

The place and use of art

What is the use of art in the learning process, what does it serve?

Short presentation

You may or may not be already using artworks in your classes, depending on your current practice this section can be of use to you like the other sections as a mirror of your activities or mainly as a source of inspiration on how you could integrate art works as a pedagogical resource. In the LALI project our aim was to test how the integration of art works could enrich the teaching of local language and literacy to migrants or low language skill adult learners, and we discovered that art can be beneficial for at least six different perspectives, that we're going to share with you below.

Presentation of categories

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- **Aesthetic appreciation** Most professionals working in the art field are convinced that art has a genuine value, it is a source of richness in our daily existence and interactions. We'll see in below that it can be instrumental in many ways, supporting the language acquisition with useful, even crucial aspects. But first and foremost, the presence of art in the classes should be an occasion to celebrate and connect to this fantastic potential of humans for artistic creation. The exploration of forms and colours, how they engender meanings and provoke emotions and thought is itself a valuable activity. The aim is not to transmit lexical and precise data, but to provide, for example, anecdotes related to works and their history as an object, or to share interpretations of previous eras that seem surprising to today's spectators. These elements may function as mnemonic means to link the work to the discussions that follow during the session. In order to conduct a conversation about the works of art, regardless of the level of the participants, the activities should provide them with indirect or informal means of doing so. It is primarily a matter of sharing a vocabulary either

to be able to formally describe the works or to be able to report on the artistic, historical, technical, etc. context of the works.

- **Learning about the host society socio-historical background** Art works are not only a means for sensibilisation to the visual culture of a society (Muller 2020) but they can also become an entry point to learn about elements of the social, cultural, historical background of that society. And in particular in language trainings for migrants a key learning point is to combine cultural learning about the host country with the learning of language or literacy. In this program the elements of the context of the artwork play an important role. Providing information about the artist, the period in which the work was created, the implicit or explicit artistic references that the work mobilizes constitutes an opportunity not only to enrich the knowledge of the participants, but also to nourish a dialogue with them. This information, which cannot be guessed, must be communicated in an indirect and playful way. Therefore, a series of activities can be constructed to allow participants to discover these elements on their own or through their peers. The history of the work, from its creation to its arrival in the exhibition space, reflects the history of the country, its culture and its values. It can also show the changes in mentality through the ages, and offer parallels with other cultural areas: these counterparts can be communicated at many levels, well compatible with those of beginner language learners. Finally, when the work is being contextualized, information of how it was acquired can link to topics as colonialism, exotism, ethnocentrism, racism, sexism etc. As those topics are/were part of cultural (and social) practises, they should be considered.
- **Connection with learners' own cultural context** If using the art works as an entry point to teach about

the dominant culture may favour an assimilationist momentum, the same art works can also be the entry point to explore and valorise the cultures of the participants. In fact, we consider a balance between these two orientations a key feature of the work with art works. Inviting and valorising the cultures of the participants helps to maintain a positive identity and guarantee the recognition that all individuals crave for the groups they are members of. Such a valorisation can be simply done by inviting participants to share aspects connected to the subjects represented (e.g. food in a still life, dressing in portraits etc.) or to compare and reflect on what is considered as beautiful or worthy, or even what is considered art.

- Connecting to learners' known experience and subjectivity Bringing learners into a museum for perhaps their first time opens up a space that is not per se perceived as space with open door policy. Having them interact with works of art serves to facilitate conversation. And more than that it can be an opportunity for self-disclosure, sharing and valorising personal associations, subjective appreciations. We can create such opportunities with tasks that invite the participants to talk about themselves through the art works. For instance, inviting them to find an artwork through which they can introduce themselves: that reminds them of their childhood, that they connect to their profession etc. Equally valuable are the moments when participants ask questions or make spontaneous remarks or comments on their own. These clues show that they were touched by the art experience and that they „forget“ language barriers because the desire to communicate outweighs them. More than that these interactions create opportunities to develop real connections through the mutual self-disclosures. It is therefore a good idea to choose the types of works and museums to be shown and to seek to present paintings or sculptures, etc., that are sufficiently versatile and polysemic, and that lend themselves to multi-level readings.
- Developing creativity: It is sometimes difficult to get in touch with works of art that date back

several centuries, come from very different eras or have styles that are no longer familiar to us. It also happens that recent pieces, belonging to contemporary art, use a language that is not easily accessible to the spectators. Several methods can be envisaged to open a dialogue around these works.

Changing the style of the work by graphic means, imagining the same scene in another era, (mentally) reinventing the painting as if it were a photo, transposing a two-dimensional image into space with the help of choreography are operations that serve to better understand the works by transferring them to a new context.

In conjunction or independently of these processes, an element of the work - the history represented, the architecture, objects, pieces of nature depicted, etc. - is transferred to a new context. - In conjunction or independently of these approaches, an element of the work - the story depicted, the architecture, objects, pieces of nature depicted, etc. - can be examined outside its original context. In an uncluttered way, it lends itself more easily to associations and can encourage participants to relate it to their own culture of origin.

- Invitation for creation: The active and even creative participation of participants should be encouraged throughout the sessions. Not only does it help to better involve and motivate people, but it also plays a key role in the way new information is retained. Manual exercises invite other senses than vision into the game, they stimulate the learners through multisensorial work, they help to encourage conversation/exchange between participants, to better look at and understand a work, and to link and retain a new vocabulary in a lasting way. The mnemonic exercises, presented in the form of a game, also serve to improve, activate or revise one's vocabulary. For example, asking participants to memorize the elements of a painting for one minute and then to list them with their backs to the work allows them to link a word to an image and to better retain it, with the support of their visual memory.