A project-based approach in the Arabic Classroom.
A case study in a complementary school

Harf Al Kaf (1991)
by Ali Omar Ermes

'… the art is like the heart of this whole thing'
Student F, Peace School

A Project- Based approach

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Outline of session

PART 1

- Project Based Language Learning
- Affordances of visual art
- The artist Ali Omar Ermes
- Focus works
- Pedagogical process

PART 2

- Peace School
- Implementing the 3-stage pedagogical model
- Researching work over last academic year
- Tentative findings
- Implications

- -

- Questions

Relevance of the Project Based Language Learning (PBLL) approach

- A macro-based, top-down approach fitting needs of HL learners (socio-affective factors) (Kagan & Dillon, 2001/2003; Carreira 2016)

- Akin to cross-curricular, thematic, TBLT and CLIL approaches

- Crosses boundaries and makes connections – curriculum, languages and cultures, sites of learning, semiotic modes, online-offline (Beckett & Slater, 2019;Thomas & Yamazaki, 2021)

- Learner centred, active, experiential, collaborative dialogic, holistic, (van Lier, 2007; Kramsch, 2009)

- Safe, flexible space for negotiation of identity (Cummins & Early, 2011)

- Socially engaged, participative, critical and creative

Appeal of project-based language learning approach


ENGAGEMENT – CHALLENGE - EMPOWERMENT

- Addresses relevant, real-world issues and connects with students' personal experience and interests

- Promotes active learning, collaboration, critical thinking and creativity

- Extends walls of the classroom into home and community, facilitating parental involvement

- Builds confidence and supports positive identity construction

Why visual art based approach

- Accessibility

- Materiality / Embodiment (social objects, artefactual literacy)

- Sensoriality

- Emotionality

- Memorability ('mental images', 'language learning with the mind's eye')

- Ambiguity

- (Inter)culturality

- Creativity

- Intertextuality

The artist Ali Omar Ermes
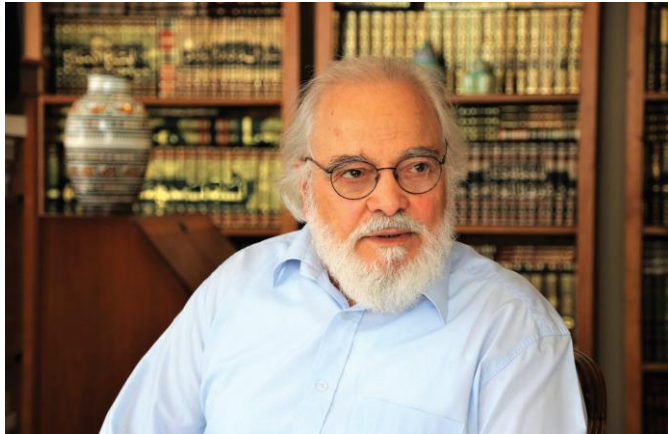
- Renowned artist, Libyan background, several works in British museum

- Work features Arabic letters, words and extracts from Arab poetry

- Language in art a feature in various cultures, ref. Haiga - Japanese art of combining brush painting, haiku, and calligraphy.

Haiga artist: Doshin Kuba
https://doshinkuba.blogspot.com/2011/06/haiga-japanese-painting-with-haiku-poem.html

Trio of works: 'La', 'Kalla', 'Wa Lan' (لا كلا و لن)

Not ever ← Never ← No

Prose poetry in art works related to resisting injustice and corruption in the world

Note: Right to left orientation

Pedagogical process:

Phases

1. Approaching
- brainstorming
- discussing in pairs/group
- introducing key words

2. Exploring
- researching
- connecting and comparing
- analysing and interpreting
- developing language knowledge and skills

3. Creating
- re-imagining
- re-mediating
- re-presenting

Peace School and heritage language learners

- Community-based 'complementary' school run by volunteers on Saturdays

- Teaches Arabic language-and-culture as well as Islamic studies

- **Mission**: *To enable young people mainly of Arab background to experience high quality Arabic-language-and-culture teaching which develops confidence and gives them a sense of pride and responsibility as bilingual Arab-British individuals.*

- Focus class: 12 students, 8 Arabic background, 4 non-Arabic background, range of countries of origin / Intermediate level

Implementing the 3-stage pedagogical model:
1. Approaching
2. Exploring
3. Creating

- Active involvement of learner

- Links to personal experience and interests

- Dual focus content and language

- Scaffolding including bilingual elements

- Collaboration in groups

- Integrated use of technology

- Variety of activities involving 4 skills

- Progression towards a creative outcome presented/performed to a real audience

Researching work over last academic year

- Self-reflective ethnographic research model

- Qualitative data (lesson plans, observation, interviews, work samples)

- Thematic analysis

- Tentative findings under three broad headings:
  a) **Agency, emotion and personal experience**
  b) **Identity**
  c) **Multimodal design**

Student D

- Poster features large scale words used by Ermes in colours reflecting levels of anger as in original

- Around these is poetic text (nathr) in smaller writing about bullying and injustice in the world

- Text relates to personal experience of bullying at school

TRANSLATION OF POEM

No to pain and sadness because of bullying (Yellow)

Never to loneliness and fear for it leads to depression (Orange)

Never more will we accept isolation for it destroys nations (Red)

What is this? Is it life or death?

Where is the fun and the joy?

Where are the free souls?

Why am I lost?

Where am I in this unjust world?

Interview data:
1. Multimodal design

1a Students developed appreciation of how visual and textual elements can complement each other and work together as resources for meaning-making

[Referring to La-Kalla-Wa Lan] *I think the painting explained the text, so the text was about things that weren't good or forbidden and then the painting with all the colours, the red and orange which kind of represent fire, blood, that kind of went well with the text which .. linked it to each other* (Student K)

Interview data:
2 Agency, emotions and personal links

2e Poster activity based on works by Ali Omar Ermes offered creative space for personal expression on issues that matter to students

From the La-Kalla-WaLan I expressed my personal issues and [those] of many other people like Islamophobia, bullying and many other reasons so a lot of the pictures of Ali Omar Ermes really let me express myself in different ways. (Student I)

Interview data: 3 Identity

3b Focus on works of Ali Omar Ermes renewed commitment to Arabic language-and-culture learning

3c Probing works by Ali Omar Ermes served as trigger giving students confidence and desire to express a personal perspective

3b

- *For me learning about La-Kalla-WaLan in art in Arabic, it kind of made me passionate about Arabic* (Student D)

3c

- *I didn't know I had this creativity … I did not know I could do all of this …* (Student E)

- *It made me very proud of myself that I was capable of writing **my own** poem and painting **my own** art by using Ali Omar Ermes' art as my inspiration.* (Student K)

Data sample:
Video inspired by
La, Kalla, Wa Lan

- Created collaboratively by group of 5 students

- Focus: Bullying and its effects

- Created bilingually – Arabic and English

- Planning – Storyboarding – Scripting bilingually – Rehearsing and Filming - Editing
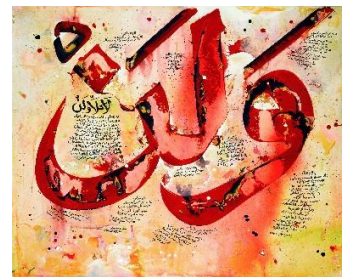
Video inspired by La, Kalla, Wa Lan

Implications.

Visual art can:

- bring context and purpose to language learning

- foster learner agency, creative thinking and voice

- develop appreciation of heritage culture

- develop pride in bilingual identity

- unlock personal, emotional, multisensory and aesthetic aspects of language learning

- develop understanding of multimodal design and intertextuality

Thank you.

Questions

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