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# Ways of Teaching Arabic through Story

## Description of presenter

My name is Sajida Abu Ali; I am a teacher at Al-Nour School and Al Iman weekend School in Cleveland Ohio. I graduated as a teacher in 1995 and have taught a variety of subjects. I currently teach Arabic and Qur'an. Masters Degree in modern languages (Curriculum and Instructional Design). CORE Program for Foreign Language (Arabic), 2006-2007 and CRETE training, Summer 2007.

## Abstract

Storybooks offer important learning opportunities about narrative text. By listening to many stories, children begin to build an awareness of the ways stories are organized. Children's concept of story gradually includes the notion that stories have characters that are sustained throughout the story and that stories have actions or events that lead up to an ending. In addition, through read aloud and shared readings with adults, children learn that a story has a setting where it takes place and conversations might be taking place between characters. Their growing awareness and understanding of stories is often demonstrated when they attempt to retell or re-enact events from their favorite story with the support of their peers.

Children's books and personal and shared experiences provide opportunities for early childhood educators to demonstrate and engage young children in the process of writing. Through small group discussion, or one-on-one dialogue, adults engage children through modeled and shared writing experiences where text is created, the relationship between the written and spoken word is modeled and the function and purpose of writing are illustrated.

In foreign language thematic units are organized in terms of meaningful experiences with language, focused on a theme and on theme-related tasks. These

experiences prepare students to use the language for a variety of purposes-their own purposes-beyond the classroom.

### **The framework and the standards:**

The framework for Curriculum Development is fully compatible with the Standards for foreign language learning in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Each of the outcomes circles ties directly to one of the goals in the standards. “Language in Use” could also be named “Communication”, “Culture” and Cultures” are fully compatible; and “Subject Content” could easily be renamed “Connections.” The remaining Standards, Comparisons, and Communities interact with the framework outcomes at several points, in the following diagrams standard 4.1 is illustrate which deals with comparing languages, and standard 4.2 addresses comparison of cultures. The communities’ goal brings the learning of language, culture, and curriculum content beyond the classroom, and engages the learner with the language and the culture for lifelong learning.

### **Statement of problem**

Thematic planning and instruction are among the most important elements of an effective early language program. Our standards orientation calls for integrated learning, with connections to other content areas and to new information through the use of the new language. Our growing insight about brain-compatible learning supports thematic instruction as well. As we teach new languages to children, our focus is making meaning, rather than making accurate new sounds or grammatically correct sentences (important though these may be). Eric Jensen (1998) suggests that for meaning-making to take place, we should evoke three important ingredients in our general practice: emotion, relevance, and context and patterns (96) A carefully designed theme can incorporate emotion, one of the most powerful channels for learning; relevance, a critical motivator for language learning; and rich context, an element that bring language learning to life and active the pattern making functions of the brain.

Much of elementary school curriculum in all content areas is built around themes, often as a means of integrating several subjects during the school respond to the

intellectual, social, and developmental needs of the early adolescent learner. As the language teacher connects language instruction to existing themes or creates language-specific themes, the language class is clearly an integrated part of the school day, and languages are perceived to be meaningful components of student learning.

**Practical elements of implementation:**

1. *Thematic planning makes instruction more comprehensible, because the theme creates a meaningful context.* In thematic unit, students can interpret new language and new information on the basis of their background knowledge. They are not just learning vocabulary in isolation; they are using words to identify which foods came from Middle East, or which animals are endangered in South America etc.
2. *Thematic planning changes the instructional focus from the language itself to the use of language to achieve meaningful goals.* In thematic instruction we focus on using the language to communicate something related to a theme, rather than repeating words in isolation with no connection to the classroom or the student. Instead of focusing on how to say or write something, thematic instruction shifts the focus to communicating a message for a reason. As we shift the focus to what language means and can do, students become motivated to acquire language and to be accurate, because they want to communicate about information that is of interest to them.
3. *Thematic instruction provides a rich context for standards-based instruction.* One of the important features of the *National standards for foreign language learning* is their emphasis on working toward a goal, and focusing on the “big picture” or the “big idea.” Many of the scenarios found in the Standards document are also examples of integrated thematic units.

4. *Thematic instruction involves the students in real language use in a variety of situations, modes, and text types.* Thematic instruction, especially when it is organized in a story structure, gives students the opportunity to use language in a variety of situations, including simulations of cultural experiences. A theme lends itself to all three of the communication modes: interpersonal, interpretive, and presentational. Text types within a thematic unit can range from preparing and reading poetry to reading headlines to creating or listening to a description to participating in a conversation to listening to a play-and the list goes on and on.

## **Methods**

A central goal during the early learning years is to enhance children's exposure to concepts about print. These concepts are related to the visual characteristics, features and properties of written language. Some early childhood educators use Big Books to help children distinguish many book and print features, including the fact that a book must be held right side up to read the words and view the illustrations; that print, rather than pictures, carries the meaning of the story; that print conveys not just any message, but a specific message; that the strings of letters between spaces are words that correspond to an oral version; and that reading progresses from left to right and top to bottom. The process of gaining meaning from spoken language begins in infancy — as young children search for meaning through the context, gestures and facial cues. Children demonstrate their understanding or comprehension by asking questions and making comments throughout the day. They bring this curiosity to reading events and develop comprehension skills through the conversation around the story — by making predictions about story events or characters or commenting on the topic of a story being read to them. In addition, children take delight in retelling stories or acting out the events of a story in their play. Pausing at the end of a sentence to let children join in, asking open-ended questions and helping children make connections to prior experiences are all effective teaching strategies for developing comprehension skills.

## **Concepts of Print**

1. Understand that print has meaning by demonstrating the functions of print through play activities (e.g., orders from a menu in pretend play).
2. Hold books right side up, know that people read pages from front to back, top to bottom and read words from right to left.
3. Begin to distinguish print from pictures.

### **Comprehension Strategies**

4. Begin to visualize, represent, and sequence an understanding of text through a variety of media and play.
5. Predict what might happen next during reading of text.
6. Connect information or ideas in text to prior knowledge and experience (e.g., “I have a new puppy at home too.”).
7. Answer literal questions to demonstrate comprehension of orally read age-appropriate texts.

### **Self-Monitoring Strategies**

8. Respond to oral reading by commenting or questioning (e.g., “That would taste yucky.”).

### **Independent Reading**

9. Select favorite books and poems and participate in shared oral reading and discussions.

### **Reading Applications**

1. Use pictures and illustrations to aid comprehension (e.g., talks about picture when sharing a story in a book).
2. Retell information from informational text.
3. Tell the topic of a selection that has been read aloud (e.g., What is the book about?).
4. Gain text information from pictures, photos, simple charts and labels.
5. Follow simple directions.
6. Focus on curriculum and learners with different instructional strategies.
7. Seek for greater collaboration between content areas.

### **Recommendations of practical implementation**

Children learn that books contain different kinds of information – books that provide facts about a topic; books that help us understand general ideas or themes, such as numbers and the alphabet; books that tell us stories about real people and events and those that share fairy tales and make believe, such as *The very Hungry Caterpillar*. Through multiple, varied and engaging experiences, children develop concepts about these texts, how they are organized and how they are useful tools in learning about the world.

**“Young children need to chew on books, hug them, laugh at them, touch and feel them, and associate them with a warm voice and an interested adult.”**

Betsy Harne

Careful planning can help the early language teacher to make the most of the limited time available for instruction in the target language. One meaningful approach to planning curriculum is the development of integrated thematic units that incorporate the key elements of language-in-use, subject content, and culture. Effective planning takes into account the educational development of the students and draws on such approaches as story form and backward design to make learning more meaningful and more memorable. The careful preparation of student-oriented objectives and a written plan can free the teacher to be flexible as they develop without losing the direction and focus of the lesson. Each plan should be organized around the needs and development of the whole child and take into account the child’s need for both variety and routine.

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