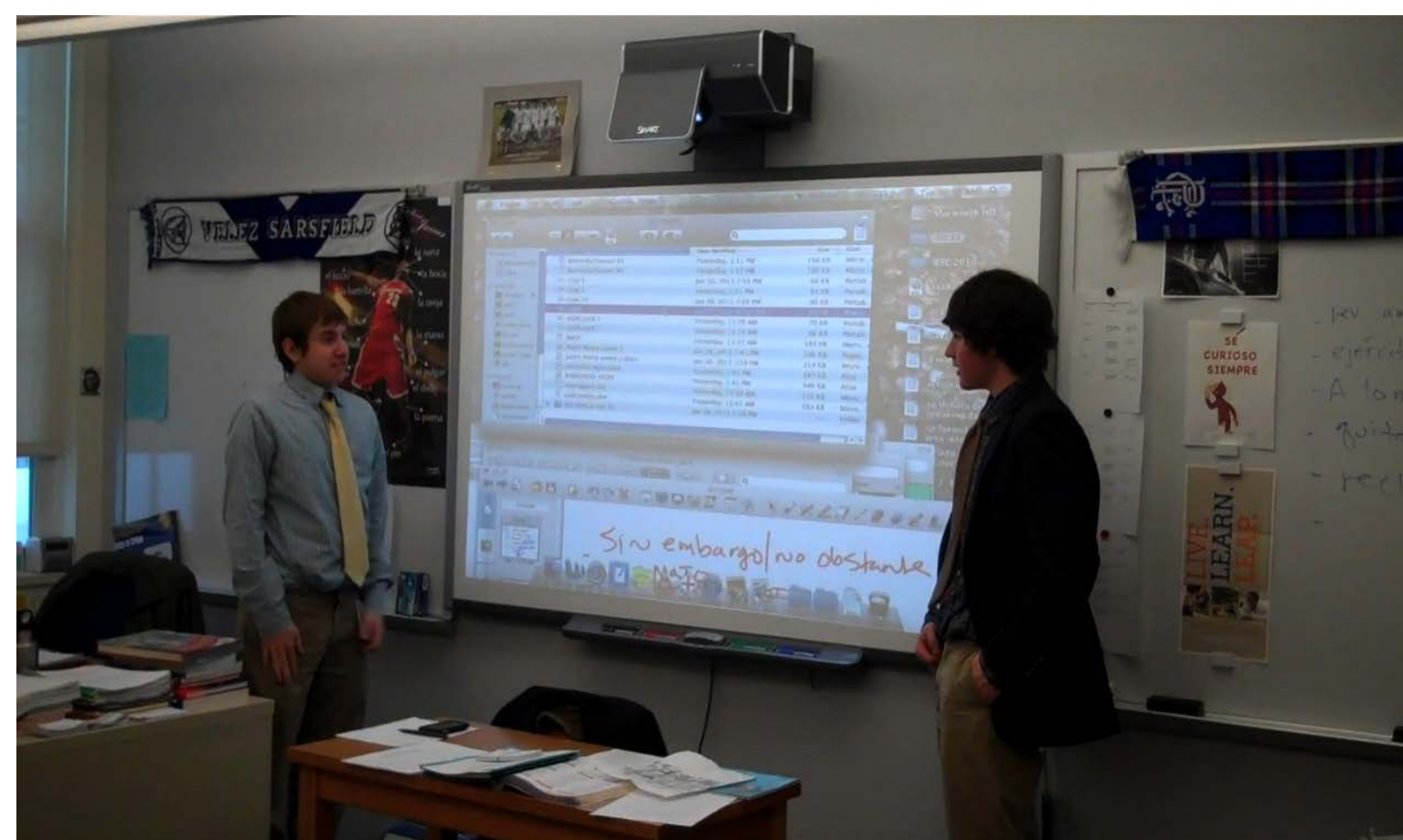
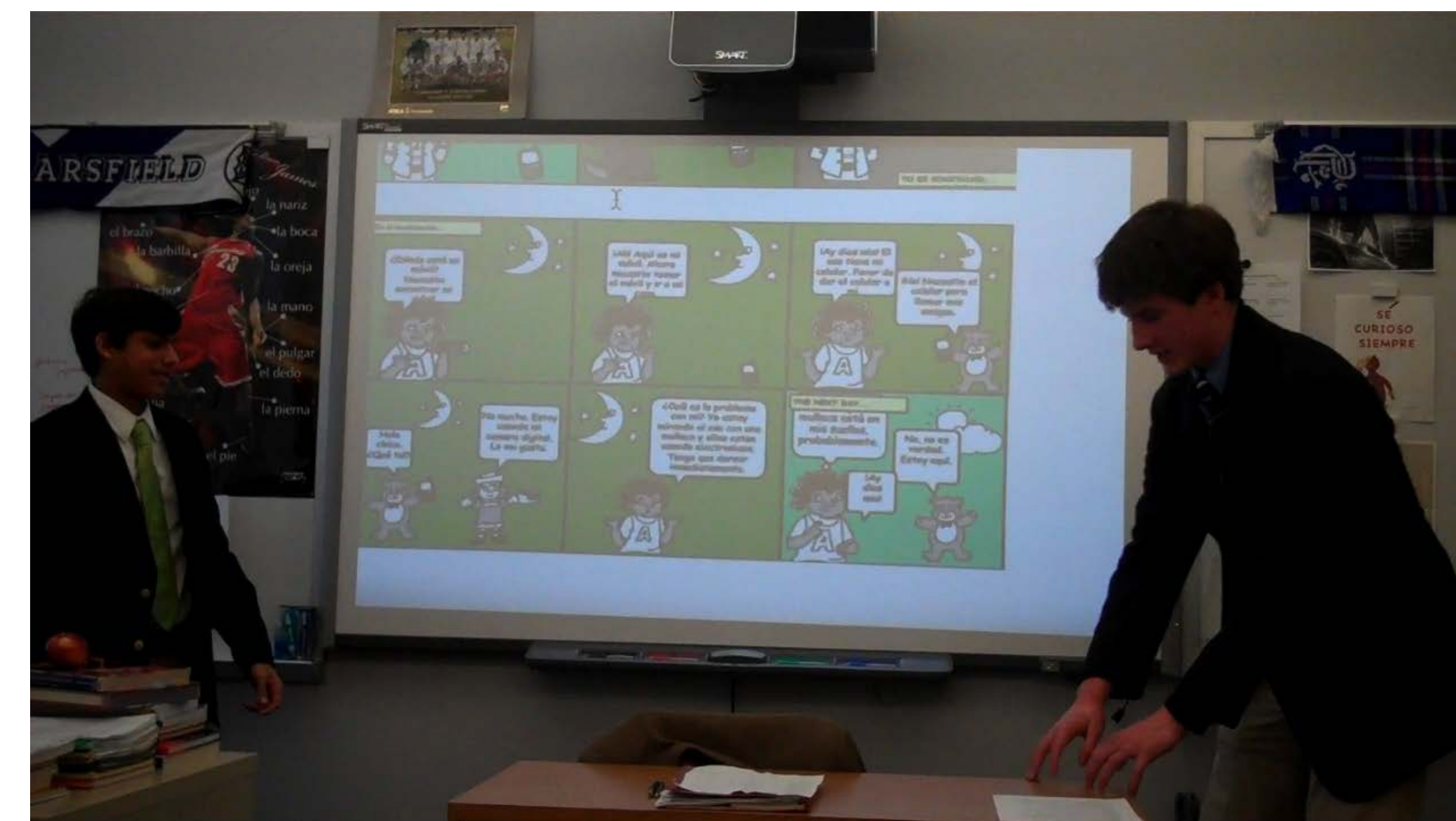
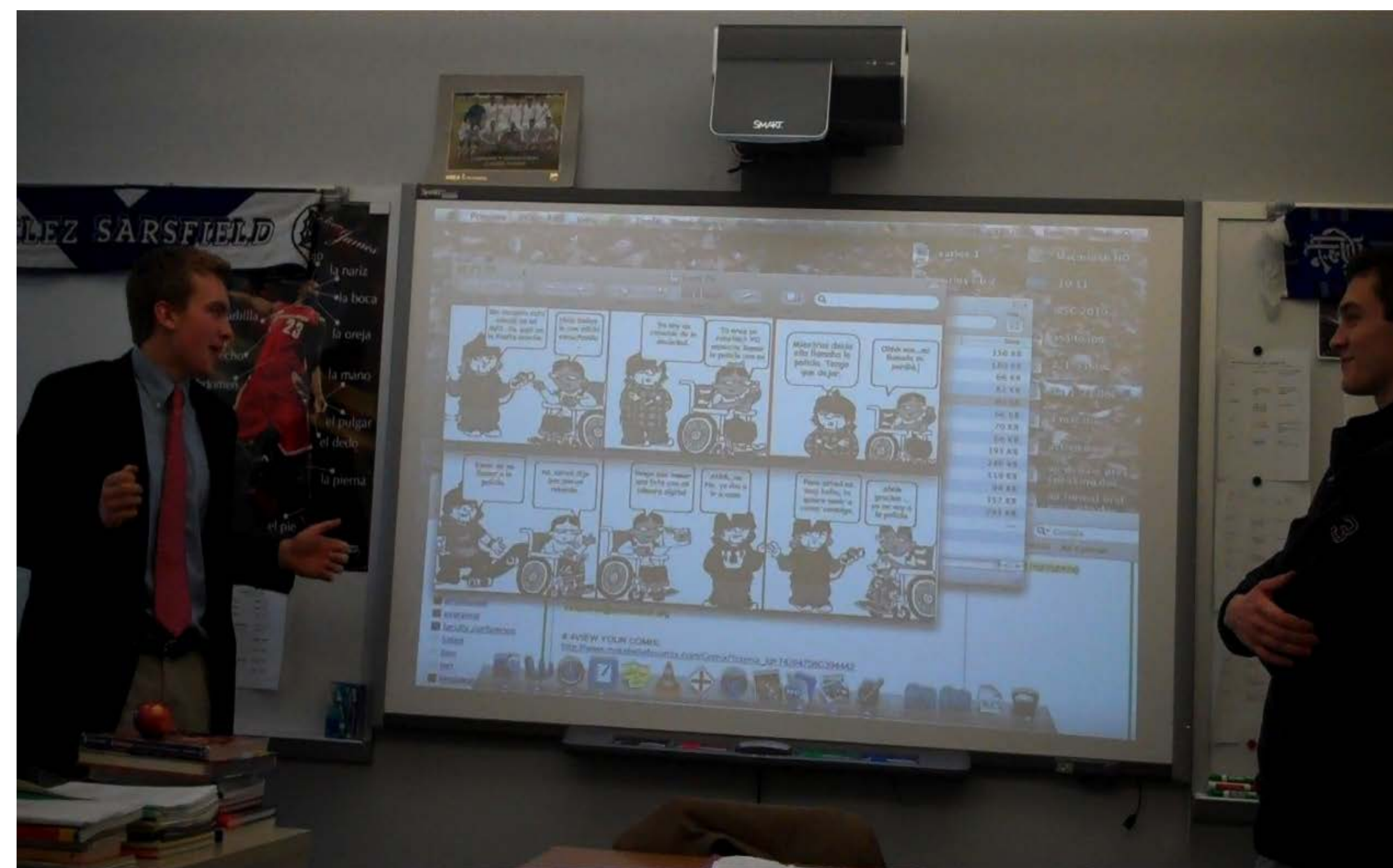
→ "You see how the topics are used in everyday conversation"

What do you find most worrisome or daunting about the role-plays?

→ "The dialogues weren't hard to memorize if you put the time into it"

→ "The actual performance of the role-plays was most worrisome, but after the first time it became much easier and boosted my class speaking confidence"

→ "Memorizing the lines but this was minor."



Conclusions

•When boys own their learning and the teacher becomes mediator instead of the central focus, the students gain more from the experience.

•Instead of evaluating them in the tradition quiz/test model, their role-plays became their final projects. As a result of putting time and effort into their projects, they became more personally invested. The pride and ownership they feels translates into a more valuable learning experience.

Implications for future practice:

>Drama and kinesthetic activities are very powerful in a language classroom. I will continue to create activities that offer grammar and vocabulary in this context.

> From this point forward, our department will continue to allow students to be self-exploratory, enabling them to make language learning personal, meaningful and, above all, fun.

Implications for further research:

>In presenting my findings to the department next year, I would love for there to be a mandate that our language students will carry out role-plays or dialogues at each level, the degree to which will increase in difficulty over time. This will allow us to track their progress and increase their confidence over several years.



Literature informing the study

Cavanaugh, T. (2005). *Action research for teachers*. University of North Florida College of Education and Human Services Jacksonville, Florida. Retrieved from http://www.nefstem.org/teacher_guide/intro/index.html

Gurian, M. & Stevens, K. (2005). *The minds of boys : Saving our sons from falling and life*, San Francisco, Jossey-Bass.

Koning, P. (2011). Language teachers get dramatic to engage students. *The Language Educator*, Vol 6, Issue 3, April 2011.

Lever, L. (2009). *Dialogue role-play for communication practice*. Retrieved from <http://www.suite101.com/content/dialog-roleplay-for-communication-practice-a138107>

McNiff, J. (2002); 3rd edition. *Action research for professional development*. Retrieved from <http://www.jeanmcniff.com/ar-booklet.asp>

Further information

For more information on this project I can be contacted at steffey@belmonthill.org. The full reports of this and similar projects undertaken as part of the IBSC's Action Research Program can be viewed at <http://www.theibsc.org/>. An online copy of this poster is also available on the IBSC site.