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Art Activities to Enhance Writing in a Community-based ESL Program

The power of art is the expression of human creative skills and imagination in order to create an inspiring story. Arts allow English as a second language (ESL) learners to express their ideas in a creative way. Compass International Family Center is a volunteer-run organization that supports English learning for different people from diverse countries with different cultures, languages, stories, ages, backgrounds, and knowledge in a creative environment. They use different teaching methods and lesson planning strategies, including songwriting and story writing, to help students to build their English proficiency. This research addresses how inspiring art activities support adult multilingual writers in English learning in a community-based program in Indiana. My research shows that adult immigrant ESL students are motivated when they are writing songs and stories using the vocabulary the teacher already taught in class; they can express their own feelings and ideas in an interactive and collaborative way.

Previous research shows that creative lesson plans help ESL students to enhance their writing abilities (Cantor 2006, Cremlin, et al. 2006, Vetrie 2004, and Gardner 1993). One of the creative activities includes drama. For example, studying elementary school children who were native speakers of English, Cremlin et al. 2006 shows that “The children’s concentration and ability to focus and follow through their written work was also positively affected by their involvement in process drama” (p. 9). Additionally, Cantor (2006, p. 62) shows that songs help children who are learners of English to increase their writing abilities. My research builds on these studies by looking at how adult English learners increase their writing abilities through art-related activities.

The field location for this research, Compass, which is located in Northwest Indiana, has different programs including K-12 tutoring, English learner preschool, adult English, and citizen classes. The purpose of this community is helping with adult English classes and helping children complete their homework, and it is free and accessible for everyone who lives in this area. It is really interesting to see how this community breaks walls and contributes to immigrant success in learning English no matter what level they are in. This program involves different professionals training in TESOL (teaching English to speakers of other languages) methodology to work with learners who are not native speakers of English who are living in the USA. Through consideration of my teaching and learning observations, lesson plans, student work and interviews in Compass, I have explored how it is necessary to engage learners with inspiring art activities because they feel free to transmit and communicate their ideas and thoughts in a collaborative and creative way.

I found that learners use their imagination when they create stories through pictures and songs which are great, significant art activities to enhance writing English abilities. I have seen how the volunteer teachers include some of them in their lesson plans, and learners find joy and create an atmosphere where all of them participate with enthusiasm and collaborate in a dynamic way. However, it is necessary to include more art activities such as drama, music, films and videos because they have more impact in supporting learners as they master the English skills, and one of them is writing to communicate their knowledge in a meaningful way. This research will help teachers improve their lesson plans and teaching practice and help ESL students to improve their writing abilities.

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