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Art and Expression

INTRODUCTION

ARTE: Art and Expression is a biannual book chapter, published under collaboration of Department of Fine Arts, Faculty of Art & Design, UiTM Perak Branch with Galeri Al-Biruni under the supervision of Universiti Teknologi MARA, Malaysia. 'ARTE' is an amalgamation of english word 'Art', and malay word, specifically Perak slang 'Ate' which translate as conversation starter. 'ARTE' uses the concept of book chapter that platform art enthusiasts to express their inner-creativity in the form of literacy conjecture

VISION

Art and expression as aspiration towards stylistic and artistic practices

MISSION

- To enhance the culture of research and academic publication among academician and artist for international recognition
- To promote intellectual, cultural and knowledge sharing through artistic expression
- To celebrate the diversity and differences in arts practices thus creating and intellectual platform for artist to express their interest in art

PUBLICATION FREQUENCY

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CHAPTER 2

CHINESE CALLIGRAPHY: CULTURAL APPRECIATION FOR PRIMARY SCHOOL STUDENTS

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Abstract

Education is more than learning and teaching, it is also a preparation that shapes experiences, and the best time to educate youths is as early as primary schools. Embarking in education requires nurture and practicality for students to experiences it first-hand. Young school students are curious, they would prefer visuals rather than textual, and that is what this paper is about. Teachers are not just there for teaching so that students will learn, but we need to create a moment that students can enjoy and remember out of a sheer will. The lesson plan is particularly discussing on Chinese calligraphy. Not only does this project promotes cultural appreciation for students but it also educates them on the gestural art in calligraphy. This paper is rather an anecdote for us teachers in the sense that we are sharing something that was not familiar culturally to us but, through art projects; appreciation for the culture of Chinese calligraphic writings is exposed for students to participate. In this paper, readers will find a brief history, the tools, the techniques, the benefits, and the results of conducting Chinese calligraphy as an art project in primary schools. Through art activities like this; students can learn art and culture while doing it with excitement.

Keywords: Chinese Calligraphy, Education, Primary School Students, Art Projects

2.0 History and Technique of Chinese Calligraphy

Calligraphy is known as visual art which translates to textual using tools such as pen, ink brush, and more. Claude (1996) states that calligraphic practice is defined as the “art of giving form to signs in an expressive, harmonious, and skillful manner”. This means that calligraphy has a direct purpose and its depiction is rather identifiable. Though, calligraphy existed in a variety of forms depending on the region such as Arabic, Japanese, Indian, and Chinese; and each one has its unique traits culturally. In Chinese calligraphy, similar tools and techniques are used to accomplish emphasis on motion charged through rhythm and energy shifting shown as artistry (Baker, 2010). This means that the Chinese calligraphy itself is an act of artistic movement shown through motion. What is interesting about motion in Chinese calligraphy; is the stroke-induced images that it produces. Most Chinese calligraphy can be seen written rather hastily, but fluidly. Practitioner believes that motion plays a major role in synchronizing the calligraphy stroke as if it was machine-made due to its consistency. To create something beautiful and consistent while doing it with speed is what practitioners are taught in Chinese calligraphy.

Discussing writing, Chinese calligraphy does have its very own ways of making. For instance, the English alphabet can be seen written from left to right; Arabic script (Jawi) can be seen written from right to left; Chinese calligraphy, however, is written from top to bottom.

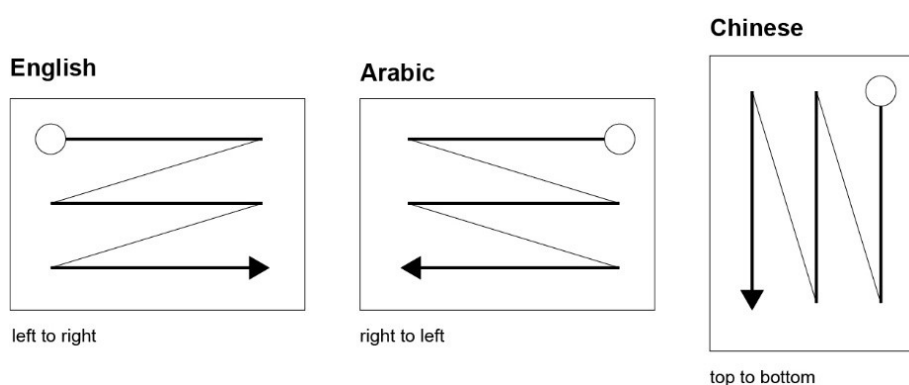


Figure 17: Calligraphy writing directions (Source: Personal)

Figure 17 above shows the common directions of writing for English, Arabic, and Chinese calligraphy. Some written texts go the other way around but rather marginally. These directions have no intention towards artistic reasoning but just to complement the way the text was read centuries ago. Besides that, the direction also leaves a trait for each particular calligraphy to mark their characteristic to whoever reads or writes it.

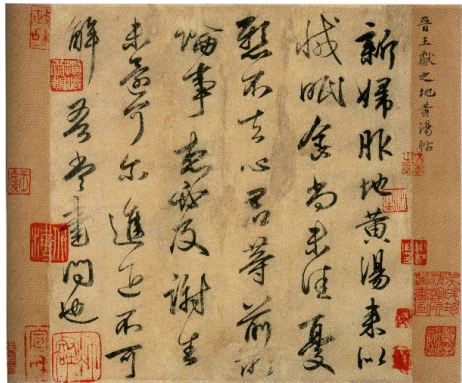


Figure 18: Chinese calligraphy (Source: Wang Xianzhi at wenhuacn.com)

Anyone today can identify that the picture shown (Figure 17) is Chinese calligraphy due to its unique characters. There are plentiful strokes in Chinese calligraphy but all follow the same method. The method is defined from a combination of strokes shown in the figure below (Figure 18).

The Basic Strokes of Chinese Characters

笔划 bǐhuà Strokes	点 diǎn	一 héng	丨 shù	丿 piě	㇏ nà	㇏ tí	丨 shùgōu
名称 míngchēng Name	点 diǎn Dot	横 héng Horizontal stroke	竖 shù Vertical stroke	撇 piě Left- ward stroke	捺 nà Right- ward stroke	提 tí Upward stroke	竖钩 shùgōu Vertical stroke with a hook

Figure 19: Basic strokes of Chinese characters (Source: ichinesematters.blogspot.com)

These are basic strokes required to produce Chinese characters, and all of them are widely used in every variant of Chinese calligraphy. Such strokes require a proper way of handling the brush to correctly write Chinese characters. With a good grip and understanding of each stroke, anyone, even primary school students can write. The brief details of Chinese calligraphy are just to clarify reader on the basics; likewise, it was not meant for primary students but to ensure the projects are conducted smoothly, teachers need to know the history and technique to simplify the method of teaching as an art project that is more practical rather than theoretical.

2.1 Problem Statement

According to Ozer and Keskin (2015), knowledge is forgettable but the skill of reaching the correct information is persistent. The statement suggests that knowledge is always there, however, the way it was delivered will remain in the students' minds. As a teacher we always searching for ways to deliver teachings; there is no definite way but there is the right way. A student came of all ages and each unique to their own needs and requirements which includes primary school students. We have identified that practicality is much suitable for students of their ages. It consists of hands-on, excitement, and involvement. Therefore, this paper utilizes teaching practices in form of art activity to highlights results rather than giving them pure knowledge through verbal and texts. The objectives are to identify the key elements that grasp student attention and explain the result based on observation and self-involvement. The structure of the simplified teaching application is shown in the figure below (Figure 20).

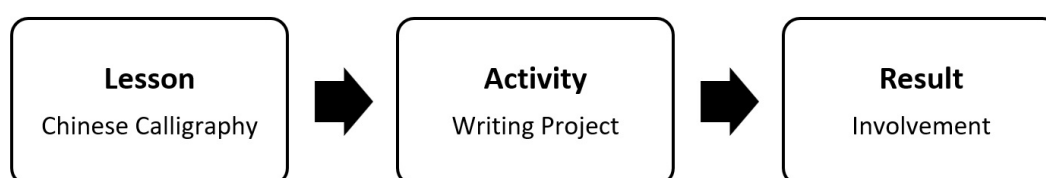


Figure 20: Simplified structure teaching method

2.2 Chinese Calligraphy Art Project

The art projects were realized particularly for primary school students to join and experience. Like any other project, this project too has its objectives and goals. The project objectives are to encourage passion towards Chinese culture among students of various cultural backgrounds. Since younger generations are like white clothing and their journey is shaped depends on what markings that were laid upon. We believe there is no harm in exposing them to the beautifulness of other cultures through something as simple as a writing project. Other than that, we recognized that any form of knowledge sharing requires visual practices for younger students to easily follow compared to through reading and discussion; especially when it involves art and culture. This is because younger students are easily distracted by fun and games rather than logic and theory. Using this lesson plan, put them in an art activity to play around with as if it was part of games while at the same time introducing them to Chinese culture.

The project is simple, first, we create a sample for them to follow and allow them to embellish it the way that they like. We interlude knowledge throughout the session and taught them about cultural appreciation along the way. At first, they are fonder of focusing on doing the calligraphy, but students have this sheltered mind of curiosity which makes them question each moment they go through.



Figure 21: Student's activity (Source: Personal)

The figure above (Figure 21) was captured during the art project, it shows that the student is focusing on imitating her friend's completed calligraphy. It was such a sight to behold as she immerses herself in the calligraphy writing. We know by then that students can concentrate when they are enjoying the activity. From the picture, the students are encouraged to decorate their paper with several natural elements like trees and birds just to give the paper variety of outcomes. Even though students are mostly questioning why should we do this at the start; their mindset is built on peers, when their friends join in the projects, they too will eventually plunge themselves into the activity and gradually show their likings. We identified several reasoning for their interests and hopefully, it can be a guide for educators especially for the primary school students to use in their teachings.

2.3 Results and Findings

In general, appreciation towards other cultures is through experiencing it first hand or through self-observation and correlating. However, this statement applies differently for youth, particularly primary school students. We educators are constantly implementing different ways of teachings for the younger generations to learn. As time progresses, a student is continuously been introduced to different technology and innovations which made their process of learning differ now compared to decades before. In this art project, we devise a plan that combines actual hands-on experience with an addition of introducing Chinese culture through calligraphy writing activity and justify their involvement through the outcome. From the results, we have identified several key elements which help students appreciate culture through art projects.

2.3.1 Curiosity leads to Questions

Since this activity is identified as “New” to them, students participate out of sheer curiosity. Throughout the activity, students are open to exploring the task that was given to them. The flexibility of the task invokes the needs for them to questions. Commonly, young students do not just “do” but the question “why?”. These questions are reflecting the situation in which they are about to do, and that is when we explain to them.

2.3.2 Peer Support

This is rather surprising for primary school students to show how they support each other throughout the entirety of the project. They do it without any pressure but rather casually just to show what they are doing and what they think is right. From here, we observe the way they cooperatively do the task and we would correct them if there is any mistake. If it was done flawlessly, the act itself would improve their teamwork value as well as boost their morale among each other as well as towards the activity.

2.3.2 Sense of Accomplishment

Although a sense of accomplishment would sound rather ambitious, students can have that feeling even while doing something as little as just learning to write. When they accomplished the task, the excitement is considerably shown as if they achieve something difficult. As educators, we would celebrate their accomplishment even if it’s simple; from there, they realized that doing something and completing it is something to cherish. So, they would appreciate anything that was given to them.



Figure 22: Student’s Chinese calligraphy (Source: Personal)

In conclusion, youths are curious, they do not need theory and logic for them to learn as that will come by naturally. They are easily influenced and they react overenthusiastic to things that seem little. They have a natural urge to help their friends if it were allowed. From the projects, students can be seen appreciating culture even more through the simplest act of learning to write. Unlike the complicatedness of learning culture through reading or self-observation or experiences living with that particular culture; primary school students only need hands-on visual activity as a kick-starter. From there, they will remember what they did and they will constantly ask for more activities that are similar. Hopefully, from there, they start to be fond of other cultures as part of their life growing up.

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