Kathy Weber – Spanish Teacher
Vocabulary activities using differentiation

Making connections with vocabulary

Oftentimes, students are successful in learning foreign language vocabulary, but are not nearly as successful in using it. Because our current textbook provides vocabulary assessment based on using the words in context rather than just matching them to their English counterpart, students have performed poorly on them. To help students learn their vocabulary better, and to help them do better on assessments, I have used the following activities during class to help students learn how to relate their vocabulary words to one another, to other words already learned, and to concepts and themes that are present on their assessments. These activities are designed to appeal to a variety of learning styles, providing differentiation in daily classroom assignments. They are useful in all levels of Spanish.

Word web—visual learners, kinesthetic learners

Objective: Students will be able to associate new vocabulary words to each other in a logical way; connect new vocabulary words to previously learned material; express ideas in written Spanish.

Activity: Students start with one new vocabulary word in the center of a blank sheet of paper. As they think of words that are related to that word, they make connections in a word web. Students should try to connect together as many vocabulary words from the new list as possible. A bonus may be provided for connecting the new vocabulary to previous material, or this may be part of the assignment.
Oobat—auditory learners

Objective: Students will brainstorm words and ideas related to current vocabulary words; express ideas in written Spanish; successfully interpret spoken Spanish; use spoken Spanish to communicate ideas.

Activity: This is a game that is kind of a reverse of the “Taboo” game. In that game, a word is given and a player must describe this word for his/her team to guess without using a list of words that accompanies the target word. In ‘Oobat’, students use words that are logically associated with the target word to get the team to guess it.

Students are given a blank index card. At the top of the card, they write the vocabulary word that they want their team to guess. The teacher may assign these ahead of time to ensure there are few, if any, repeats in vocabulary words. In this case, the teacher can differentiate the activity by assigning the more challenging vocabulary words to the more advanced students and the simpler words to the less advanced students. They are then given 5 minutes to brainstorm all of the Spanish words and phrases that they associate with that word and write them on the card below the target word. The cards are handed in, and the class is divided into teams (2, 3 or 4, depending on class size). The moderator (may be student(s) or the teacher) reads the ‘clue words’ on the index card. The first team to guess the target word gets the point. Play continues until all the vocabulary words are used up.

Examples of Oobat cards
Category game—visual learners, kinesthetic learners

Objective: Students will be able to associate new vocabulary words to each other in a logical way; connect new vocabulary words to previously learned material; sort vocabulary words into categories by concept; express ideas in written and spoken Spanish.

Activity: There are two ways to do this activity, depending on the comprehension level of students in the class. In one version of the activity, students are given categories related to the vocabulary. For example, if the unit of study was on food, the categories would be things like: fruits, vegetables, meats, grains, treats, things to drink, etc. Students are then given time to put the vocabulary in a logical category on their papers. Follow up includes setting the categories up on the board and letting the students fill in the categories with the words as they see fit and then reviewing as a class. If a disagreement arises among students as to why a word was put in a certain category, the students must explain why they put the word where they did.

To challenge more advanced students, have them work alone or in pairs and give each an overhead film and a marker. The students then take their vocabulary list and develop their own categories, placing the vocabulary words in to the categories they create. Students then present their categories on the overhead projector, explaining why they created the categories they did and why they put the words they did in those categories.

Advanced students’ versions of the category activity—same vocabulary lists different category ideas!