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Mural-making, Multimodality, and a Palimpsest in a Spanish Language Classroom

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Abstract

This article illustrates how collaborative artistic creation in a world language class can offer multiple cognitive, social, cultural and professional benefits for language learners. An interdisciplinary mural project undertaken in a community college serves as a case study to examine these ideas. The class was co-taught by the authors, a teaching artist and Spanish instructor. The article explores questions about the intersection of art creation and language learning, using the Experiential Language Learning Cycle (Emery, 2018) as a pedagogical framework for the project, and describes the context and qualitative research methods used. Conclusions discuss the advantages of artistic creation and experiential language learning for both students individually, and for world language programs on a curricular level, while pointing out limitations encountered. The article finishes with reflections on how interdisciplinary collaborations might sustain and revitalize university language programs.

Introduction

Intercultural communicative competence is one of the fundamental goals of language instruction, in which the language learner develops skills in navigating multiple linguistic and cultural contexts, and subjectivities (Council of Europe, 2025; Kramsch, 2009, 2011; Byram, 1997, 2021; Hoff, 2020; Ros i Solé, 2013, Baker & Ishikawa, 2020). Language students, in order to acquire a new language, must confront their changing identity as language learners, their own cultures, and those of others (Kramsch, 2009, 2011; Byram, 2021). The activities described in this article are informed by the belief that arts integration in a language class offers one possible way into that process.

Zhang (2022) points out that more research on L2 acquisition in arts integration is needed as currently there is a scarcity of research concerning language learning in the contexts of artistic creation and appreciation. This article contributes to the literature by showing that art can provide an avenue for language acquisition and intercultural communicative competence, based on the results of the case study presented here.

Intercultural Communicative Competence

Intercultural communicative competence consists of a constellation of skills including the ability to find ways to communicate with others while negotiating multiple identities and cultures in differing contexts. Identity and culture are understood to be dynamic, ever-changing, and contextually constructed. Interculturally skilled individuals draw on symbolic knowledge (Kramsch, 2009, 2011) of their own culture and of the culture(s) of the language studied in order to act with agency within this new negotiated space between cultures. Byram (1997, adapted by Hoff, 2020) identifies curiosity, openness toward others, and the ability to interpret texts from another culture and relate it to one's own as important skills in intercultural communicative competence. Also important is the "acknowledgment that there can be multiple perspectives on and interpretations of a given situation or issue" (Council of Europe, 2018, Vol. I, p. 45, cited in Hoff, 2020). An intercultural pedagogy, as contemplated here, "takes cognizance of the world of the imagination and learners' ability to critically reflect on their environment in a personal and creative way" (Ros i Solé, 2013, p. 337).

Language Learning, Aesthetic Appreciation, and Art Creation

Artistic creation enhances literacy development (Landay & Wooten, 2012; Molomot & Levenson, 2014; Shivers et al., 2017), encouraging habits of critical and imaginative thinking as students reflect on the aesthetic decisions they make (Greene, 2001; Goldblatt, 2006). Zhang (2022) and Wu (2020) found increased student engagement when art is integrated into language classes, while Bomgaars and Bachelor (2019) reported that linguistic performance improved among language students. Though harder to quantify than lexical or grammatical

gains, the intrinsic benefits of arts integration in a language class include stronger social bonds, "growth in one's capacity to feel, perceive, and judge for oneself" and the capacity to "participate imaginatively in the lives of others" (McCarthy et al., 2004, p.37). Students gain agency by using language creatively to wield symbolic power (Kramsch, 2009, cited in Parks & Ryan, 2017, p. 2), in the Bahktinian sense of creatively entering into dialogue, discursively appropriating new language (Parke &Ryan, 2017, p. 66) and thus developing critical literacy (Keneman, 2015, p. 128).

Sensorial and imaginative experiences in art integration have potential to strengthen language acquisition in the same way physical exercise has been shown to enhance language learning (Liu et al., 2017; Fanselow, 1987). Using the target language in multiple ways appears to increase neural pathways in language learning (Macedonia & Repetto, 2016), building the neuroplasticity and cortical thickness associated with second language acquisition (Martensson et al., 2012). Additionally, an extensive literature review by Jusslin et al. (2022) found that embodied learning, defined as "holistic, utilizing the body faculties fully and thus connecting learning processes with the learner's environment" (Jusslin et al., 2022, p. 3), enhanced language acquisition. In particular, Jusslin et al. (2022) concluded that embodied learning supported gains in vocabulary learning and provided emotional and motivational benefits to learners. The research, therefore, suggests that through the experience of examining art, drawing, painting a mural, and collaborating on the use of materials, students acquire new language through contextualized and multisensory experiences.

In terms of types of language acquired, integrating content and language learning can achieve a "synergy" composed of three interrelated areas: the language of learning (the metacognitive and process-focused language), language for learning (functional, transactional, interpersonal), and language through learning (content-based language) (Coyle et. al., 2010, p. 36). Thinking of the target language through these functions allows the educator to plan for cognitively demanding content, for negotiation of meaning, and for knowledge construction based in social interaction (Vygotsky, 1978; Landay, 2004; Kalantzis & Cope, 2010).

Self-expression is also important for making language learning relevant to students; theory and research show the importance of providing engaging content for language acquisition. Artistic creation allows for diverse student expression and provides a forum for different skill levels to flourish (see Tomlinson, 2014 and CAST, 2018, for discussions of how student choice and expression support differentiation). Markus and Nurius (1986) and Dörnyei (2009) have argued that encouraging students to think about their possible future selves and their ideal L2 self can positively impact student motivation, agency, and language learner identities. Indeed, the art project in our case study asked students to imagine not only their present work lives but their future professional identities.

Constructivist and sociocultural communicative approaches to language teaching have long argued for classroom environments that include task-based activities and authentic contexts for meaningful communication (e.g., Prabhu, 1987; Council of Europe, 2014; Lantolf & Poehner, 2014). Extending the teaching/learning process beyond textual activities to kinesthetic, aesthetic, and sensory responses invites students to use their imaginations and creativity in multiple ways for communication (Dewey, 1916, 1934, 1938; Greene, 1995, 2001; Landay & Wooten, 2012; Molomot & Levenson, 2014) and to contribute in new ways to meaning making, which is a central goal for communicative and sociocultural language learning.

The Context

During the spring of 2016, students in an urban community college Spanish language class in the Northeast United States collaborated in creating a mural, guided by the authors of this article: JoAnn Moran, an artist specializing in community-based murals, and Alice Emery, the Spanish language instructor for the course. As instructors, we brought both the artist's participatory methods and the Spanish instructor's language teaching techniques to the process. In this project, the class created a mural (Figure 1) around the theme of the working world and students' visions for their futures, with imagery inspired by Diego Rivera's murals.

Figure 1. Visiones de nuestro trabajo (2016).

The students possessed a diversity of language skills with varying levels of linguistic control. While the majority of students were learners at the beginning level, some students were either native speakers of Spanish or were heritage speakers who spoke Spanish to varying degrees at home. Such diversity required differentiation through student choices and project-based activities (CAST, 2018) to adequately respond to the wide range of linguistic abilities in the target language. A mural project incorporating student expression thus was a particularly appropriate pedagogical choice for this group, as it offered opportunities for language- level differentiation (Silverstein, 2020). The project created a broadly inclusive approach to language acquisition, which, as Carreira (2016) argues, can accommodate many levels of language skills.

The world of work and professions as a topic was already in the course syllabus, which helped planning. Students needed to use vocabulary in the target language to describe work activities and their art. For example, to describe their artistic representations of their professional lives, students had to be able to use verbs in the present tense to describe ongoing or repeated actions. Additionally, they needed vocabulary to describe colors and materials, and for formulaic communicative expressions for interpersonal interactions during painting activities, such as, "Pass me a brush, please."

Thus, the linguistic objectives for the unit were expressed in the following terms:

1) Students will be able to write a composition about their present or future employment, describing their basic duties in their work, as well as their likes, dislikes, and daily work routines.

2) Students will be able to use basic vocabulary to talk about colors, shapes, and figures in a painting. They will be able to ask for paintbrushes and paints by color.

The Experiential Language Learning Cycle

The Experiential Learning Cycle (Kolb,1983) has been modified by Emery (2018) for use in teaching language (Figure 2). The model shares characteristics with other literacy methods in arts- and story-based language learning, such as the Learning by Design (Kalantzis & Cope, 2010; Zapata, 2018; 2022), ArtsLiteracy (Landay & Wooten, 2012), and the PACE model (Donato & Adair-Hauk, 1992). The Experiential Language Learning model is intended to be flexible; depending on design considerations such as the topic, context, participants, and the forms of presentation or media, the learning process might begin at any point in the cycle. At the outset, students and instructors decide together on the form the project will take. In the planning phase, the instructor must think about how the project, whatever it may be – art, a community engagement project, or another sort of multimodal creation in class – will reflect

the course's linguistic and content objectives. Student input and choice, to the extent possible, are important ingredients that support differentiation and student engagement (CAST, 2018). In the case discussed here, a mural project was appropriate because the art educator was available to guide the class in the process of artistic creation.

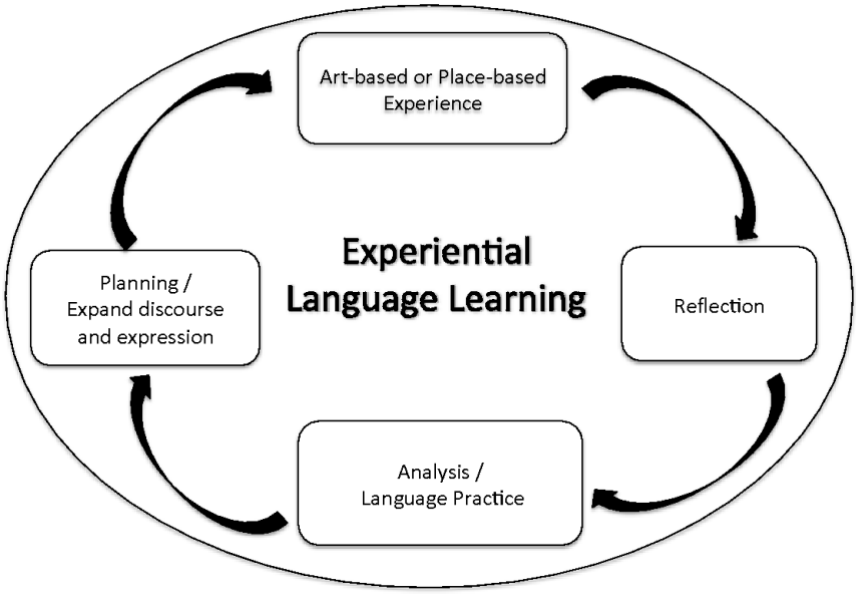

Figure 2. The Experiential Language Learning Cycle (Emery, 2018, based on Kolb, 1983).

In the first step of the model, "Experience," students may create art or participate in the community as experiential activities. This step also could include observations, reading texts, listening to or watching videos or sound recordings, thus providing linguistic and conceptual input. The emphasis at this point is on ideas, with new language introduced in context with interpreting meaning supported by other modalities (images, video, gestures, etc.). During Spanish sessions, the class cycled through the language experience process twice. In the first cycle, this step was used for linguistic and content input in which the students listened to a presentation about Diego Rivera's work, his vision for his art, and the historical context. The students viewed images of various Rivera murals depicting workers and Native peoples, the history of the conquest, and industrialization in Mexico and the U.S.

The next step of the model, "Reflection," asks that students use discussion and writing to connect input they received in the previous step to their experiences. In this way, they generate their own thinking about the topics in the new language. At this stage in our Spanish class, the students began to write short descriptions of their present or future work, after which they began to sketch depictions of these ideas. Some students chose to use a figure selected from one of Rivera's various murals as a model and transform it to represent their vision. For

example, a student who worked as a hospital technician in an obstetric ward adapted an outline of a worker in an industrial plant pushing a cart from Rivera's 1933 mural Detroit Industry (Figure 3). The student transformed Rivera's factory worker into a hospital orderly pushing a cart with a swaddled baby and baby bottles (Figure 4). Other students adapted images from The History of Cuernavaca and Morelos (1929-30), converting them into medical technicians, dog trainers, and agronomists. Other students drew their own images freehand, depicting musicians, business entrepreneurs, and illustrators. The students explained in Spanish (orally and in writing) what their pictures depicted, using newly acquired vocabulary that included verbs and nouns to describe their work activities. This step reinforced new vocabulary and grammar structures and allowed the students to put that language into use while describing information that was personally relevant to them in a communicative context.

Figure 3. Detail from *Detroit Industr*y (D. Rivera, 1932-33) (Attribution: Carptrash, Wikimedia Commons).

Figure 4. Detail from Visiones de nuestro trabajo (2016).

In the third step of the model, "Analysis/Language Practice," linguistic elements (grammar and vocabulary) are isolated so students can practice them and focus on the correct forms, now that the language usage and meaning has been presented in context. In our Spanish class, the focus was on new vocabulary describing colors, shapes, and forms, as well as functional formulaic expressions for asking for and using paints and tools. This vocabulary provided students with linguistic tools to create art in the target language. In groups the students practiced through roleplays the names of colors and functional formulaic phrases to ask for brushes, paint, and water. Students were then ready to create the mural, armed with the functional and analytical language required to do so.

JoAnn Moran, the collaborating artist, created a composite arrangement of the students' drawings for the mural. With the help of a few students, she transferred the images onto the canvas using an overhead projector and markers. Once the canvas was ready, three class days were dedicated to painting. Although students were hesitant at first, by the second day they began to use much more Spanish for asking for and giving supplies. They chose and listened to popular music in Spanish while they painted. The students created the majority of the mural in class but, because of time constraints, details meant to add visual unity, shading, and depth needed to be finished outside of class by volunteer students who had extra time.

The images of workers and their work, some clear in their depictions and others more ambiguous and in surprising juxtapositions, offered students and the audience multiple opportunities to explore ideas. In the finished mural many figures appear: two different musicians, a dog trainer, a fantasy novelist, a landscaper, a waiter, a biologist, two businessmen, someone working with hazardous materials, a corrections officer, an agronomist, a teacher, and a waiter, among others. Some of the indigenous women, instead of holding corn in their laps as in Rivera's work, are using a laptop and taking water samples using scientific instruments to measure the water quality in a stream (Figure 5). Furthermore, careful examination of the students' mural yields imagery of resistance that refers to a Rivera mural in Mexico's National Palace in which a Spanish conquistador greedily counts gold, hovering over enslaved native peoples. In the students' mural, however, this figure is transformed into an employee of an educational for-profit corporation counting out money over textbooks, but still dressed in 16th century European garb – a neo-colonizer as twenty-first century capitalist (Figure 6).

Figure 5. Detail from Visiones de nuestro trabajo (2016).

Figure 6. Detail from Visiones de nuestro trabajo (2016).

The class then returned to the Reflection step again by describing everything they could about the entire mural. After this step, they individually turned to revising and further developing their first drafts of short compositions describing their own part of the mural and their work or future work. The culminating effort for the unit was a final composition in Spanish that each student wrote about their contribution to the mural. In the compositions, the students integrated vocabulary and grammar structures they had learned throughout the semester.

The students, in analyzing and explaining their own work, opened up the interpretation of the work to multiple discourses and by valuing the students' interpretations, the Spanish instructor, Alice Emery, encouraged a democratic approach to discourse and voice in the classroom (Landay, 2004). The mural project, situated within the particularities of the local culture of the city and in the shared and diverse experiences of the students who lived there, provided an opportunity for students to practice the target language in discussing their working life, hopes, and frustrations.

The Students' Mural as Palimpsest

Painted on a recycled commercial banner, the class mural was displayed for several months in the community college and then at a local library. Later, it was repainted and modified with images related to immigration to be used by activists in demonstrations to support the local anti-deportation sanctuary movement (Figure 7). As an example of a palimpsest, the mural was composed of various semiotic layers, with multiple "voices" of individual students, each new text in "dialectic with previous inscriptions" (Marshall, 2016, p 4).

The history of palimpsests dates to Roman times and the Middle Ages through the practices of scribes who scraped off or washed parchments to efface a layer of text and reuse the writing surface (Crang, 1996; Dillon, 2005, cited in Marshall et al., 2017, p. 4). Similarly, the Spanish language students' mural was a collage of signs collectively and individually conceived– Bakhtinian voices in visual and textual languages that stood in dialectic among themselves and with previous and future uses of the canvas (see Bakhtin et al., 1981). The mural-as-palimpsest provided a valuable opportunity for participants to reflect on the dialogic nature of artistic creation, collaboration, community engagement, and the repurposing of waste.

Figure 7. Immigration banner (2017).

Research Questions and Methods

The planning process for the unit happened quickly. The qualitative research techniques for documenting the process included note-taking on the part of both instructors and a student questionnaire (British Council, 2018; McKernan, 1996); the themes identified by the participant-observers (the instructors) became salient as the semester drew to a close. The research questions, therefore, were exploratory and grounded in the experience, observations, and reflections of the participants. The questions were:

1) What language learning was observed during student artistic creation?

2) What scaffolding and pedagogical practices were needed to create favorable language learning conditions in a project of this nature (integrating artistic creation into the language classroom)?

3) What implications might such an approach have for curricular planning?

As the course progressed, the instructors documented the process with observations and notes, with an eye towards reflecting on project replicability and on the contextual limitations in replicating the collaborative process. The instructors worked to triangulate data provided from answers students gave via questionnaires or circumstantially in class.

At the time the research was conducted, in 2016, institutional research protocols at the community college were not clearly articulated for professors or researchers. Thus, retrospectively, in order to consider "procedural ethics" and to interrogate their own subjectivity and "ethics in practice" (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004, cited in Heigham & Croker, 2009, p. 274), we consulted the current IRB Application Procedure for the state community college system (CT State Community College, 2024). We concluded that our work was conducted ethically because all student information was anonymous and could not be linked with individual students. Importantly, we asked the students for permission to be quoted via informed consent protocols.

Findings

A total of 15 students answered a questionnaire about their experiences in the project. Seven students out of 15 said they were willing to be quoted. In response to an intentionally broad open question, "What did you think of the mural?", fourteen responses were positive and one was negative. Positive comments included, "I liked the painting and doing it together with everyone," "I thought it was a great way to the get the class to work together and create a beautiful project," "[f]un, enjoyable, good interaction between everyone in the class," "[a] good break from the regular classes," "[i]t was an interesting experience I've never had outside of an art class."

In response to the question, "What did you like best about [the project]?" students said, "I liked painting the pictures as it was actually kind of relaxing, "[b]rought [the] class together as a group, created energy and willingness to speak Spanish," "[b]eing able to relax and go at your own pace," "[h]ow relaxed the class was on the days we painted, we learned so much more about each other," and "I liked that it was a way to make the class creative."

Responding to the question "What did you like least about the project?" many students said there wasn't sufficient time to finish painting: "That we only spent two days doing it," "[t]here wasn't anything I didn't really like," "It took time to settle into the project," and "I didn't like the time constraints." The instructors also felt some time pressure due to insufficient hours in the semester to spend as much time painting as the project needed (volunteers had to finish painting outside of class hours). Especially frustrating was the reduced amount of time to spend on reflection, a scheduling decision that could be remedied in future projects.

When answering the questions "What Spanish did you learn during the project? and "Was the project helpful for learning Spanish?" students mentioned the vocabulary specific to painting and art and said that authentic communication in Spanish helped them. Comments included "It helped to learn the colors and put the knowledge to practical use," "[h]ow to talk about colors and painting materials, good practice on top of learning new words," "[h]aving to speak Spanish for everything helped me." On the other hand, a native or heritage speaker felt the work did not help her learn more Spanish, another student said, "It helped a little, but we were more focused on painting than speaking too much," and another simply said, "[It was] not really [helpful]."

Discussion

The first research question we asked was, "In what ways can language learning be enhanced by student artistic creation?" Most of the students felt that they learned new vocabulary about colors and painting. Jusslin, et al. (2022), in their meta-analysis, mention vocabulary development as the most salient linguistic improvement in arts-integrated language classrooms, and this was confirmed by the students' answers to the questionnaire.

Several students mentioned the unstructured language practice opportunity afforded by painting the mural. The relaxing atmosphere was consistently mentioned. Although a project like this takes time, and thus some professors or administrators might not see an art project as the most efficient use of time for language acquisition, it gives low-level language learners the opportunity to discover that they can, indeed, use the new language to accomplish authentic real-life tasks. This is valuable knowledge for students, as it supports their motivation and positive beliefs about their language learning.

The unstructured classroom environment during painting allowed the heritage speakers to shine. For example, one L2 student asked a heritage speaker how to say "stem" in order to describe flowers in the hand of an agrarian. The heritage language student couldn't remember the word but looked it up. The next day she returned, saying her mother had found an image on the internet which consisted of a play on words. The image showed a bouquet of some

flowers in the rain and below it said "*tallo viendo*," which in translation means "seeing a stem" but also is a pun because it sounds like "it's raining" in Spanish (*está lloviendo*). This interaction put the heritage speaker in the position of cultural and linguistic expert and allowed for a sophisticated and playful exploration of language, with her family's participation. Such interactions indicate that the class provided an environment that strengthened heritage speakers' confidence in the relevance of their linguistic and cultural resources in an educational context and offered them the opportunity to be teachers of language in unstructured contexts. In addition, the authentic use of the second language appeared to support all students' well-being by offering a venue to express their career aspirations. Finally, this classroom experience offered a much-needed moment of self-expression and relaxation for students in their otherwise stressed, overworked lives as students, workers, parents, and supporters of their aging parents.

In considering the question "What scaffolding and pedagogical practices were needed to create favorable language learning conditions in a project integrating artistic creation into the language classroom?", the instructors saw the need to pre-teach vocabulary and formulaic expressions. The project confirmed this step was needed for vocabulary development and to prepare students for the painting task. Additionally, the early input of information about the Mexican muralist movement, and Rivera's work in particular, provided intellectual context for the historical artistic tradition that the mural engages with, which is important for developing intercultural competence. Lastly, it should be mentioned that some adult learners may want a pedagogical justification for experiential language learning in order to understand the value of art creation in the language classroom.

Considering the question, "What implications might such an approach have for curricular planning?" it must be recognized that arts integration planning takes time and willingness of instructors to collaborate and share the classroom. Art creation requires art materials usually not required in a traditional language classroom and co-teaching a class such as ours needs administrative support and flexibility. Curricular and course objectives must be modified to reflect the interdisciplinary nature of these types of projects and the courses that include them. Certainly, administrative and labor-related obstacles will arise, as well as general resistance to novel activities. It is beyond the scope of this article to delve into these potential difficulties, but we hope that possibilities for greater program sustainability will allow art integration in the language classroom to prevail over institutional stumbling blocks.

Reflection is an important part of developing intercultural communicative competence and supporting language acquisition, yet it can easily be omitted due to time pressures in the semester. Indeed, in this project, time for reflection was shortened due to scheduling. Yet, the process of reflection is an essential component of the experiential learning model proposed

here and is a growing area of research in L2 acquisition. Our students' reflections showed that the majority found social and emotional value in the time taken to appreciate and create art. Some found it to be a good way to put some of their language learning into practice. As we, the instructors, looked back on the activities, we felt it was useful for the students to self-assess and to consider how learning a new language can be personally meaningful. The sample was small, and the study exploratory, yet these findings were helpful to us as we considered future projects. Crane and Sosulski (2019) discuss areas in which theories of transformative learning intersect with developing intercultural communicative competence in world language education, and they propose a curricular approach to "staging transformative learning through structured reflection" (p. 76). The reflection process they propose includes examining students' existing beliefs, experiential understandings, and the conceptual understandings they have acquired from the class, a model drawn from Anderson & Cunningham (2010, cited in Crane & Sosulski, 2019). Crane and Sosulksi (2019) recognize that a long trajectory is required for language learners to become linguistically, communicatively, and interculturally competent. As a result, they propose a progressively deepening process of scaffolded reflection over the trajectory of a full language program curriculum. This process would have been helpful, as we felt that the students would have benefited from more reflection time.

Conclusions

The trajectory of artistic and L2 learning processes described here allowed students to build language skills, learn about a Mexican artist, and strengthen their literacy skills. The students put into practice both socio-constructivist and embodied learning, through classroom activities designed to facilitate individual and collaborative processes to imagine their work through the target language.

In spite of the extensive diversity of language skills in the class, the students found ways to engage with Spanish language and culture, while expressing their own perspectives through the experiences of drawing, painting, and creating a communal work of art. Exploring an aspect of the target culture (Mexican muralism) and the students' cultures through art provided a naturalistic setting where students acquired language. The students were able to produce expressive linguistic and visual work that described their plans, hopes, pride, and frustrations in their work lives. The interdisciplinary, multivalent process of art integration opened the doors to experiences in which intercultural communicative competence could flourish.

The multiple lives of the mural's materials invited reflection about sustainability, the use of

recycled material for art, and even how a palimpsest can be a form of art. The canvas had many incarnations, from a corporate promotional banner, to a class mural employing a variety of symbolic meanings for students referencing their lives and Rivera's murals, to a new life as an activists' banner in support of immigrant rights. The mural as a palimpsest can be a source of reflection about the role and nature of recycled material, art, and community engagement.

Part of Diego Rivera's and the Mexican muralists' legacy is the idea that public art can offer a way to support community identity and forge a democratic future (Rochfort, 1993). In this spirit, the project, as an experiential and interdisciplinary language learning activity, offered learning liberated from traditional communicative and grammar-based approaches to language learning. Using the target language in an interdisciplinary university course created opportunities for authentic uses of the target language and provided an innovative way to consider language acquisition.

The Future of Language Programs

While instructors and students in language programs, the arts, and the humanities in general, have always understood their pertinence in the world, in the United States they have struggled in recent years to fully communicate that understanding to the general public. Higher-education language programs face deep budget cuts and constant questions about their relevance. Interdisciplinary courses, on the other hand, can position languages as socially relevant, offering students skills to build intercultural competence while they broaden their knowledge of world culture (Modern Language Association, 2019). In an age in which humanities studies are under threat of extinction in many U.S. universities, arts integration and other interdisciplinary collaborations with language programs may offer an innovative way forward. Bringing together the teaching processes of two distinct disciplines also provides opportunities for professional growth for the instructors.

Although some students, institutions, and university departments may argue that combining the target language with content studies at the university level is too cognitively demanding for students, this belief disregards the fact that in some U.S. states dual language content-based and full immersion programs in K-12 and in universities are proliferating. In countries on nearly every continent, schools and universities teach classes in second languages, simultaneously strengthening students' skills in their second or third language and advancing their knowledge in their chosen careers.

Landay (2004), in her discussion of arts integration and literacy development as part of a democratic approach that places particular value in student voices, states:

> [I]t is crucial to look as honestly and unflinchingly as possible at what it will take

> in school and out to create circumstances that will lead to improved student literacy not as an end in itself but as a means of improving students' chances to lead a more productive life (p. 124).

Rigorous examination of the praxis of art-based approaches to literacy and language learning is still needed, but research showing the potential for simultaneous language learning, heightened aesthetic awareness, and social engagement is encouraging.

Aesthetic appreciation is a part of humanistic educational traditions, with its emphasis on sparking and sustaining the student's internal life (Greene, 1995). Discussing art in education, Greene (1995) wrote that it is necessary "to keep…visions of possibility before our eyes in the face of rampant carelessness and alienation and fragmentation" (p. 197). Written nearly thirty years ago, Greene's words are now more relevant than ever. More recently, Wilson et. al (2023) argue that art education "affords possibilities to be in dialogue with the world" (p. 13) in an "arts pedagogy of cultural resilience… connecting identity, social learning and collective achievement" (p. 12). In this vein, the project described in this article offered Greene's "vision of possibility" in which student expression, communication, and collaboration can model ways of constructive interaction in the world. Embodied responses allow for "an experience capable of throwing off the covers bred by routine and making people wide awake to themselves and the world in which they live" (Hubard, 2007, p. 47). Through the interplay of subjectivities that are a part of both art appreciation and creation, individuals can learn to think more expansively, to consider new possibilities, and find community. Greene (1995) says of the integration of arts:

> …the ground of a critical community can be opened in our teaching and in our schools. It is out of such thinking that public spaces may be regained. The challenge is to make the ground palpable and visible to our students, to make possible the interplay of multiple plurality of consciousnesses -- and their recalcitrances and their resistances, along with their affirmations, their 'songs of love' (pp. 197-198).

Higher education instructors can make that communal democratic ground, as Green (1995) says, "palpable and visible" (p. 198) by bringing art into our language classrooms. This "makes the [educational] system work better for our students. It brings color, texture, form, and meaning to learning; it brings imaginative logic and serious, deep thinking as well" (Marshall, 2016, p. 18). Art deepens empathy, as it allows people to see themselves and see others in new ways. It brings us closer to ourselves and to others, and that is what language education proposes to do as well.

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