Integrating the Arts to Facilitate Culture and Second Language Acquisition: An International Perspective

Olga N. DeJesus, Alvaro Fernando Rodrigues-da-Cunha


a. School of Education at Mercy College, New York.

Resumo

O multiculturalismo e a difusão entre culturas tem sido um fenômeno constante devido o vai-e-vem pessoas no mundo hodierno. Quando as pessoas deixam suas pátrias para viver num novo lugar, enfrentam novos desafios culturais e linguísticos. O indivíduo tem que passar por dois processos basicamente, isto é, assimilação e aculturação. Um indivíduo pode passar com êxito por esses processos com muito apoio. Por isso, educadores dos Estados Unidos, da Áustria, da Hungria, da Holanda, da Finlândia e do Brasil se reuniram em um fórum educativo para divulgar ideias novas e inovadoras de como facilitar um processo de ensino e aprendizagem que apoie a aquisição da linguagem e da cultura. As artes como uma área de conteúdo a ser explorada são parte integrante de uma sólida educação. As artes têm uma profunda capacidade de enriquecer as vidas que tocam e podem ser uma ferramenta inestimável para professores em todos os níveis para melhorar a instrução dos alunos que falam uma L2 (segunda língua). Por exemplo, os alunos bilíngues nos Estados Unidos entram na escola pública enfrentando os múltiplos desafios de aprender inglês, dominando o conteúdo acadêmico, superando distâncias entre o país de origem e seu novo lar e negociando novos contextos culturais e sociais. Ao integrar as artes no ensino de língua inglesa como forma de aprendizagem, os alunos irão desenvolver e aprofundar a sua compreensão da sua experiência pessoal e outros. Em combinação com a leitura, escrita, fala e audição, as artes podem abrir portas para altos níveis de análise e desafiar os alunos a explorar a si mesmos e seus arredores e, assim, encontrar caminhos para a compreensão sofisticada e comunicação. As artes transmitem o que significa ser humano, desafiar o intelecto e proporcionar experiências ricas em análise, exploração, reflexão, observação, imaginação, experimentação e comunicação, bem como seu comportamento social.

Palavras-chave: Aquisição da Linguagem; Educação; Artes; Assimilação; Aculturação.
Abstract

Multiculturalism and the diffusion between cultures has been a constant phenomenon due to immigration and migration of people from all around the world. When people immigrate or migrate to a new place, they face new cultural and linguistic challenges. The individual has to go through two processes: assimilation and acculturation. An individual can successfully go through these processes with much support. For this reason, educators from the USA, Austria, Hungary, Netherlands, Finland and Brazil have come together in an educational forum to disseminate new and innovative ideas of how to facilitate a teaching and learning process that supports the acquisition of language and culture. The arts as a core content area are integral to a well-rounded education. The arts have a profound ability to enrich the lives they touch and can be an invaluable tool for teachers at all levels to enhance instruction for second language learners. For example, second language learners (SLLs) in the United States enter the public school facing the multiple challenges of learning English, mastering academic content, bridging distances between the home country and their new home, and negotiating new cultural and social contexts. By integrating the arts and art making into English language teaching and learning, students will develop and deepen their understanding of their own and others' human experience. In combination with reading, writing, speaking and listening, the arts can open doors for high levels of analysis and challenge students to explore themselves and their surroundings, and thus find avenues for sophisticated comprehension and communication. The arts convey what it means to be human, challenge the intellect and provide rich experiences in analysis, exploration, reflection, observation, imagination, experimentation, and communication as well as their social behavior.

Keywords: Language Acquisition; Education; Art; Assimilation; Acculturation.
1 Introduction

For Second Language Learners (SLLs), it is imperative to make teaching and learning culturally relevant and to enable access to prior knowledge upon which new skills and concepts can be build. It is critical for educators to understand the ways in which students’ cultural and linguistic backgrounds profoundly influence their experiences in the classroom, even because their behaviors and mores diverge from culture to culture.

As a form of maintaining and preserving their culture, the human being uses among other possibilities the visual arts to enhance language development by offering non-verbal methods for communication and understanding and by providing a platform for students to create mental images (Moore, Koller and Arago, 1994). Integrating the arts into language arts and the content areas for SLLs can give students the opportunity to engage in new and varied approaches while gaining positive emotional responses to learning, understanding others and communicating their own ideas.

This idea of integrating the arts to promote language learning can be supported by the research presented by Cunha (2012) who introduced the idea of using tales, stories and narratives as a way to facilitate language learning. Cunha (2012, p. 63) stated, It’s known that any narrative process is mentally birthed by a native language speaker. The native language speaker acts as a subject in the process of producing a narrative process for socializing any linguistic experience in their speech-production.

In the most diverse types of societies, narratives are always the preferred technique in the process of language acquisition. The most diverse acts of linguistic connection that form a net of social-cultural information in the process of language acquisition.

The summit of the process of language acquisition is based on the collective linguistic technique of preferred narrative events that reproduce passed events that relate a beginning, middle and end.

It’s essential to know the cultural-psychological function of the language or plainly speaking “the spirit of the language”, because we cannot linguistically go far even if we possess tons words, without having or knowing the cultural code that promotes the essence, the rational and judgment of the L2.

Therefore, through these proficiencies, we share experiences and at the same time transform memories. In addition to the coordination of representations of linguistics skills from the L1 to L2. From the beginning of the first words of any oral story, we understanding that we are in the presence of the speaker of the language that manipulates their L1 and who also wishes to manipulate the L2. Their linguistic experience permit them to use all possibility of their language to achieve the desire point in the process of second language acquisition.
2 Integrating the Arts to Facilitate Culture and Second Language Acquisition

Incorporating the arts as a core content area is integral to a well-rounded education. Additionally, a movement to integrate the arts across the curriculum will display their contribution to critical areas of learning and their relevance in our schools; it is hopeful that all teachers of SLLs will find continued value participating in professional development aimed at incorporating the arts in classrooms as effective tools for reaching students. Opportunities to practice the arts benefit students’ cognitive development and enhance literacy and language development. Students from highly diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds with varying academic needs thrive in programs that incorporate the universal language of art elements and images; access multiple intelligences; and encourage critical and conceptual thinking along with technical and creative problem-solving skills. Students engaged in quality arts curricula develop confidence and find outlets for individuality and self-inquiry. While engaging in a variety of learning styles, their imaginations and visual awareness are stimulated and they learn to understand the work of others and express their own point of view. Through the arts, young people have opportunities to develop their voices; enhance multicultural awareness; take pride in heritage; and recognize their role in, respond to, and participate in the world at large (Rucinski-Hatch, 1996).

By placing art within the context of the lives of SLLs and enabling them to express their ideas visually as well as by speaking and writing, teachers can:

• Build on prior knowledge.
• Scaffold instruction.
• Create a bridge between written and spoken language.
• Make learning relevant and meaningful.
• Help students develop self-esteem.
• Foster creativity.
• Develop an appreciation of the past.
• Highlight similarities and differences.
• Foster higher order thinking skills.
• Promote high levels of analysis, reasoning, and questioning.
• Support creative thinking.
• Model problem solving.
• Emphasize interpreting and communication of ideas.
• Enhance students’ ways of observing, responding to, and representing the world.

3 An International Perspective of Art Integration

In an International Conference of Educators held in Baden, Austria in the spring of 2016, a group of professors from different parts of the world shared their experiences and concerns about having to meet the needs of diverse SLLs. These professional scholars from the U.S.A., Hungary, Netherlands, Austria and Finland got together to disseminate theories of art integration through the curriculum as a strategic instructional approach to facilitate the second language learning of the diverse student in their schools.

The professors from the U.S.A. presented on the value of incorporating the various forms of arts into the curriculum as a way to facilitate culture and second language learning. According to Mages (2016), an associate professor from Mercy College in New York, USA,
incorporating drama into the classroom has significant value in the process of learning and language acquisition. Through drama, students have the opportunity in a relaxed environment to formulate ideas and use language through their character. McNulty (2016), an assistant professor from Wise University in Virginia USA, emphasized that by incorporating drama in teaching, it allow the student to develop a sense of self-image and this self-image is essential in helping the student gain the confidence to learn a new language and feel accepted in the new culture. Ryan and Ryan (2016), professors in the performing arts department from the same institution, presented on the importance of teaching talent through music and singing as a way to improve the student’s sense and discover skills that can be applied to the learning of language arts.

Not only in the USA is the arts valued as a key element for a successful teaching and learning process, but in a few European countries as well. In Hungary, educators are incorporating the use of puppets in the language class. According to Koverne-Ngyhazi (2016), a professor of education from Hungary, the use of puppets as an instructional tool in the classroom for SLLs has been a successful approach in facilitating the learning of Hungarian culture and language to students who have immigrated from many parts of the Middle East. She reported that the use of puppets in the primary grades allows the students to develop cognitive and oral competencies of the acquiring Hungarian language. Meanwhile, Van Eerden (2016), a professor from the Netherlands, expressed the importance of incorporating music in arithmetic lessons. He demonstrated how the use of musical instruments and the production of sounds and movement stimulate the brain and conditioned it for higher levels of cognitive processes that were ideal during the learning of arithmetic in the classroom. His colleague professor Loes Bastiaansen (2016), emphasized that the integration of the performing arts in core curriculum especially in the primary school level was key to unfolding cognitive and linguistic set of skills that would facilitate learning at a much faster pace.

Researchers Hubert Gruber and Josef Bauchner (2016), from the Pedagogische Hochschule from Baden Austria presented their study on the use of “stair play”, a step-by-step game of using musical notes with the first seven letters of the alphabet to create songs or new sounds. These researchers reported that to incorporate music in the teaching of language was motivational for the students but also very effective in developing their understanding of language intonation, something that is essential to the SLLs.

According to Marjanen (2016), a professor and researcher from Laurea University in Finland, the integration of music education as an instructional tool is taking new force in the education world. She presented her most recent study on the use of an iPad app that integrates music and narratives to support interaction between the learner and the app. The use of the iPad and this app as an instructional tool for developing language arts skills has proven to be very effective in the primary schools of Finland. Marjanen reported that the primary students as well as their teachers love the use of this app because it motivates the student and facilitates the teaching of the developing linguistic skills.

In the Amazon Forest of Brazil, the Arapiun, Tapaiu and Jaraki—an indigenous territory located within 4 hours by boat from the City of Santarem, State of Para—they use religious songs, folktales and narratives as a way to recover and teach their language.

Actually, these specific tribes speak Portuguese and they are between 200 and 300 students that live in an Indigenous protected area by the National Foundation of Indigenous people also know as (Funai).
The population is composed of three tribes, Arapiun, Tapaiu and Jaraki. These indigenous people practice traditional economy that integrates agriculture, fishing, hunting and plantation. In addition, they dedicate themselves to raising small domestic animals. The daily catch of fish and the root cassava is their daily meal. Within their costumes exist numerous gods, they do many magical rituals, paint themselves, and often they speak in their indigenous language etc.

Many surrounding tribes have disappeared due to battles between Portuguese and indigenous people. The Portuguese out beat them because they have firearms and the indigenous people have only bows and arrows.

These unfair battles resulted in the ending off ethnicities that refused to be converted by the Portuguese priest, but the more passive indigenous survived by accepting the European ways. This group of people were influence by Jesuits and Franciscan fathers who transmitted the Portuguese language, Catholicism and other behaviors that they brought from Europe to the Amazon Rainforest.

Even in time of rapid transformations, because the daily idiom used is the Brazilian Portuguese language, their language represent the possibility of maintaining the self-determination of their sociopolitical organization and the integrity of their traditional communication. The teachers that live there they do not have adequate training in pedagogy or linguistics. Although, their teaching is based exclusively on their prior knowledge and lived experiences, the effects are very significant.

Their teaching approach consisted of singing songs and telling narrative folktale in round tables. They are acquiring little by little their lost language that the “white man” tried to destroy during the exploration of Amazon Rainforest.

It is interesting to know that this primitive model of teaching has taken an entire community successfully through the process language acquisition. Due to the lack of resources, they do not have access to diverse technology, but the empirically applied results through storytelling, fairytales and religious praise, allow the indigenous people the opportunity for small dialogues of what once was their native language.

It is not just the children who are motivate to participate in the process of language acquisition from L1 to L2, but also the adults and elders who are excited with this brilliant language recovery initiative.

In phonetic transcription, here is an example of a religious praise sang to the Tupã god:

\[\text{[aNiv}\gamma\alpha, aNiv} \gamma\alpha x\gamma\tau\nu\varpi\alpha\iota\Upsilon. \kappa\Omega?\alpha\varsigma\kappa\Omega?\alpha\varsigma\iota, \kappa\Omega?\alpha\varsigma\iota \alpha\nu \times \nu \gamma\Upsilon].\]

“Aninga, aninga, aningalia tupae. Kuasi, Kuasi, Kuasi anulinge”.

“Powerful, powerful, powerful god. Thanks a bunch for everything”.

4 Conclusion

Multiculturalism and the diffusion of cultures and languages is an evolving phenomenon that is fascinating and challenging.
The idea of a crossover culture allows for endless opportunities for human preservation. At the same time, the language boundaries can interfere with cultural diffusion. Resulting in a conflicting issue between two diverse cultures and language acquisition.

Doubtless, the arts have a profound ability to enrich the lives they touch and can be an invaluable tool for teachers at all levels to enhance instruction for second language learners; however, by integrating the arts in this process we find a common ground.

As aforementioned, the arts convey what it means to be human, challenge the intellect and provide rich experiences in analysis, exploration, reflection, observation, imagination, experimentation, and communication as well as their social behavior.

A few scholars from around the world got together to disseminate theories of art integration through the curriculum as a strategic instructional approach to facilitate the process of culture and second language acquisition.

As a result, we can affirm in this essay that we perceived beyond human theories that there is some human creativity.

It does not matter if people have or do not have resources or if they do not have access to diverse technology. It’s proven that—sometimes—primitive models of teaching has brought successful results in the process of language acquisition, whether in America, Europe or at a simple tribe of Amazon Rainforest.

References


_______________

**Informeções dos autores**

**Olga N. DeJesus:** Educational Leadership Ed.D. Assistant Professor, Multilingual Studies in School of Education at Mercy College, New York. Contato: odejesus@mercy.edu

**Alvaro Fernando Rodrigues-da-Cunha:** Ethno-Anthro-P-Linguist. Ph.D. New York, United States of America. Contato: dr.alvarocunha@gmail.com