

Arts-based approaches in contemporary world language education

© Yury V. Almetev

Chelyabinsk State University, Chelyabinsk, Russia

Abstract: Based on the view that creativity plays an important part both in general cognitive development of children and in education, supported by a number of prominent scholars, the author advocates that creativity should play a vital role in language education including first language, second language, heritage (community) language, and foreign language education. The author cites contemporary scholars who argue that creativity is mostly left out of school education around the world. Following this premise, the article provides a brief literature review of the existing research on various forms of incorporation of arts in the teaching of various school subjects including arts-infused education and art integration in selected schools in North America and Europe. The author also focuses on the studies investigating the inclusion of various forms and genres of arts in language education, including creative writing, music, visual arts, and drama. Special attention is paid to the studies focusing on the implementation of innovative approaches to second and foreign language education based on the incorporation of visual arts and creative artistic processes in language classrooms around the world, specifically the creation of picturebooks and comic books in the foreign language by language learners.

Keywords: First language education, heritage language, foreign language teaching, second language learning, arts-based creativity, arts-infused learning, arts integration, visual arts, arts-based teaching, picturebook and comic book creation

Article info: Received November 8, 2019; accepted December 1, 2019; available online December 30, 2019.

For citation: Almetev Yu. V. (2019) Arts-based approaches in contemporary world language education. Social Competence. Vol. 4. No. 4. P. 346–351. (In Russ.)

Современные методы обучения языкам народов мира, основанные на творческой деятельности

© Ю.В. Альметев

Челябинский государственный университет, г. Челябинск, Россия

Аннотация: Основываясь на утверждениях многих известных ученых о том, что творчество играет важную роль как в общем когнитивном развитии детей, так и в их обучении автор данной статьи теоретизирует, что творческий процесс должен играть ведущую роль в преподавании языков, включая обучение родному, иностранному, дополнительному и национальному. При этом он ссылается на работы ведущих современных ученых, утверждающих, что образовательные системы большинства стран мира оставляют творчество «за бортом» учебного процесса. Основываясь на данной предпосылке, проводит краткий обзор существующих научно-исследовательских работ, посвященных теме использования различных видов внедрения искусства и художественного творчества в учебный процесс, включая «арт-инфузию» и «арт-интеграцию» в обучении различным школьным предметам в ряде школ Северной Америки и Европы. Статья также знакомит читателей с исследованиями в области включения различных видов и жанров художественного творчества в преподавании языков, в том числе литературное творчество, использование музыки, изобразительного искусства и драматических постановок. Особое внимание уделяется исследованиям, посвященным внедрению новаторских подходов в обучении иностранным языкам, основанным на использовании изобразительного искусства и художественного творчества в языковых классах различных школ мира. В частности, рассматривается опыт создания комиксов и книжек с картинками учащимися на уроках иностранного языка.

Ключевые слова: обучение родному, иностранному, национальному, второму языку, творчество, основанное на художественной деятельности, обучение с использованием различных видов искусства, включение искусства в учебный процесс, изобразительное искусство, создание комиксов, книг с картинками

Информация о статье: Дата поступления 8 ноября 2019 г.; дата принятия к печати 1 декабря 2019 г.; дата онлайн-размещения 30 декабря 2019 г.

Для цитирования: Альметев Ю.В. Современные методы обучения языкам народов мира, основанные на творческой деятельности // Социальная компетентность. 2019. Т. 4. № 4. С. 346–351.

Arts-based creative approaches in first language, heritage language, and second/foreign language education

One of the world's leading proponents of fostering creativity in school children, Ken Robinson (2001), states that instead of encouraging children's innate creative abilities to help them achieve higher academic goals, schools around the world teach children out of creativity. Arguing for the broader inclusion of creativity in education, Vygotsky (2004) underscores the importance of creativity and imagination in human life and maintains that all human beings, children and adults alike, have access to the creative ability called imagination. He argues that imagination permeates all aspects of cultural life, without which no artistic, scientific, or technical achievement would be possible.

However, it appears that childhood is the period when creativity is especially salient in human beings. Vygotsky (2004) maintains that all people are born creative but, during the period of adolescence, the majority of them gradually lose their creative abilities. Imagination undergoes significant changes involving adaptation to rational requirements around the age of puberty. Vygotsky (2004) argues that, before puberty, all children eagerly draw, no matter their artistic ability. Their reason willingly accepts what their imagination produces and they are completely satisfied with their creative endeavors. That is why it seems especially important to use children's creative abilities in education before puberty sets in, when children's creativity and imagination are at their peak.

Creativity is particularly important in language learning. Kramsch (2009) maintains that learning to use a language is an inherently creative process. Indeed, each time we use a language, we make a creative effort as we create a new utterance. It becomes especially salient when we are learning and using a foreign language. According to Clarke (2012), creativity is a favorable condition for second language (L2) learning because "the use of any language is inherently creative, as thinking, re-enacting the speech, thought and lexis of another foreign culture inspires creativity in itself" (Clarke, 2012. P. 5). Creativity in L2 education is the opposite of the traditional para-

digm, which privileges transmission of knowledge and "a conformist, passive reproduction of stereotyped forms" (Clarke, 2012, p. 4). Learning a language can be compared to painting on a blank canvas – "I can use any of the tools I have to create a living work of art" (Kramsch, 2009. P. 65).

Since the focus of my recent dissertation study was the use of creative, arts-based methods in foreign language education, the primary goal of the current literature review was to find relevant academic literature discussing the inclusion of arts in foreign/second language classrooms. My search for academic sources of information on the use of arts-based creativity in foreign language (FL) education has yielded rather scant results. However, I discovered quite a slew of studies dedicated to the incorporation of arts in first language, heritage language, and second language education. Most of the existing research on the use of creativity in classroom concerns first language (L1) education (Lorimer, 2011), whereas the research on creativity in FL or second language (L2) classrooms mostly focused on ESL classes in the USA and UK context (Craig & Paraiso, 2009). The few existing studies on creativity in FL education focused on university FL instruction and higher linguistic competence level (Sağlamel & Kayaoğlu, 2013). Arts-based creativity in low proficiency L2/FL classrooms, particularly the use of visual arts and student creativity in L2 learning, still remains an under-researched area.

Arts-infused learning was observed by Lorimer (2011) in four U.S. middle schools. The researcher provides convincing evidence that infusing visual and performing arts into language arts, math, science, and social studies as a pedagogical approach fosters a meaningful, integrative, and exploratory curriculum. Lorimer points out that infusing arts on a regular basis in all curricular areas not only provides rich and relevant learning experiences but also has the potential to engage disenfranchised students. The researcher observes that students work on the arts-based projects with focused effort, interest, and high engagement. Although Lorimer's study does not specifically address L2 learning, it sheds light on how arts can be incorporated in the core curriculum subjects.

In a study of art integration, Baker (2013) explored the practice of teaching core content subjects, such as reading, language, science, and social studies, with the help of arts-based hands-on projects, in which such media as drama, dance, music, and visual arts are utilized. The study describes the framework, in which the arts are integrated with content subjects through the use of thematic units, in which various activities include drawing illustrations, poetry writing, costume design, dance, musicals, plays, and multimedia production. The important finding of this study is that instruction of any subject can be "interwoven with the arts to yield rich and complex forms of learning for children that promote conceptual and intellectual development" (Baker, 2013. P. 13).

In a study conducted by Anderson and Chung (2013), the researchers' focus is on implementing arts in heritage language, or community language, teaching, namely, in the teaching of such languages as Arabic, Chinese, Punjabi, and Tamil, in British public schools. Advocating for the inclusion of the arts in heritage language learning, the researchers point out that "it is through the arts in all their forms that young people experiment with and try to articulate their deepest feelings" (Anderson & Chung, 2013. P. 4). In particular, the teachers commented on how the creation of dual language comic books "developed students' translation and reference skills as well as their awareness of language" (Anderson & Chung, 2013, p. 13). Among the benefits of the approach, the researchers named the stimulating context for developing language skills and meaningful tasks which give learners a voice. The inclusion of arts in the learning process has allowed the teachers to raise student motivation towards learning their heritage languages and provided a secure and stimulating space for immigrant children to hone their heritage language skills.

Arts-based creativity in L2/FL classrooms includes the use of various art forms: drama, dance, poetry, visual arts, digital design, and creating comic books. All these artistic genres have been recently used in various contexts of L2 teaching in order to foster different aspects of L2 learners' language development. The benefits of poetry writing in

learning ESOL are the focus of Cahnmann-Taylor and Preston's (2008) study, in which the authors refute the notorious misconception that poetry is "an elite craft reserved for those who have both talent and Standard English proficiency" (Cahnmann-Taylor & Preston. P. 235). Arguing that creativity is a necessary life skill for all students developing L2 proficiency, the authors maintain that poetry can be a powerful tool for "developing students' love of language, especially students in the early stages of Standard English language acquisition" (Cahnmann-Taylor & Preston. P. 235).

Hanauer's (2012) approach to teaching college EFL through poetry, which he calls "meaningful literacy instruction", is informed by the sense of richness of every L2 learner's internal world. He shares the schematic outline of his teaching L2 poetry writing, which starts with introductory reading of other people's poetry, goes on to the exploration of a specific poetry genre, and finishes with production of students' own poetry and sharing it with an audience of significant people, including peers and relatives. I adopted a similar succession of work stages for my dissertation study, in which the participants were first to be introduced to the world of picturebooks, then produced their own picturebooks under the teacher's guidance, and finally shared them with their parents, teachers, and friends.

In the study on EFL teaching and learning in Turkish universities, Sağlamel and Kayaoğlu (2013) found evidence that creative drama activities in L2 classrooms alleviate foreign language anxiety, lower affective filter, and raise learners' intrinsic motivation to studying foreign languages. After MacIntyre & Gardner's (1994) work on L2 anxiety, it has become common knowledge that high anxiety in L2 learning leads to inhibition and interferes with L2 language development. Sağlamel and Kayaoğlu argue that, since language anxiety is identity-based, using arts-based activities pushes learners to "an imaginary realm which might cover their identities and reduce the threat to the self" (Sağlamel & Kayaoğlu, 2013. P. 379). One of the activities of that study included improvisations, in which learners were to assume novel roles and be engaged in spontaneous speaking. As a result, students' apprehension of making mistakes in L2 speaking was alleviated, since, in their perception, it

was their selected characters and not themselves, who were making mistakes.

Incorporating visual arts in foreign and second language education

Craig and Paraiso (2009) maintain that visual art can serve as a facilitating tool for L2 learners. Their study showed that visual art can become "a perfect bridge from the past world" to the "present circumstances" (Craig & Paraiso, 2009. P. 23) for immigrant children just beginning to learn English. The high affective filter and the low expectations on the part of the school authorities make it difficult for beginning ESL learners to speak English in class. The researchers argue that engaging adolescent ESL students in free self-expression through drawing, painting, and creating illustrations lowers the affective filter and creates a non-threatening environment conducive to successful learning of their new language.

The participants of the study were given opportunities to create individual artwork in the classroom, which was followed by sharing their creations. The researchers provided the art supplies and encouraged the students to freely choose any themes for their art. The artwork was displayed around the classroom and the participants took particular pride describing their creations. As a result, "the use of vocabulary increased as they shared with each other" (Craig & Paraiso, 2009. P. 18) and students gained L2 confidence - "the natural flow of language used when describing their art carried over to content area subject instruction and language learning" (Craig & Paraiso, 2009. P. 18). The researchers also noted that along with the growing confidence of students in using various art techniques, their confidence in using English also increased - "often the students would collaborate with each other, communicating in Spanish at first, but increasingly in English" (Craig & Paraiso, 2009. P. 22).

Pictorial narratives, such as comic books, picturebooks, and graphic novels have been used in L2 classrooms mostly as "read-alouds" (Ranker, 2007; Hsiu-Chih, 2008), during which the teachers perceived their role as that of a mediator, whose job was not to transmit knowledge to students but to encourage their active participation. In Hsiu-

Chih's (2008) study, EFL teachers perceived three main educational values of picturebooks in the following hierarchy: (1) linguistic value, (2) the value of the story, and (3) the value of the picture. However, the studies analyzing the actual creation of picturebooks and comic books in a FL by students are very scarce. One of them is a qualitative study by Zapata (2013) on picturebook making and the development of young Latino students' bilingual composing processes. The study findings suggest that picturebook study and picturebook making can become useful creative and intellectual acts for elementary school students. Zapata (2013) found that picturebook making not only afforded various literary and artistic composition resources, but also provided opportunities for bilingual students to "embrace their in and out of school resources and identities as composers of many texts, in many languages, and in many modalities" (Zapata, 2013. P. 248).

In another study, Morrison, Bryan, and Chilcoat (2002) focused on the use of student-created comic-books in helping middle school students develop their writing, comprehension, and research skills. Besides discussing the advantages of using comic-book design in a language classroom, the authors share some valuable tips on the construction of a comic book, which I found useful for my project. For example, they recommend drawing "each panel as realistically as possible", keeping drawings simple and avoiding too much detail (Morrison, Bryan, & Chilcoat, 2002. P. 762). The authors also share important advice on using different "camera angles" (close-ups, medium shots, high angles, low angles) in pictures to avoid sameness on the page.

An important insight into the nature of implementing arts-based creativity in a FL classroom was suggested by Morrison, Bryan, and Chilcoat (2002), who state that creative projects should not aim at creating fine pieces of art. However, "if the teacher reminds students of a few simple guidelines, their end products will be more visually pleasing" (Morrison, Bryan, & Chilcoat, 2002. P. 762). Another important benefit of incorporating arts-based projects in FL education is that the resulting student-created artifacts can be used as elicitation devices for speaking activities. Accord-

ing to Clarke (2012), the work with visual images in a L2 classroom facilitates communication with children in the L2 as images can be used as elicitation devices. Visual images created by children can also be used as artifacts for analysis and serve as mechanisms for empowering children in conversations with adults (Clarke, 2012).

Another benefit of the inclusion of arts in L2 instruction is that artistic processes "involve abundant opportunities to teach failure and revision" (Cahnmann-Taylor & Zhang, 2017). Cahnmann-Taylor and Zhang (2017) argue that the process of artistic creation teaches students that "to fail is a necessary part of success", and that through arts production L2 learners come to realize "the need to take risks, to explore and make mistakes, to

start over again and learn from the process" (Cahnmann-Taylor & Zhang, 2017. P. 4).

Overall, the conducted literature review in the selected area of scholarly research has yielded rather scant results, which shows that arts-based creative processes and arts-based teaching approaches are still mostly left outside of world language classrooms, including heritage language, foreign language, and second language education, which emphasizes the necessity of conducting more experimental studies on the use of arts-based creativity in world language education. Such studies can focus on the implementation of various art forms and genres in language classrooms, including visual arts, music, poetry and prose writing, and drama.

References

- Anderson, J., & Chung, Y. (2013) Finding a voice: Arts-based creativity in the community languages classroom. *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*, 14(5), 551–569.
- Baker D. (2013) Art integration and cognitive development. *Journal for Learning through the Arts*, 9(1), 1–15.
- Cahnmann-Taylor, M., & Preston, D. (2008) What bilingual poets can do: Re-visioning English education for biliteracy. *English in Education*, 42(3), 234–252.
- Cahnmann-Taylor, M., & Zhang, K. (2017) Arts and TESOL. In J. I. Lontas (Ed.), *The TESOL Encyclopedia of English Language Teaching*. John Wiley & Sons, Inc.
- Clarke, M. A. (2012) Creativity in modern foreign languages teaching and learning. The Higher Education Academy, Published online. Retrieved April 24, 2016, from http://www.creativeacademic.uk/uploads/1/3/5/4/13542890/creativity_in_modern_languages.pdf
- Craig, D. V., & Paraiso, J (2009) Dual diaspora and Barrio Art: Art as an avenue for learning English. *Journal for Learning through the Arts*, 4(1), 1 – 27.
- Hanauer, D. I. (2012) Meaningful literacy: Writing poetry in the language classroom. *Language Teaching*, 45(1), 105-115.
- Hsiu-Chih, S. (2008) The value of English picture story books. *ELT Journal Volume*, 62(1), 47 – 55.
- Lorimer, M. (2011) Arts-infused learning in Middle Level classrooms. *Journal for Learning Through the Arts*, 7(1).
- MacIntyre, P. D., & Gardner, R. C. (1994) The subtle effects of language anxiety on cognitive processing in the second language. *Language Learning*, 44, 283–305.
- Morrison, T. G., Bryan, G., & Chilcoat, G. W. (2002) Using student-generated comic books in the classroom. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, 45(8), 758–767.
- Ranker, J. (2007) Using comic books as read-alouds: Insights on reading instruction from An English as a Second Language classroom. *Reading Teacher*, 61(4), 296–55.
- Robinson, K. (2001) *Unlocking creativity: A strategy for development*. Belfast: Department of Culture Arts and Leisure.
- Saçlıamel, H., & Kayaoğlu, M. (2013). Creative drama: A possible way to alleviate foreign language anxiety. *RELC Journal*, 44, 377–394.
- Vygotsky, L. S. (2004). Imagination and creativity in childhood. *Journal of Russian and East European Psychology*, 42(1), 7–97, (Original work published in 1930).
- Zapata, M. A. (2013) Examining the multimodal and multilingual resources of young Latino picturebook makers. Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation, The University of Texas at Austin, Texas.

Библиографический список

- Anderson, J., & Chung, Y. (2013) Finding a voice: Arts-based creativity in the community languages classroom. *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*, 14(5), 551–569.
- Baker D. (2013) Art integration and cognitive development. *Journal for Learning through the Arts*, 9(1), 1–15.
- Cahnmann-Taylor, M., & Preston, D. (2008) What bilingual poets can do: Re-visioning English education for biliteracy. *English in Education*, 42(3), 234–252.
- Cahnmann-Taylor, M., & Zhang, K. (2017) Arts and TESOL. In J. I. Lontas (Ed.), *The TESOL Encyclopedia of English Language Teaching*. John Wiley & Sons, Inc.
- Clarke, M. A. (2012) Creativity in modern foreign languages teaching and learning. The Higher Education Academy, Published online. Retrieved April 24, 2016, from http://www.creativeacademic.uk/uploads/1/3/5/4/13542890/creativity_in_modern_languages.pdf
- Craig, D. V., & Paraiso, J (2009) Dual diaspora and Barrio Art: Art as an avenue for learning English. *Journal for Learning through the Arts*, 4(1), 1 – 27.

Hanauer, D. I. (2012) Meaningful literacy: Writing poetry in the language classroom. *Language Teaching*, 45(1), 105–115.

Hsiu-Chih, S. (2008) The value of English picture story books. *ELT Journal Volume*, 62(1), 47 – 55.

Lorimer, M. (2011) Arts-infused learning in Middle Level classrooms. *Journal for Learning Through the Arts*, 7(1).

MacIntyre, P. D., & Gardner, R. C. (1994) The subtle effects of language anxiety on cognitive processing in the second language. *Language Learning*, 44, 283–305.

Ranker, J. (2007) Using comic books as read-alouds: Insights on reading instruction from An English as a Second Language classroom. *Reading Teacher*, 61(4), 296–55.

Robinson, K. (2001) *Unlocking creativity: A strategy for development*. Belfast: Department of Culture Arts and Leisure.

Sağlamel, H., & Kayaoğlu, M. (2013). Creative drama: A possible way to alleviate foreign language anxiety. *RELC Journal*, 44, 377–394.

Vygotsky, L. S. (2004). Imagination and creativity in childhood. *Journal of Russian and East European Psychology*, 42(1), 7–97, (Original work published in 1930).

Zapata, M. A. (2013) Examining the multimodal and multilingual resources of young Latino picturebook makers. Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation, The University of Texas at Austin, Texas.

Criteria for Authorship

Yu. V. Almetev has conducted research, summarized the results, prepared the manuscript for publication, he owns the copyright in this article and bears responsibility for its originality.

Conflict of Interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

The author has read and approved the final version of the manuscript.

Author's Credentials

Almetev Yu. V., Cand. Sci. (Pedagogical Sciences), PhD (University of Georgia, USA), Associate Professor of the English Language Theory and Practice Department of Chelyabinsk State University, 129 Bratya Kashiriny Street, Chelyabinsk, 454001, Russia,

✉ e-mail: yu71@list.ru

Критерии авторства

Ю.В. Альметев выполнил исследовательскую работу, на основании полученных результатов провел обобщение, подготовил рукопись к печати, имеет на статью авторские права и несет полную ответственность за ее оригинальность.

Конфликт интересов

Автор заявляет об отсутствии конфликта интересов.

Автор прочитал и одобрил окончательный вариант рукописи.

Сведения об авторе

Альметев Юрий Валерьевич, кандидат педагогических наук, ученая степень PhD (Университет Джорджии, США), доцент кафедры теории и практики английского языка, Челябинский государственный университет, 454001, г. Челябинск, ул. Братьев Кашириных, 129, Россия,

✉ e-mail yu71@list.ru