Water Preservation: Content-Based Arabic Unit, Design and Implementation

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**Statement of the Problem:** How can third and fourth grades students enhance their Arabic vocabulary and fluency through a content-based unit in which they also achieve awareness that water preservation is essential for life and that it is highly encouraged by Islamic teachings?

**Review of Literature:** Content-based Instruction (CBI) in foreign language learning is a communicative approach that is based on subject matter, utilizes authentic materials, promotes the learning of new information, and considers specific students' needs (Betty Lou Leaver, Stephen B. Stryker, 1989)

The word content refers to the use of subject matter as a vehicle for foreign language teaching/learning. A subject matter means a non-language subject that is closely aligned with traditional school subjects, themes of interest to students, or vocational and occupational areas (Fredricka L. Stoller, 2008.) While the primary goal is to teach a foreign language, the focus in CBI is not on the language itself, but rather on what is being taught through the language; that is, the language becomes the medium through which something new is learned (Fredricka L. Stoller, 2008.)

The theory behind CBI is that when students are engaged with more content, it will promote intrinsic motivation. Students will be able to use more advanced thinking skills when learning new information and will focus less on the structure of the language. This approach is very student-centered as it depends entirely on the students’ ability to use the language (Fredricka L. Stoller, 2008, Littlewood, 1981.)

Lately, teachers of Arabic as a foreign language started to learn and implement the CBI approach in their classrooms, (Mouna Mana, Dany Doueri, Mohammed Abdul Aleem, 2009.)

This action research is only a sample of many CBI units the author has been implementing at the Islamic School of Columbia-Missouri for many years. Students enjoy this lively approach to learn Arabic as well as the subject matter, water preservation in this case. For the purpose of teaching this unit, the curriculums of Science, Math and Islamic Studies are fully integrated with it.

**Methods:**

**Videos:** A video is shown about water preservation. With no sound, students will have the opportunity to come up with their own version of conversation depending solely on what they see in the video. Each student is provided with a blank sheet of paper to write down two to three ideas of what he/she thought the video was about

The teacher discusses with the students what they understood from the video, using their prior knowledge of Arabic vocabulary as well as what they had already studied in their Science and Math classes. Observations are written on the board for the students to see and think about. All discussion and writing are in Arabic of course. If a student has difficulty expressing his/her observation in Arabic, the teacher may guide him/her achieve that. They end up with a list of observations on the board.

Now the video is shown with the sound on, the class goes over the list above and try to eliminate whatever does not match what the video had emphasized. Students now should be much better grasping the new vocabulary and sentences that most correctly describe the different scenes in the video.

Each student is given a paper with a question, in Arabic of course, related to the video. One minute is given to read the question. The class is divided into groups of twos where each group works together to answer the questions they generated. Before they proceed, they may be allowed to watch the video one more time, simply to help each group relate the video to their questions.

The class as a whole will now go over each question and find out the right answer. If needed, the class may watch the video again. At this step, the class ends up with a set of Arabic vocabulary that best describe the video, closer attention should be paid to the new words.

Power point presentation is used to focus on each of those new words; what each means and how to use them in useful sentences.

A picture that best describes each of these words is prepared; around 15 total. Each student gets a sheet where all these pictures are printed. Students are required to cut the pictures and glue them to flash cards.

On the power point, there is a list of both the pictures as well as the words associated with them. While presenting these pairs on the power point, students are asked to come up with a proper Arabic sentence that correctly describes the picture. All the students should participate in such exercise.

A second video, is watched, where two girls are shown discussing how to preserve water. From this and the first video, the class discusses and try to come up with specific rules people have to follow to preserve water.

**GRAMMAR**: A Nasheed (song) in Arabic is played, using these new words, Students will sing the Nasheed along with the recording. This Nasheed focuses on using those words as well as on how to negate an action (لا;) something that introduces the students to Arabic grammar but without mentioning the word grammar.

The Nasheed:

**نشيد حافظوا على الماء**

لا تترك هذا الصنبور بل أغلقه يا شطور

لا تسرف أبداً بالماء لو كنت على نهرٍ جاري

الماء نعمة فاحفظها لا تهدرها فتخسرها

لا تسرف أبداً بالماء لو كنت على نهرٍ جاري

This Nasheed has the Prophetic Hadeeth about water preservation. Islam gives a great deal to water and other resources preservation. Students count how many times the word (لا) appears in the Nasheed and how it is used each time. Students now practice using the word (لا ) by constructing their own sentences describing the pictures the teacher shows them; of people who do not use water properly.

**Journal**: Each student has a daily journal in which he/she has to write the answer to one question related to this unit. On daily bases, the teacher makes sure that each student has indeed done that.

Examples:

أسئلة لدفتر المذكرات

سؤال 1: لماذا كانت قطورة صغيرة في بداية الفيديو ثم كيف أصبحت؟

سؤال 2: كم غالون من الماء نستخدم كل مرة نستخدم فيها غسالة الأطباق/ غسالة الملابس؟

سؤال 3: كيف نحافظ على الماء عند تنظيف أسناننا؟

سؤال 4: ماهو أفضل وقت لسقي النباتات في الحديقة؟ ولماذا؟

سؤال 5: كيف تغسل أمك الفواكه والخضار؟

سؤال 6: تخيل أنك فتحت صنبور الماء لتشرب ولم تجد هناك ماء، ماذا تفعل؟

سؤال 7: ماذا يجب أن نقول بعد شرب الماء؟

**Games**: Throughout this unit, students are given the opportunity to play many games, the benefits of which are to familiarize themselves with the new vocabulary and to help students practice their Arabic conversation and fluency. Examples of these games are: Memory Game, Stacking Cups, Block a War, Bingo game, Jeopardy, and Running spelling.

**Projects:** Students also work on few projects throughout this unit, here are few examples:

**T-Shirt Design:** Each student makes a design of a T-Shirt that reflects water preservation. The whole school votes on the best design and the winner is sent for printing. The T-shirts are sold to the community to support the school projects.

**Posters:** Students make posters; on each they write a useful advice about water reservation. They then hang the posters all over the school and at home if they choose to. Such posters usually deals with using dishwashers, laundry machines, brushing teeth, making wudu, watering the plants, washing the car, washing fruits and vegetable, and so on.

**Leftover Water:** Students are asked to brain storm on how to be creative in reusing the leftover water people usually waste every day. Their ideas are discussed in class to see how realistic and efficient each is. A list of these ideas is written on the board, then together decide on each. Posters are made about the chosen ideas to educate the community. Students may search the internet to see what other schools are doing with their leftover water. One school in the UAE, for example, collects the leftover water in one big container and use it to water the plants around the school. They call their project (اسكبني pour me). This idea may be borrowed and implemented in every school, office building, and homes. Integrating with the Math and Science classes, students measure how much water is collected each week.

**Assessments:**

**Interpersonal task:** The class is divided into groups of twos, each is given a task to create a scene and talk about it. One scenario is going to Makkah for Umrah. When they reach the hotel room and go to the bathroom to make wudu, they find the water faucet in the bathroom dripping. They remember water preservation unit they studied at school, and think of how much water this faucet is wasting. They also remember the Hadeeth of the Prophet (PBUH) and the Ayah that talks about not to waste water and other resources. They decide to call the front desk to send someone to fix the problem. They need to make up a conversation between the hotel worker and the visitor. One of them will play the role of the hotel worker while the other will be the guest. They eventually communicate in Arabic until the problem is resolved and water is wasted no more in that bathroom.

**Presentational Task:** Students need to present what they learned in this unit using Power Point or posters. They need to include verses from the Qur’an and the Hadeeth about that. They need to show how this unit has influenced their water consumption. They have to draw a comparison of their water usage before and after going through this unit. They also need to include what they do to influence their families to make sure they do not waste water. Searching the web to show how some people struggle to find water and how most people unfortunately take water for granted.

**Interpretive Task:** Students watch a video and answer questions related to the subject.

**Writing Assessment:** Writing a story about water preservation. Students are shown some pictures on the computer and asked to write a sentence for each picture. Students then combine their sentences using some connection words like; (بعد ذلك، ثم، لذلك، عندما،.في يوم من الأيام،...) After finishing their writing they can give a name to their story. The teacher then check their writing and give them some suggestions for improvement.

Each student can make his/her story into a picture book. They can read their stories to each other or to students from other grades.

**Reading Assessment:** Students read a story called (وانقطع الماء فجأة) and answer some questions that check for their reading comprehension. This story is related to the pictures they use for their writing assessment above.

**Recommendations of Practical Implementation:**

The water preservation unit is part of a yearlong theme for this class, named Living Healthy. Students study why and how to live healthy from an Islamic perspectives. While covering this unit over a period of six weeks, students are frequently reminded about the integration of this unit with the general theme of living healthy. This shall insure the consistency of the Islamic teachings in preserving water with the rest of the theme components as well as with the Math and Science curriculums.

Students may visit the water purification plant in town to listen to, observe, and appreciate the efforts to insure that the water they drink is healthy. Similar visit to the recycle plant will show similar appreciation to the efforts being put to keep the trash under control and how to limit the amount of trash that eventually go to water streams, rivers, and ocean if not recycled.

Students will benefit from studying the water cycle in nature to appreciate this commodity that is essential to life on earth. With collaboration with the Science teacher, a simple experiment can be designed and built to show students the stages water go through in nature; ocean, evaporation, cloud, and rain.

Students are assigned projects to search specific chapters of the Quran and Sunnah to find more texts that deal with water, its cycle, importance, usage and preservation. Quran and Sunnah are parts of the revelation from Allah, The One who created human and the nature around them, and accordingly Islamic teachings are in harmony with preserving life on earth. Humans are not the only living creature on earth.

Students are assigned projects to search the internet to see how different regions in the world deal with water, its abundance and scarce, attitude towards its use, and effect of drought on living creatures.

Students are asked to think about and come up with practical approaches on how to promote water preservation and healthy living in their homes, with their friends and within their Muslim community and beyond. Sharing what they learn with others is as important as them practicing it. The more people are convinced with the mission the better and cleaner the environment becomes. Ideas of such approaches, may include presentations to the community in an annual day they may call Living Healthy Day, or at other occasions such as after Friday prayer and in the Earth Day.

**References:**

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