

Art: The Bridge Between Oral and Written Language

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“A picture’s worth a thousand words.”
~ (Unknown source)

“A picture’s meaning can express ten thousand words.”
~ (Ancient Chinese Proverb, Lester)

INTRODUCTION

This paper has been an opportunity to journey through my own personal history. I have been teaching only three years, but I am no fresh-faced, wide-eyed youngster. I am a grandma whose first love was art, but who opted for master’s degrees in education at my then fiancé’s urging that I do “something practical” while he was in Viet Nam. It proved to be practical, but not in the sense he anticipated. I didn’t work for pay in a school system until almost thirty years later. I used my creative talents engendered by my love of art by being a world-class mom, referring to my children as my “works in progress;” the practical application of my grad school education was negotiating as a parent (AKA being a pain in the derriere) in HISD to ensure my offspring’s successful completion of K through 12.

As a child, I was intrigued by Pompeii and the pyramids, thinking archaeology would be a cool endeavor, but I mistakenly believed that all the discoveries had been made, therefore, leaving no new ground for me to explore. I had never wanted to be a teacher as a young person perhaps because my experience as a student was neither challenging nor exciting. In the end, any paying employment that I had was usually temporary or designed to keep me occupied only to the extent that I was still available for my family, that was okay with me.

I started working at a low paying clerk’s job at Bellaire High School mainly because the only chick in the nest was in middle school leaving me stir crazy with too much time on my hands. I wanted to be useful and keep occupied but still take advantage of the eleven sick days if I was needed in my child’s world. As I worked in the assistant principal’s office, I began to see a parade of discipline problems, especially the English Second Language (ESL) students who were amassing huge disciplinary records often simply because they did not understand the way the system worked. The system works like this: Metro is late or you can’t figure out where your room is; you’re tardy five times, so you get a detention notice which either you disregard because you can’t read English or you skip so you don’t get detention because you have to work; you get caught skipping and you go to the student referral center which seems like a better deal because it’s during school hours; you get sent to the student referral center three times, then you’re suspended which is really good fortune because you get three days off where you are NOT allowed to go to school; suddenly, you are a “bad kid” and you find yourself in an alternative school with some *really* bad guys. It’s amazing how quickly things can go from bad to worse.

However, I had the very good fortune to work for Jon Gundry, an assistant principal, who had been an ESL teacher and was fluent in Spanish. His empathy without pity towards ESL students and their parents triggered a desire in me to reach out to these students. I also had the very good fortune to work for Bill Lawson, our principal at that time, who allowed me to be the swim coach, never mind that he was probably desperate. It was, at the time, unheard of that a clerk would be the swim coach, especially a middle-aged chubby non-athlete who had no personal swimming background. Nonetheless, my swim teams secured the district championships six years in a row, and I took the first swimmer from Bellaire to state in twenty years. Why is this important? What I learned as a swim coach, besides how to talk in a commanding voice, is that what I know or don't know is not nearly as important as recognizing talent in kids and putting them in a position to be successful.

Those two important lessons, empathy and putting students in a position to succeed, made my six years working at poverty wages invaluable. Somewhere in those six years, the desire to be a teacher snuck up on me, and I began the Alternative Certification Program to become certified as an English Second Language (ESL) teacher as my youngest child started college. At St. Thomas University I was introduced to language acquisition theories, teaching strategies, linguistics and other information that I would need to be successful in the classroom. I was a good student, made the top grades, but just as reading parenting books while you're pregnant doesn't prepare you for the reality of a screaming bundle of humanity, being a good student doesn't prepare you for being a good teacher to several screaming larger bundles of humanity. That's when you lie awake at night and try to reconcile all the diverse threads of your life experiences into a meaningful cloak to hide your ignorance and inadequacies so that you can inspire confidence in your students to be risk takers.

That's where this paper and being a Houston Teaching Institute (HTI) fellow has brought me. For me the information in this seminar on pre-Columbian art is not just another lesson plan to put away in a file to trot out to impress (or not) my students or colleagues with what I know about the Mixtec culture and which, by the way, will be transformed into a quiz on the key vocabulary terms so you better pay attention or else. For me this seminar has been a process of unraveling that cloak of life experiences and reweaving it to incorporate new ideas, to re-evaluate what I have done in the past so that maybe I can do it better in the future, and to be an example on how to learn – not what to learn.

BACKGROUND

Language mastery has four essential skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. In my experience when educators talk informally about these four skills, they usually agree it's easier to teach reading than writing, in other words children are capable of reading before they are capable of writing. In fact, the one skill that seems to strike the biggest fear in students and teachers alike is passing the writing portion of the mandatory TAKS (Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills) test. BUT does it really make sense that we must be able to read before we can write?

I remember as a young child writing pages of scribble writing fully expecting my mother to be able to read it back to me. I was absolutely convinced that I was communicating through writing in a meaningful way even if I couldn't read it. If one looks at the question "Which comes first reading or writing?" in the context of human evolution of cultures, no one could possibly read if someone had not written something decipherable. Of course, no one just sat down one day and hammered out an alphabet with twenty-six letters and confusing spellings with any expectation that other humans could read the language. There has to be some interim process – a bridge.

Stephen Krashen and Tracy Terrell in their book *The Natural Approach, Language Acquisition in the Classroom*, present the five hypotheses of their theoretical model on language

acquisition. Beginning with the Acquisition-Learning Hypothesis, they make a distinction between language learning and language acquisition. Language learning is what we generally consider language arts to be in school: the study of grammar and the application of the rules in language. It is the consciously learned, explicit application of rules in a formal teaching setting. Language acquisition is the process very much like a child's first language acquisition; it is not conscious, but internalized language understanding which is not dependent upon formal teaching. (Krashen 27)

The Natural Order Hypothesis claims that grammatical structures are generally acquired in an order we can predict. For example, the progressive tense marker *-ing* as in *He is going to work* and the plural *-s*, as in *two hats*, are usually among the first morphemes acquired by children. Typically late acquired are the third person singular morpheme *-s*, *He goes to work every day at nine*. And the 's possessive marker, *It's John's hat*. (Krashen 28)

For the classroom teacher the practical application of this hypothesis is that one can teach complex grammatical concepts all day, but if students have not matured enough linguistically, it's not going to stick for the majority of students, so it's going to waste a lot of time with little results or, even worse, may discourage discourse because language becomes overwhelming.

The Monitor Hypothesis explains the mechanism of self-correction in language. In order for the Monitor to be effective in language acquisition, the student must have enough time to be able to consider the correctness of his/her language and to recognize how to do it correctly. (Krashen 30) The danger of an overactive monitor is that students become paralyzed with fear of making a mistake. How many times have we seen students who won't put anything on the paper rather than face ridicule for making a mistake? How many times have we compromised ourselves instead of risking looking like a fool?

The Input Hypothesis is where the thread of the content in this seminar becomes intertwined with language acquisition theory. Essentially, Krashen and Terrell are saying that we acquire language by understanding information that is slightly beyond what we already know. This can be applied to any discipline, we have to know something to understand anything new, and we all know something – the trick is to find out where to start. Krashen and Terrell go on to ask, "How can we understand language that contains structures that we have not yet acquired? The answer is through context and extra-linguistic information. Good second language teachers do this by adding visual aids, by using extra-linguistic context." (Krashen 32)

This hypothesis speaks to one of my lessons learned as a swim coach: put the child in a position to be successful. The other lesson learned, empathy, is expressed in the fifth hypothesis, the Affective Filter Hypothesis, which simply states the higher the anxiety, the lower the language acquisition. If we can make the child comfortable in the classroom environment and if we can provide lessons that they can understand yet require that they stretch, we should be able to expect language acquisition in English and success in school.

But going back to Krashen and Terrell's Input Hypothesis's quote above for a moment, they mention visual aids as "extra-linguistic" which seems to imply visual aids are an add-on in language acquisition. However, in my reading about the origins of writing, I began to wonder if visual aids are not much more important than providing extra-linguistic context. If the purpose of language is to communicate, and we look at beginning writing, as in the *Codex Nuttal*, and even farther back to Sumerian writing in Babylonia, Egyptian hieroglyphics, even cave drawings, the purpose of art is to communicate, and at some point both in evolution of mankind and in the individual, writing and art serve the same purpose and are, in fact, the same. It seems that the true abstraction of art is the printed word. Dr. Rex Koontz, the leader of our seminar, states a similar conclusion in an article on Aztec codices:

The Aztec codices seem to us almost cartoon-like in their sharp out lines and bright, flat colors. The hieroglyphs, although much smaller than the images proper, are full of representations of dogs, rabbits and architectural ensembles, as well as hundreds of other picture signs that make up the Aztec writing system, all done with many of the same conventions seen in the images, only in miniature. It is little wonder that images and hieroglyphic writing share fundamental techniques; the Aztecs saw no difference between writing and painting – indeed their word for the two was the same: *tlacuiloa*. The aspiring codex painter had to master both to become a *tlacuilo* (scribe/artist). (Koontz, “Mexico Codices” 44)

It is obvious there has to be a mechanism that spurred on evolution in the origins of writing, something that moved us from speaking amorphous words to recording these words with the semi-conscious impulses generated by typing onto a computer screen. When I was spending time Easter weekend in a hotel with my four-year-old grandson, Max, he wanted to show me that he could draw, but we couldn’t find any unlined paper. Finally I gave him a small hotel note pad so that he could draw on the plain back of each page. I was expecting a series of small artistic compositions; instead, he created a little book, each page of which had a well executed icon from the original composition he had intended: his house in Florida with flowers, grass, a tree and a rainbow. (See Figure 1)

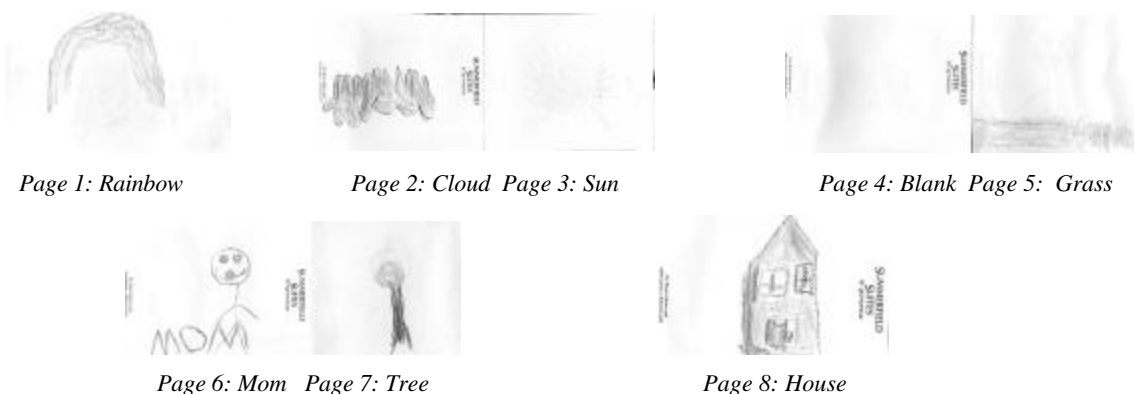


Figure 1. Book Authored by a Child.

Max was four years, six months old when he wrote this book by himself on a hotel note pad. The book conforms to conventional order and has a theme. It is interesting to note that there is only one human and one written word in the book, Mom.

Later that day, at a restaurant, Max took a paper folded into eights, and drew seven stick figures with happy faces and a house in the eighth rectangle. Each figure, almost identical in size and shape but with slight variations in color or arm position, represented a member of the family at the table from eleven-month-old George to 62 year old Grandpa Jones. To Max, it was clear which person was which; he labeled each individual by meticulously spelling out each person’s name under the pictures and he added a house, the symbolic reference to his home. (See Figure 2)

So what is the big deal? It occurred to me, that Max had written stories that day that were just as literal as if he had written entirely with words: the story of his happy home in Florida, and his sense of unity and belonging in a happy family. He had used art to bridge oral and written language, and that is exactly what people and cultures have done for thousands of years. It appears art is not just an extra-linguistic event, but may be an essential component in progressing towards a written language both in individuals and in the evolution of a culture.



Figure 2. Max's Family Portrait

Even though the stick figures are highly stylized, it is apparent that Max was making an effort to communicate differences. For example, all females are red and have arms reaching up. Only one male, Max, has his arms reaching up. Rather than leave the final panel blank, Max chose to draw a house perhaps symbolizing a happy family.

The evidence that this is the case is overwhelming once we take the time to look at art as language. The Sumerian writing found in Babylonia that dates back 3000 B.C. appears to represent a tally of cattle. The hieroglyphics of Egypt began as drawings of everyday objects. The Palette of Narmer, the first king of Egypt, chronicles his achievements in schematic representations. The great religious art of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance had a literal purpose, to teach the illiterate masses their Bible lessons. The Codices of Mesoamerica are actual picture books that reveal in elaborate detail religious philosophy and important historical events. In fact, it is not until the late nineteenth century that literacy had advanced to the point that we really see the beginnings of what we consider abstract art.

Early writing clearly appears to be pictographic in nature until it could eventually refine and abstract itself into characters which could be understood among members of a culture just as a child's early attempts at written communication begins with pictures. It is important to note that the pictographs are usually representational of plants, animals, insects, and humans. Why? Because the whole purpose of written language is to communicate or to give information. We write about what we "know," we know what we see. We as humans have been doing this long enough that we are capable of expressing our ideas in abstract writing. The problem with many of my teenage ESL students is that we expect them to jump into expressing abstract thoughts by writing in English when they have no mental images in English. Many of my students have skipped these steps even in their own language; they have not yet worked through what they know by creating mental images of everyday concrete items so that it is very difficult, if not impossible, to make analogies in order to explain abstract ideas. To compound the problem, too often they are given age inappropriate classroom materials consisting of what I call "bunnies and puppies" content meant for four or five year olds learning to read. As a result they lose their self-respect because they know the materials are too simple for them and they lose heart.

Perhaps we can change that by building mental images that are more sophisticated based on the sophisticated art forms that served as writing in earlier cultures.

CONTENT OBJECTIVES

An old college text of mine, H. W. Janson's *History of Art*, mentions pre-Columbian art only in the Post-Script section. Janson states:

Compared to what we know about India and the Far East, our knowledge of pre-Columbian America is limited indeed. Its very isolation from the rest of the world, however, makes its study peculiarly fascinating. Was this isolation, we wonder, really complete, especially during the historic period (c. 1-1500 A.D.)? If so, then the resemblances and analogies between pre-Columbian America and the civilizations of the Old Worlds must result from a parallel evolution of human culture that made the American Indian "re-invent," on his own, many things already invented elsewhere. (553)

In the almost forty years since I came to the University of Houston, it appears that the students' resources to study pre-Columbian art and indigenous American cultures have expanded significantly. This is wonderful especially for about half of my students who are from Latin America. However, I have students from every corner of the world, and it is incumbent upon me to be inclusive. Using the comparison of pre-Columbian America to ancient Egypt provides countless avenues for my students to pursue. Most, if not all, of my students have some prior knowledge of the Egyptian culture. If I can incorporate social studies, math, and science in a six to eight week unit that compares the pre-Columbian civilization with that of Egypt, I believe that I cannot only strengthen their language skills, but also help them develop their own learning strategies in content areas with topics that are interesting, relevant, and teeming with information.

Under the CALLA (Cognitive Academic Language Learning Approach) method of teaching English Language Learners (ELLs) promulgated by Anna Chamot and J. Michael O'Malley, the theoretical model is to teach language through content. At the secondary level it is often difficult to coordinate with content area teachers because our ESL students are grouped by language proficiency levels, but the content area teachers are grouped by grade level and subject matter of the required credit courses. It, therefore, becomes important for the English Language Arts and reading teachers to be proactive in providing readings and classroom activities that promote academic language in other disciplines.

In addition, in every TEKS (Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills) set of objectives for academic disciplines at every grade level, teachers are mandated to provide content that reflects cultural diversity and to use technology in the classroom. In fact, as of April 20, 2005, the House in the Texas Legislature has given tentative approval to House Bill 4, "which rewrites state law to shift the focus from traditional text books to computers, technology, and online instructional material" (Elliot B3). To meet these objectives, I am presently involved in the planning stages to implement better cooperation among the disciplines and an increased student use of technology. I am part of a team with content area teachers (math, science, and social studies) that will attend training to help integrate content and language objectives. I also will be the English Language Arts teacher that will serve as the liaison with the sheltered content area teachers of ELL's to develop strategies to integrate writing into content areas in the hopes of improving comprehension and performance. In addition, I plan to attend a two-week literature symposium sponsored by the Honors Program at the University of Houston to explore culturally diverse texts. My ESL department chair at Bellaire High School, Sandra Starr, has requested that I utilize a wireless computer lab in my classroom to teach the Intermediate Level ESL reading and language arts courses in the 2005-2006 school year. Our hope is that by using the notebook computers and integrated content-language lessons, we can improve performance, graduation rates, and attendance of ESL students in college programs.

Using works of art, including photographic art, as the basis for determining the thematic topics is integral in achieving these goals. The specific work of art will not only be the starting

point, but also the unifying force behind each lesson. The *Codex Nuttal* is a Mixtec book that tells the story in pictures of the rise of Lord Eight Deer, a warrior king who united the Mixtec civilization in the Oaxaca region of Mexico. Lord Eight Deer who ruled in the late eleventh and early twelfth century has been characterized as the “Charlemagne” of the Mixtec culture by our HTI professor, Rex Koontz. The art of the codex is representational, yet abstract in its symbolism of places, dates, and names, leaving more than adequate opportunity for the student to interpret the scenes. The organization of the book is literal enough that one can clearly see that it tells a story and is an excellent example of art as writing.

The *Palette of Narmer* is a shield shaped carving excavated in the ancient Egyptian city of Hierakonpolis; it commemorates the achievements of Narmer, the Catfish King, also a warrior who some 4000 years earlier than Lord Eight Deer united Upper and Lower Egypt to become the first king of Egypt. The stories have striking similarities in content and images despite being separated by millennia and oceans. Again the art is the writing, providing students opportunity to comprehend the story while developing vocabulary and language skills. In addition, by introducing these two artifacts to my students, I can encourage them to develop their own questions about the two cultures and be able to apply the knowledge into the investigation of other cultures. These goals are set to develop critical thinking skills, but incorporated into the unit will be lessons based on vocabulary development and grammar skills to produce quality writing assignments.

Art history lends itself very well to meeting these content objectives. At the very core of art history is visual representation that reflects the cultures that produced the images; and, if art can be approached as written language, we can help the student create mental images. Using four concepts, tradition, power, commerce, and fashion, I plan to spend a semester beginning, referring to, and ending with the *Codex Nuttal*. I plan to show that by using a piece of art/literature we can understand the human experience over time and space by exploring concepts in the original work and other pieces of literature and art. As an example, a comparison of *Codex Nuttal* and the *Palette of Narmer* will provide the centerpiece of one of lessons about the concept of power. When possible I will use primary sources.

By choosing subjects from diverse areas of the world, I am hoping my students can make hypotheses about migration patterns of mankind, draw conclusions on how geography influences history, understand the evolution of cultures, recognize common traits among cultures, and discern significant differences and similarities among cultures. In addition, exploring the technology and agriculture of ancient periods and creating graphic organizers such as timelines are examples of how language and content can be combined to utilize the Language Arts and reading class work to strengthen content area mastery. Using the wireless computer lab, the students will be able to help shape their own learning through research based on their interests.

LANGUAGE OBJECTIVES

I love my job, teaching English to immigrant high schoolers, but the challenges can sometimes be daunting. As I read the first of the three essentials that I am required to include in my narrative, I was daunted by how I was going to “elaborately explain the topic.” The challenge for an ESL teacher is to make a topic comprehensible and relevant without “dumbing down” the content. The language objectives for teaching ELLs are the same as they are for any student in Texas. Everyone has to pass TAKS before they graduate. Not only are ESL teachers teaching English, we are also trying to help some students compensate for little or no prior education in their native language. Each student requires individual attention, and yet there are not enough hours in the days to do all that needs to be done. Lessons need to be designed so that students who are “getting it” can move on without being held back by those who need more time; at the same time, those students who do need more time and attention must get what they need.

Consider the meaning of the words “Language Arts.” We talk about poetic language, formal language, figurative language, body language, computer language, the language of love, sign language, spoken language, business language, street language – all of which conjure up some sort of mental visual image. However, when we study or teach language arts, it seems to me we are usually really emphasizing the science of language. For example we have rule after rule: “In a complex sentence a comma follows an introductory subordinate clause. However, if the subordinate clause follows the independent clause there is no comma.” After all, we have to pass the editing and revising part of the TAKS test, right?

When teaching ELL’s, grammar instruction, albeit necessary, should be subordinate to comprehension and communication. On the other hand, grammar sometimes gets a bad rap. I have found that grammar can be approached in a way that does not turn off students, but gives them a sense of empowerment when they take that TAKS revising and editing test. I have had my greatest grammar success with short D.O.L. lessons (Daily Oral Language) as warm-ups and mini grammar lessons; we treat them as games, nothing more. I usually only correct in person one-on-one with students who have progressed far enough that is actually is helpful rather than discouraging. I do not want grammar to become that dreaded overactive Monitor that Krashen writes about. In other words: My students and I render unto Caesar, and then we move on to the good stuff – reading and writing. By using strategies that encourage language production and emerging literacy by rewarding effort instead of penalizing for mistakes, I hope that I encourage optimism and a love of learning among my students.

Imagine how enlightening it would be to understand written language as an extension of art so that letters and words are the ultimate in artistic abstraction –our mental visual images on paper or the computer screen. Imagine the power of being able to bring the mental visual images to life so that others can mentally visualize our images. If I show a group of students a painting of a crying Frida Kahlo with an image of Diego Rivera on her forehead and on HIS forehead is a third eye, imagine my excitement when a Chinese student who has no clue who Frida is says, “The woman is crying because she is thinking about her dead father who knew her as only a parent can.” The facts may be wrong, but the emotion is so right on – the pain caused by a loved one. This is what I want to do – to help students to create mental visual images when they communicate through written or spoken language and to understand the mental visual images of others when they listen or read.

My goal is to have the students working in small groups and engaging with the material sufficiently to explore topics of their own design. The small groups would function as investigative teams to create an interdisciplinary project that would be developed over a period of several weeks. The keystone of the unit would be a “Writer’s Workshop” which would reinforce a five-step writing process: pre-writing, drafting, revising, editing, and publishing. In order to have something to write about, the pre-writing would include research that could include library visits, readings, visual representation, and possibly video clips. One reading choice from John Pohl’s book, *The Legend of Lord Eight Deer, an Epic of Ancient Mexico*, will be “The Ball Game.” (Pohl 28) It has many elements that appeal to modern students: competition, drama, and food; and it is not too gory (except for the nose piercing). What interests me about this story is that Pohl takes one scene from the *Codex Nutall* on the bottom center of page 45 and interprets it in a way that convinces us that that Lord Eight Deer was a resourceful hero of epic proportion.

The *Paleta of Narmer*, which is an early artifact from c.3100 B.C. (Stokstad 96), is a good example of Egyptian culture which could be compared and contrasted with the Mixtec culture in many areas: picture writings, a great warrior king, battles, ceremonies. The readings, art work and videos would all be accompanied by assignments designed to inspire the student to analyze and draw conclusions about what they have seen and at the same time practice their language skills. For example, I may show an example of art on the overhead projector and have the

students write me six of their own interrogatory sentences about the art (who, what, where, when, how, why), then ten declarative sentences, two imperative, and two exclamatory sentences. Graphic organizers such as Venn diagrams, web diagrams and T-charts would promote learning strategies and are particularly useful in pre-writing. There are many Internet tools that would be helpful in encouraging them to pursue independent learning. For example, <http://www.archeology.org/> has numerous interactive dig sites including Hierakinopolis, which is the site of Narmer's temple.

RATIONALE

I believe that teaching English Language learners as if they are GT (gifted and talented) students is important in raising self-esteem and achievement. Students are empowered when they recognize the art and literature from other cultures. Many of my students take refuge in creating graphic works with color while they are subliminally working language issues out. I want to provide them with a challenge and, at the same time, encourage them to feel a sense of accomplishment.

I have observed with myself and with my students a natural inclination to avoid writing unless absolutely forced. In fact, "writer's block" seems so pervasive that it shouldn't be reserved for professional writers. Yet, thinking back over years of anxious performance in my own classes, I have pages of notebooks filled with drawings and doodles instead of notes. This gives me a greater appreciation why many of my lower performing students would prefer drawing in class to doing their writing assignments: Art is an atavistic response to the need to express oneself – it is one of the skills of language for those who cannot write or read.

I pulled out an atlas one day and wrote down as many countries of origin that I could remember of students I have taught in the last three years: Albania, Angola, Argentina, Burundi, Cambodia, Colombia, Cuba, El Salvador, Eritrea, Ethiopia, France, Guatemala, Honduras, Hong Kong, India, Kuwait, Kyrgyzstan, Mauritania, Mexico, Nepal, Nigeria, Pakistan, Panama, Peru, Russia, Sierra Leone, Taiwan, Turkey, United States, Uruguay, Venezuela, Viet Nam. Approximately half of my students are from South or Central America; therefore, using Pre-Columbian art and culture for a literacy/writing unit would help my South and Central American students establish connections with their prior knowledge and, hopefully, would reinforce a sense of pride in their heritage. Using examples of art and culture from the world could be useful in establishing a sense of common values among all cultures. Ultimately my goal would be to help students develop critical thinking skills by comparing and contrasting cultures, skills which in turn could be applied to other academic endeavors.

LESSON PLANS

Structure and routine are important in teaching English Language Learners because they need the security of knowing of what to expect and how meeting these expectations leads to success in school. However, within the structural framework, the teacher must meet the challenge to present material in such a way that provides needed practice without allowing them to fossilize in a comfort zone. To complicate the challenge even further, often the teacher finds that he/she is trying to accelerate the material to try to "catch up" with native language speakers. This challenge requires flexibility and creativity.

In presenting my lessons plans for the HTI curriculum unit, I am dividing them into two major categories: Structure and Concept. Structure is an overview of the organization, procedures, and routines of the course over the semester. Concept is the format that I will use to present content. This curriculum unit will consist of four major concepts that I chose to teach using the story of Lord Eight Deer as the reference point. In keeping with my thesis that art is the bridge between

oral and written language, I hope to demonstrate how using art can make instruction more effective for English Language learners.

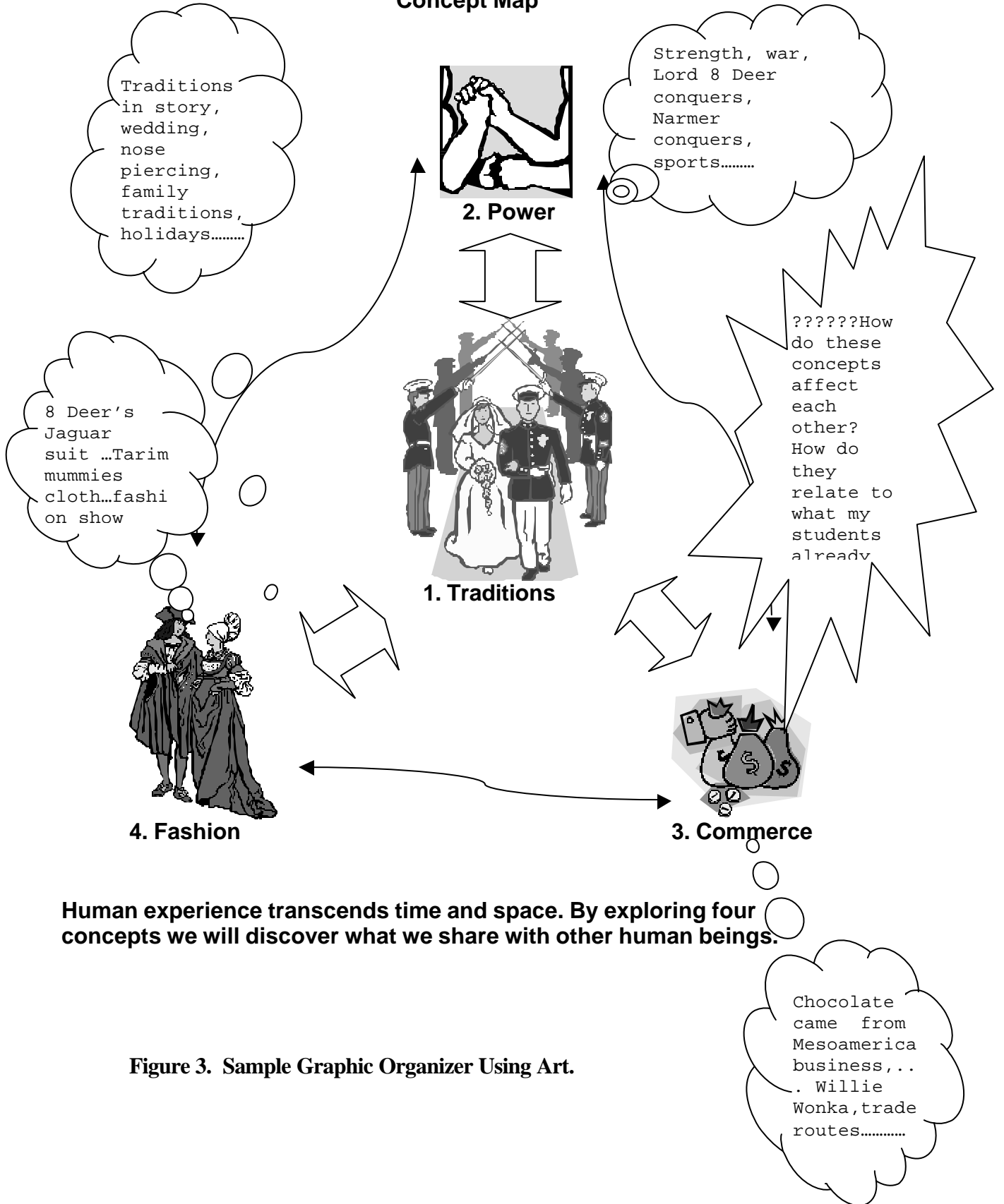
Structure

Very simply stated structure refers to procedural knowledge, the how to's of education: how to be organized, how to take a test, how to learn from your mistakes, how to write a paper, how to understand new material and so on. The first order of business in the classroom is to establish the class rules, calendar, and schedule, but I am limiting my scope in this section to how art, including visual and performing art, can be used to augment acquiring procedural knowledge especially vocabulary assessments and graphic organizers.

A prime example of using art to enhance procedural knowledge in English Language Learners is graphic organizers, particularly pre-writing activities in the writing process such as web diagrams, Venn Diagrams, timelines, et cetera. I have included an example of a concept map that demonstrates the conceptual objects of my curriculum unit. (See Figure 3.)

I generated this graphic organizer to illustrate a visualization of how I want to proceed with the curriculum unit. I would have my students generate their own organizers, or I would use something like this as a starter to brainstorm ideas with the student writing on the organizer their own thoughts as I have shown with the thought clouds. Other graphic organizers that I will use specifically for this curriculum unit throughout the semester will be a word wall to add new vocabulary words, a world map, and an interactive timeline that the class will generate throughout the semester.

Concept Map



Human experience transcends time and space. By exploring four concepts we will discover what we share with other human beings.

Figure 3. Sample Graphic Organizer Using Art.

Mondays are designated tests days for the English Department; when the students are finished with their quiz or test, they are given an independent vocabulary activity involving pictures because the time needed to complete the quiz can vary considerably. The students are aware that they will see the words and pictures the following week on a quiz. Vocabulary is associated with the pictures, initially nouns, and evolves into increasingly complex grammatical structures. Using clip art in teacher-generated tests allows me the flexibility to focus on the grammar and vocabulary that I think the students need to work. (See Figure 4)

Choose the correct answer:



- a) cow
 - b) deer
 - c) dear
 - d) bear
- Simple vocabulary



- a) dancing deer
 - b) drinking deer
 - c) singing deer
 - d) talking deer
- More complex vocabulary



- a) The deer is behind the tree.
 - b) The deer is over the tree.
 - c) The deer is above the tree.
 - d) The deer is under the tree.
- Learning prepositions



- a) Lord Eight Deer drink chocolate.
- b) Lord Eight Deer is drinking milk.
- c) Lord Eight Deer is drinking chocolate.
- d) Lord Eight Deer is drinking chocolate.

Integrating vocabulary, grammar, and content

Figure 4. Examples of assessments using clip art and other artwork

Concept

As you can see from the concept map, (Figure 3), there are four primary lessons dealing with the concepts of tradition, power, commerce, and fashion. I chose these concepts because the *Codex Nuttal* can be used as the reference point for each concept. I also believe that these concepts can be explored not only in the present, but also throughout history to show relevancy to my students' lives and to other content area subjects. In addition, each of these concepts is interrelated and can influence each other. Essential to these lessons will be an element of personal exploration particularly using technology. When possible I will use primary sources and have included several of my family photos to illustrate points. The drawings included as illustrations are mine based on drawings and photographs in the literature.

Throughout the semester, vocabulary will be student-generated from the art, videos, and reading. All art, videos, songs, and readings will be discussed to encourage language development. These lesson plans are meant to provide the backbone of the semester and to indicate how the material is interrelated conceptually, not the day to day execution of the plans because with English Language Learners there is often much repetition and redirecting as we progress through material. I hope that it is understood that on a daily basis there is discussion, journal writing, mini-grammar lessons and other pedagogy as needed. I am trying to take them where they need to go, and sometimes I don't know where until we begin the trip.

Lesson 1: Traditions

1. Listening to a DVD made by Dr. Rex Koontz explaining the story of Lord Eight Deer while viewing the *Codex Nuttall* on an overhead projector, the students will hear and see the story of Lord Eight Deer. I will explain to the students that we will be referring to this story through out the semester.
2. The students will view a primary source video titled *Ragini Weds Radheshyan*, depicting the wedding of Bellaire High School's Hindi teacher, Arum Prakash.
3. The class will view Figures 5 and 6; the class will discuss if they see any similarities between the video and drawing. Indeed Figure 6 is a drawing of the wedding between Lord Eight Deer's father and his first wife; it is the beginning point in the story of Lord Eight Deer.
4. I will show the students photographs from my family, the weddings of my grandparents and my daughter. (Figures 7 and 8) I will ask them to write what conclusions they can draw about wedding traditions from the video, the drawing, and the photographs.



Photo Courtesy of Arum Prakash
Figure 5: *Ragini Weds Radheshyan*
Traditional Hindi Wedding
Houston, TX, 2004



Author's Drawing, 2005
Figure 6: *Wedding of Five Crocodile
and Nine Eagle*
Mesoamerica, ca. 1029 A.D.



Family Photo, 1906
Figure 7: *Wedding of Richard and
Mary Ann Weller Cunningham.*
Chatsworth, IL



Family Photo, 1994
Figure 8: *Wedding of Don
and Jennifer*
Annapolis, MD

- The students will read a story about a Jamaican immigrant, *Wedding Day – a Short Story*, by Pauline Graham Binder on this Internet site. http://www.jamaicans.com/culture/articles_culture/wedding-day-a-short-story.shtml . The students will set up email accounts (with parents' permission). Those with e-mail accounts will write the author on-line.
- I will read *Benjamin's 365 Birthdays* to the class. The students will discuss other traditions that may be typical to their families or countries. (See Figure 9). The students will be assigned a presentation in the format of a poster board consisting of photographs and other representations of a tradition that is practiced by their family. Students will present the poster board with an oral explanation to the class. The students will then write a short narrative describing a family tradition.

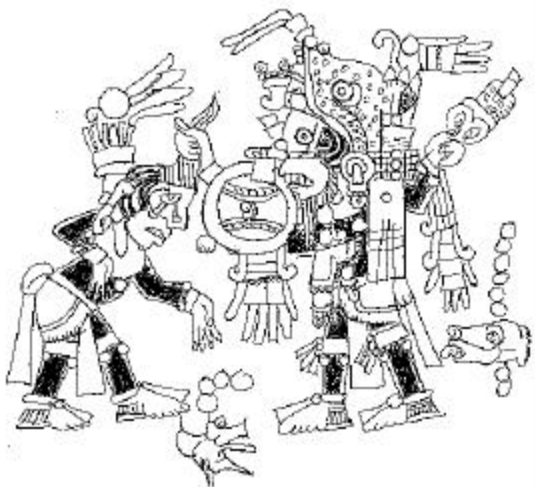


Family Photo, 1992

*Figure 9: Not all Traditions are Weddings!
Children's Party with Piñata
Miami, Ohio*

Lesson 2: Power

- I will show the students Figures 10 and 11 and ask them work in small groups to complete a Venn diagram showing the similarities and differences between the two drawings.



Drawing by Author, 2005

*Figure 10: Lord Eight Deer Defeating
his Enemy
Mesoamerica, ca.1150 A.D.*



Drawing by Author, 2005

*Figure 11: Narmer, the Catfish King
Defeating his Enemy
Egypt, ca. 3000 B.C.*

2. The students will visit the website <http://www.archeology.org/> to explore Hierakinopolis, which is the site of Narmer's temple. The students will do Internet searches to add to their Venn diagram of Figure 10 and Figure 11. The students will locate on the world map and the class timeline where and when these two men lived. The students will write a guided report comparing Lord Eight Deer and Narmer.
3. The students will view Figures 12 and 13 and research on the Internet how they are symbols of power. Practicing the methodology of research for Lord Eight Deer and Narmer, the students will create a written report comparing and contrasting George Washington, the "father of our country" and Emperor Qin, the unifier of China who built the Great Wall.



Photo by Vicki Jones, 1996

*Figure 12: Statue of George Washington
United States Military Academy
West Point, New York*



Photo by Vicki Jones, 2004

*Figure 13: Terracotta Warriors
Emperor Qin Shi Huang's Mausoleum
Xi'an, an, China ca. 200 B.B.*

4. The students will read "No Speak English" from *The House on Mango Street* by Sandra Cisneros and "Archie's War" from *Walking the Choctaw Road* by Tim Tingle. The students will discuss power struggles within families. The students will write a narrative about a power struggle they have experienced.
5. I will ask the students to bring in an article from a magazine or newspaper about a sports figure to share with the class. I will read aloud "The Ball Game" from *The Legend of Lord Eight Deer, an Epic of Ancient Mexico* by John Pohl. I will show the students photographs of sporting events such as Figure 14. We will discuss how sports relate to the concept of power. The students will write an opinion piece on the topic.



Photo, 1991

Figure 14: Modern Day Spear Chucker
Javelin thrower in heptathlon competition
Rice University, Houston, TX

6. The students will choose a noteworthy person to research on the Internet and in the library from a teacher generated list. (Examples: Cleopatra, Jonas Salk, Martin Luther King, Simon Bolivar, et cetera). The students will learn how to annotate their sources. The students will generate questions as if they were newspaper writers interviewing the famous persons. The students will pair up to interview his/her partner's famous persona and write a short persuasive newspaper article telling why that person is important. Each student will read his/her article to the class. I will ask each student to list who, in their opinion, were top five most important people presented in the order of the importance. The class will compile the information; teams will be assigned one of the five agreed upon most important people; each team will campaign with posters, mock television commercials (the students will video tape themselves), and debates why their person should win the "Most Important Person Contest." The students will place the noteworthy persons on the class time line and identify their place of birth on the class map.

Lesson 3: Commerce

1. The students will visit <http://www.fieldmuseum.org/Chocolate/about.html> to read about the history of chocolate and take the interactive quiz on chocolate. The students will be asked to point out on a map where chocolate originated. I will show the students Figure 15 to explain that Lord Eight Deer is drinking chocolate. I will show the students Figure 16 to show the American fast food restaurants in China. Students will be asked to brainstorm ways economics affect immigration and business. The students will explore how commerce affected the world of Lord Eight Deer.
2. The students will read Roald Dahl's novel, *Charlie and Chocolate Factory*, and will discuss relevant themes in the book including the business practices of Willie Wonka.
3. The students will bring in ads from magazines and newspapers and packaging from food products. They will discuss what makes an effective ad. (See Figure 17.) They will design ads for Willie Wonka chocolate.



Drawing by Author, 2005
 Figure 15: Lord Eight Deer
 Drinking Chocolate
 Mesoamerica, ca 1059 A.D.



Photo by Vicki Jones, 2004
 Figure 16: McDonald's, Kentucky
 Fried Chicken, & Pizza Hut
 Beijing, China



Photo by Vicki Jones, 2005
 Figure 17: Art in Advertising
 Celestial Seasonings Tea Boxes

4. The students will form teams to design a business plan to start their own business. They will be asked to explore ways they can bring their own backgrounds and countries into the plan. They will make a written and oral class presentation.

Lesson 4. Fashion

1. The students will view Figures 19, 20, 21, 22, and 23 and asked to discuss and write down what the clothing in each of the pictures tells them. Particularly Figure 23 indicates a shift from earlier visuals about who is a warrior.



Photo by Vicki Jones, 1997

*Figure 19: Performance Artist Dressed
As American Colonist
Colonial Williamsburg, VA*



Photo by Vicki Jones, 2004

*Figure 21: West Meets East!
Casual American in Chinese Shoes with
Girl in Traditional Chinese Dress
Beijing, China*



Photo by Vicki Jones, 1997

*Figure 20: Colonial Parade
Colonial Williamsburg, VA*



Photo by Vicki Jones, 1990

*Figure 22: Blast From the Past
Performance of "Grease"
Pershing Middle School, Houston, TX*

2. The students will check the labels in their clothing at home to see the country of origin. They will share that information with the class and identify the countries on the class map. They will discuss why clothing in the USA comes from other countries. The students will check the *CIA Fact book* at <http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/> to discover what other relevant circumstances affect the economies of the countries that provided labor to make clothing for the USA.



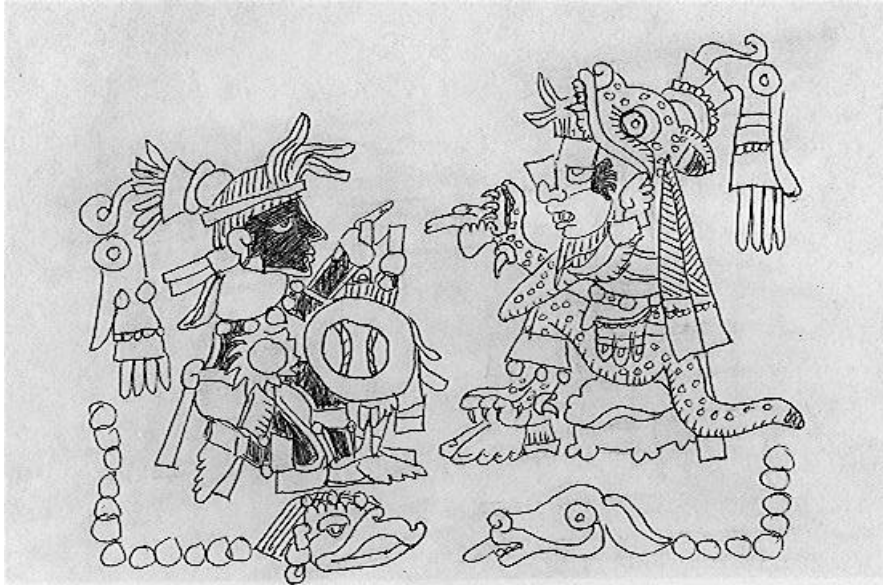
Photo Courtesy of Jessica Jones, 2005

*Figure 23: What the Well Dressed American Lady Wears in Baghdad
Female American Soldiers, Camp Victory, Baghdad, Iraq*

3. The students will view the video “Mysterious Mummies of China” produced by NOVA. They will have written questions designed to help them deduce why the European mummies were in China (trade) and how we know where they were from (clothing).
4. The students will write a resume. They will discuss how to dress for an interview. They will complete a job application and a college application. They will dress for an interview and practice interviews in class.
5. The students will view Figures 10, 15, and 18 which are all drawings that include Lord Eight Deer and give a written description of Lord Eight Deer’s clothing. They will then discuss why he is dress differently in each drawing and write an explanation. They will discuss why Lord Eight Deer is dressed in a jaguar suit and wears a nose ring.
6. The students will organize a fashion show to practice organizational skills, language skills, and creativity.

Culminating Activity

In groups the students will choose a topic to research such as Pompeii, the Terra Cotta Warriors, or the Pyramids. They will present to the class a visual, oral and written report using the methodologies they have learned over the semester. They will explore how tradition, power, commerce and fashion were related in their topic. As individuals, they will use the writing process to generate a fictional story with characters set in the time and place of their research topic.



Drawing by Vicki Jones, 2005

Figure 18: Lord Eight Deer in Jaguar Suit with Nose Ring
Mesoamerica ca. 1070 A.D.

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