Article

Arts-Based Approaches to Languages Education with Refugee-Background Learners in the Early Years: Co-Creating Spaces of Hope

Rachel Burke [1],* and Rebecca Soraya Field [2]

[1]   School of Education, University of Newcastle, Newcastle, NSW 2308, Australia
[2]   School of Allied Health, Curtin University, Bentley, WA 6102, Australia
*   Correspondence: rachel.burke@newcastle.edu.au

Abstract: Young learners with refugee experiences face a constellation of challenges particular to forced migration and resettlement. Experiences of trauma, violence, poverty, and disrupted or limited access to formal education and healthcare can have complex and long-term impacts on learning. Further, the sociocultural and linguistic challenges of undertaking education in unfamiliar schooling systems in transit and resettlement countries can also impede learner engagement and obscure individual strengths. However, like all student cohorts, children with refugee and asylum seeker backgrounds are also unique, with individual personal, sociocultural, and linguistic attributes on which to draw. While these assets may be overlooked or obscured in traditional educational contexts, arts-based approaches to instruction can offer generative and affirming learning spaces that illuminate individual strengths and provide powerful rejoinders to deficit constructions. This article provides an overview of recent research that explores vibrant and innovative arts-based approaches to languages instruction for refugee and asylum-seeker background learners in the early years. The article takes the form of a scoping study of literature using Arksey and O'Malley's framework to map the field of research, document novel instructional approaches, and identify key themes. Our discussion is oriented toward educators who seek to innovate their own instructional practice. In addition to exploring the creative avenues for language instruction described in the literature, we consider key themes that emerged inductively from our analysis including the agentic value of arts-based instructional practices, the role of narrative in articulating experiences of place and identities, and the significance of arts-based connections between home and school linguistic repertoires.

Keywords: refugee; asylum seeker; languages; education; arts

1. Introduction

1.1. Access to Education for Children with Forced Migration Experiences

While access to quality education is a universal human right and recognised in the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals as essential to "a better and more sustainable future for all" (p.na), children with refugee and asylum seeker experiences remain among the world's most educationally disadvantaged populations [1]. The 1951 Refugee Convention defines a refugee as "someone who is unable or unwilling to return to their country of origin owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion" [2]. A person seeking asylum "is someone whose request for sanctuary has yet to be processed" [3]. In 2021, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) reported that approximately 48% of all school-aged youth with refugee backgrounds did not have access to formal schooling [1]. Although collating enrolment data is complicated by the complexity of current global humanitarian crises, the UNHCR advises that approximately 42% of children with refugee experiences have access to pre-primary education [1]. This number increases to 68% at the primary level, decreases to 37% in the secondary years, and drops

to only 6% for tertiary educational participation [1]. As the UNHCR's 2022 global report on access to education states: "The message is clear: we are still a long way away from the full participation of refugees in exercising their right to education" [1], p. 2.

Complex and interrelated factors particular to forced displacement and resettlement impact children's educational attainment. Escaping war, civil unrest, poverty, climate emergencies, persecution, and other humanitarian crises often requires long and dangerous journeys through multiple transit locations. It should also be noted that 74% of the world's displaced people are currently living in low- and middle-income countries [4]. Formal schooling opportunities in transit camps can be ad hoc or non-existent, and subject to exposure to conflict, violence, and gender-based discrimination [5]. While the United Nations continues to petition all countries to institute explicit policies concerning educational inclusion irrespective of age, gender, or visa status [5] and to enable access to formal education for forced migrants within three months of their arrival [6], educational opportunities for displaced people vary greatly and remain subject to a range of complex barriers.

In addition to legislative and policy-level obstacles, the financial impact of school fees and associated costs including materials and transportation may also be prohibitive, particularly in contexts with limited educational infrastructure [5,7,8]. Importantly, as the UNHCR states: "giving refugees physical access to the same schools as nationals is indeed essential, but a place in the classroom does not automatically translate into inclusion" [1], p. 19. Meaningful and generative educational spaces for children with forced migration experiences necessitate culturally responsive, trauma-informed, strengths-based teaching approaches using relevant, engaging, and contemporary materials, including the critical use of digital modalities. For some children with refugee experiences, educational inclusion may also require additional provisions for language learning, mental health, and psychosocial transitions [1,9].

Without appropriate supports, learners with refugee and asylum seeker experiences may be marginalised within educational systems due to unfamiliarity with the tacit assumptions and underlying expectations regarding classroom practices and assessment [8,10–12]. Navigation of educational systems can be an alienating, frustrating, and isolating experience, particularly when the learner is undertaking the journey in a language that is new to them [12–14]. Further, disrupted educational histories mean that children with forced migration experiences may have had limited opportunities for developing academic knowledge, metacognitive awareness, print literacy in their first language(s), and proficiency in the language of instruction in the transit or resettlement country [9,14,15]. As McArdle and Tan [16] explain of children attending school in Australia: "At the same time as they need to master the English language, these adolescent students are just as concerned with what it means to "do school"—how to act as students. It is at this point that they are likely to find that existing educational and social support structures are inadequate to facilitate productive engagement in and successful transition to mainstream schooling" (p. 217).

Educational systems with limited attention to cultural and linguistic inclusion may result in deficit conceptions of learners with refugee backgrounds, obscuring students' strengths and impeding their engagement with instruction [12,14,16]. As Emert [17] notes: "Refugee students are at risk of being under-challenged academically, which amplifies the educational gaps that often exist for them" (p. 412). Further, this deficit framing may be experienced alongside covert and overt racism and discrimination—both structural and individual—and the pressures of navigating peer relationships and notions of identities and belonging. These factors may also be complicated by the complexities of forced migration and navigating contrasting aspects of 'home and host cultures' [18–20]. Finally, refugee background learners often carry significant cognitive, emotional, and psychological burdens associated with the violence of displacement and the loss of family members, friends, and home [21,22].

1.2. The Importance of Arts-Based, Multimodal Learning Opportunities

The potential for arts-based teaching and learning approaches to offer generative, authentic, and linguistically rich educational experiences is well-established [23–25]. These educational approaches are identified as particularly valuable for learner cohorts that are frequently excluded from more formal educational settings due to structural inequities, intergenerational patterns of educational disruption, and socio-linguistic disenfranchisement [21,26,27]. As McArdle and Tan [16] assert, "Where linguistic, cultural, and/or social barriers exist, research has shown that arts-rich programs have proven to assist with capacity building. Enabling students to learn through the arts can transcend those barriers to some extent and can open communication channels, resulting in deeper learning across all curriculum areas, including enhanced literacy outcomes" (p. 215).

However, McArdle and Tan [16] also caution against conceiving of arts-based forms of communication as "the developmental precursor to becoming literate in the more traditional sense", instead suggesting that "the arts have the capacity to transcend the limited realm of words and provide alternative ways of knowing and communicating" (p. 214). Not only do arts-based approaches have the potential to bridge gaps in classroom communication that may occur when learners and educators have varying levels of proficiency in shared language, they are naturally suited to the task of engaging multimodally, an essential feature of complex and dynamic twenty-first century communication. While refugee background children may have experienced disrupted formal education, these learners also have important life experiences on which to draw, frequently acting as interpreters and cultural brokers for family members, caring for younger siblings, and navigating complex intercultural and multilingual interactions. Arts-based approaches to instruction offer vibrant and creative means of drawing on refugee background learner knowledge, insights, and cognitive and linguistic adaptability. As Emert [17] argues, "All children deserve interesting and compelling academic tasks that encourage them to view themselves as capable, sharp, creative, and accomplished" (p. 412).

2. Materials and Method

This article provides a scoping study of research that documents arts-based approaches to language instruction for refugee and asylum-seeker background learners in the early years. In bringing together the most recent research focused on this topic, we aim to support educators who seek to innovate their instructional practice using creative and evidence-based educational approaches. We employ Arksey and O'Malley's [28] framework for mapping the field of research, identifying key themes in existing studies, and exploring important considerations in strengths-based approaches to languages education with learners from refugee and asylum seeker backgrounds.

Our scoping study focuses on the central question: 'How are arts-based approaches to instruction used within languages education with early years learners from refugee and asylum seeker backgrounds?' After identifying this central focus, we followed the subsequent stages of Arksey and O'Malley's [28] framework, locating all research related to arts-based methods of languages instruction for refugee and asylum seeker background learners in the early years, which we defined as birth until primary school. We included all forms of arts-based instructional practice including drama, visual arts, photography, videography, and dance. We limited our scoping study to publications from 2010 to 2022 and used various combinations of key search terms including 'refugee', 'asylum seeker', 'humanitarian', 'arts', 'drama', 'children', 'education', 'early childhood', 'language', and 'literacy/ies'. We used reference mining and hand searching of key journals to validate these search terms.

Only two studies that met our initial inclusion criteria were based in the early childhood sector see [17,29], so we expanded our parameters to extend to lower secondary school (approximately 13 years of age). From 1348 titles, 330 were retained as relevant to our study. Following a close review to ensure a clear focus on language instruction, we identified a final corpus of 12 publications for annotation and analysis (Table 1). Each

of these studies focused on arts-based approaches to languages education for learners with displacement experiences, although some also included learners with migrant and non-migrant backgrounds. It should also be noted that our scoping study was limited to peer-reviewed, academic research published in English, reflecting both the parameters of our linguistic expertise and the dominance of English as the global medium for research dissemination.

Table 1. Literature included in the scoping study.

	Reference	Location	Student Age	Arts-Based Methods of Instruction	Data Sources
1	Arizpe, E., Bagelman, C., Devlin, A.M., Farrell, M., and McAdam, J.E. (2014). Visualizing intercultural literacy: engaging critically with diversity and migration in the classroom through an image-based approach, *Language and Intercultural Communication, 14*:3, 304–321. [30]	Scotland	Primary school	'Journeys from Images to Words', 'River of Reading' p. 44 in [30], 'Walk and Talk Through', Text and Visual Annotations, Photo-journals	Focus groups with students Interviews with educators Parent/carer feedback Learner artefacts
2	Dunn, J., Bundy, P. and Woodrow, N. (2012). Combining drama pedagogy with digital technologies to support the language learning needs of newly arrived refugee children: a classroom case study, *Research in Drama Education: The Journal of Applied Theatre and Performance, 17*:4, 477–499. [31]	Australia	8–12 years	Drama Pedagogy, Digital Technologies	Recorded drama sessions Researcher reflections Interviews with educator and students Learner artefacts
3	Emert, T. (2013) 'The Transpoemations Project': digital storytelling, contemporary poetry, and refugee boys, *Intercultural Education, 24*:4, 355–365 [32]	United States of America	8–18 years	Transpoemations, Digital Technologies, 'Movies of the Mind' [33]	Student peer interviews Student questionnaires Learner artefacts
4	Emert, T. (2014). "Hear a Story, Tell a Story, Teach a Story": Digital Narratives and Refugee Middle Schoolers. *Voices from the Middle, 21*(4), 33–39. [29]	United States of America	Elementary and middle school	Autobiographical Digital Storytelling, *Tableaux Vivant*	Learner artefacts
5	Emert, T. (2014). Interactive digital storytelling with refugee children. *Language Arts, 91*(6), 401–415. [17]	United States of America	Elementary and middle school	Digital Storytelling, *Tableaux Vivant*	Learner artefacts
6	Emert, T. (2019). Refugee youth, digital storytelling and academic confidence. *European Journal of Applied Linguistics and TEFL, 8*(1), 61–81. [34]	United States of America	Middle school	Autobiographical Digital Storytelling	Student surveys Interviews with students Learner artefacts
7	Kennedy, L.M., Oviatt, R.L., and De Costa, P.I. (2019). Refugee youth's identity expressions and multimodal literacy practices in a third space. *Journal of Research in Childhood Education, 33*(1), 56–70. [35]	United States of America	10 years	Dual-entry Journals, Dialogic Writing, Self-found Poems	Interviews with educator and paraprofessional Learner artefacts

Table 1. *Cont.*

	Reference	Location	Student Age	Arts-Based Methods of Instruction	Data Sources
8	McArdle, F., and Tan, J.P.-L. (2012). Art as language, pedagogy, and method: Promoting learning engagement for young African refugee migrant students in urban Australia. In A.S. Yeung, E.L. Brown and C. Lee (Eds.), *Communication and Languages: Surmounting the Barriers to Cross-Cultural Understanding* (pp. 211–232). Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing. [16]	Australia	Middle school	'Art as Language', Self-portraits, Digital Technologies	Interviews with students, parents, and staff Observations Photography Field notes Researcher reflections Learner artefacts
9	Vitsou, M., Papadopoulou, M. and Gana, E. (2019). Drama pedagogy for refugee children: a means for empowerment and communication. *Babylonia 3*, p. 44–49. [36]	Greece	9–12 years	'Literacy through Drama', Persona Dolls, Puppets, *Tableau Vivant*, Freeze Frames, Improvisation	Interviews with students
10	Vitsou, M., Papadopoulou, M. and Gana, E. (2020). 'Getting them back to class: A project to engage refugee children in school using drama pedagogy', *Scenario: A Journal for Performative Teaching, Learning, Research, XIV* (2), pp. 42–59. [37]	Greece	9–12 years	Drama in Education (DiE), Persona Dolls, Puppets, *Tableau Vivant*, Freeze Frames, Role Play	Observations Interviews with students
11	Vitsou, M., and Kamaretsou, K. (2020). Enhancing Peer Relationships in a Class of Refugee Children Through Drama in Education: An Action Research. *Yaratıcı Drama Dergisi, 15*(2), 337–354. [38]	Greece	9–13 years	Drama in Education (DiE), Role play, Dramatization, Freeze Frames	Pre and post sociometric test Observations Educator journaling Student feedback
12	Wellman, S., and Bey, S. (2015). Refugee children and art teacher training: Promoting language, self-advocacy, and cultural preservation. *Art Education, 68*(6), 36–44. [39]	United States of America	10 to 17 years	Self-portraits, Digital Technologies	Pre-service teacher reflections

Following extensive annotations of each study within the textual corpus, we revisited our central research question, with added consideration of the key themes that emerged inductively from our analysis. Our discussion was enriched by following the final, optional stage of Arksey and O'Malley's [28] framework, where we sought input from key stakeholders; an early years' educational researcher with expertise in drama-based language learning, and an early years' educational researcher specialising in cultural and linguistic inclusion. These experts affirmed the salience of the themes we identified through our analysis of the textual corpus, the clarity of our research method description, and our recommendations for future research in this field.

3. Results

The 12 titles featured in our scoping study offer windows into innovative, vibrant, and responsive arts-based approaches to languages education. These projects are grounded in meaningful engagement with rich, diverse texts and performative learning experiences, featuring different combinations of drama, digital technologies, writing, drawing, painting,

music, gesture, and movement to inspire students to "communicate, represent, and interpret their worlds collectively and individually" [36], p. 45. We note a dual emphasis in these studies on the importance of hope-filled learning experiences and the agentic role of students in co-creating these educational spaces. This agency is identified as particularly important for people with refugee and asylum seeker backgrounds for whom forced migration may have limited past opportunities for self-determination but who possess unique strengths and knowledge for shaping their own educational experiences see [39]. In foregrounding learner agency, these studies also emphasise the role of educators as facilitators, with Emert [29] explaining: "Rather than content expert, the teacher serves more as guest artist, facilitator, and sideline coach, providing a template for the project design and demonstrating the steps in a multiphase creative process" (p. 33).

Here, as we consider our central research question 'How are arts-based approaches to instruction used within languages education with early years learners from refugee and asylum seeker backgrounds?', we explore some of the creative avenues for language instruction described in this literature. Our discussion of the arts-based instructional approaches depicted in the research is arranged according to the four key themes that emerged inductively from our analysis of the literature. These themes emphasise the value of arts-based instructional approaches for providing opportunities to (i) generate inclusive and agentic contexts for communication, (ii) articulate experiences of place and identities, (iii) reflect on the navigation of intercultural spaces, and (iv) forge connections between home and school linguistic repertoires.

3.1. Generating Inclusive and Agentic Contexts for Communication

A major theme intersecting the research included in our scoping study is the value of arts-based approaches for facilitating authentic, meaningful, and inclusive communicative contexts for languages learning. While navigating more traditional, print focused classrooms may pose a challenge for students with disrupted or limited experiences of formal education, less structured, arts-based approaches may offer learning opportunities in which the linguistic load is lessened through embedded, multimodal supports. For instance, Vitsou et al. [36] and Vitsou and Papadopoulou [37] describe a six-month 'Literacy through Drama' program for children living in refugee camps in Greece. This program was a component of the 'Refugee Reception and Training Structure' introduced by the Greek government in 2016 to assist newly arrived children to develop positive attitudes to schooling in Greece, while increasing their linguistic confidence and proficiency. With these goals in mind, Vitsou and colleagues [36] hoped that "a collaborative environment devoid of fear of failure could result in stronger linguistic outcomes in favor of the newly arrived children" (p. 45).

The authors detail a range of instructional techniques included in the 'Literacy through Drama' program to "provide a joyful and welcoming environment and boost children's communication skills" [37] p. 42. Persona Dolls, which are educational tools originating in the UK, were used as classroom mediators with unique backstories and experiences. These dolls helped to facilitate learner engagement and classroom communication using Arabic, Greek, and English to reflect the children's varied linguistic repertoires. Other drama techniques included puppets to help facilitate oral language production and characterisation, *tableau vivant* activities where learners visually represented scenes from a story, and role play. The emphasis in the 'Literacy through Drama' program was on authentic and creative communicative contexts, rather than explicit error correction, which facilitated a learning environment in which "The integration of new knowledge occurs unconsciously and is added to existing knowledge while focus is placed on play and collaborative learning" [36], p. 44. Language learning therefore occurred via meaningful communication where the children were focused on engaging story lines and compelling narratives.

Both the 'Literacy through Drama' program and Vitsou and Kamaretsou's [38] 'Drama in Education' (DiE) approach, which aims to enhance peer collaboration for refugee background children in Greece, foreground the importance of strengths-based approaches

to linguistic diversity. Translanguaging—where language users employ the full range of their linguistic resources for learning [40]—provides the framework for this linguistically generative approach. The authors describe how learners participating in the drama programs were encouraged to exploit a range of communicative modalities such as gestures, posture, tone of voice, and facial expressions, and to use the full range of their linguistic repertoires, including as the medium for creating signs and labels to support improvisation. Vitsou et al. [36] foreground learner quotes that demonstrate the importance of this strengths-based approach to language, including one student's comment that: "Even though I don't speak Greek well, they understood what I was saying . . . through pantomime, movements . . . some English, some Kurdish . . . some Greek. We used all languages together . . . it was fun" (p. 48). Illustrating the students' agentic role within these communicative contexts, another learner is quoted as advising: "I taught [the] teachers Kurdish words and songs from Syria . . . I liked that . . . I like talking about my house in Syria, the school and my families' customs" (p. 53).

3.2. Articulating Experiences of Place and Identities

The projects included in this scoping study also share an emphasis on providing opportunities for learners with refugee backgrounds to utilise arts-based approaches to communicate about their countries of origin and their new surroundings as they navigate the challenges of resettlement. For instance, Wellman and Bey [39], who describe an eight-week after school art program for refugee background children in the United States, discuss a digital self-portrait project in which students were invited to "capture their environment through juxtaposing digital photographs of places and people" (p. 41). Learners were provided with digital cameras to document "textures and sites" (p. 41) in their local environment and then use software to modify the images to create digital self-portraits. Not only did this task involve valuable opportunities for embedded language learning, Wellman and Bey [39] note that the responsibility of managing the digital cameras and choosing the compositional elements featured in the self-portraits increased learner confidence and self-determination.

Likewise, McArdle and Tan [16], who describe an "arts as language" program for recently arrived children in Australia, also explore the value of self-portraits for learners to communicate important aspects of their identities and lives via digital stories. The authors note that self-portraits were selected as a means of allowing the students to "bring their own knowledge and interests to the task", explaining: "Since we started with something they know—themselves—they had much to say, and much to tell us" [16], p. 219. The program focused on synthesising image and text into digital portfolios, utilising a range of mediums including digital cameras and traditional book making. In capturing and manipulating images that represented important elements of their lives at school and beyond, the learners were provided with opportunities to communicate about their family, communities, and elements of their physical environment such as their homes, gardens, and animals. In exploring the images featured in the children's artwork, McArdle and Tan [16] point to research that suggests that flowers and gardens are often used to symbolise stability and connection with place for people with forced migration experiences [16,41].

This sense of place is also evident in Emert's [17,29,32,34] descriptions of various learning programs for refugee background elementary and middle school students in the United States. Each program focused on a different element of digital storytelling to "create an inviting, yet demanding, authentic language learning environment" [29], p. 34. Emert [32] describes how one program built toward a 'transpoemation' task in which "learners interact with a poem in a variety of ways, ultimately creating a digital animation" to express the central meanings (p. 357). After exploring the importance of metaphor and imagery, the children created their own poems in response to George Ella Lyon's poem, 'Where I'm From'. Using a concept termed "movies of the mind" [32,33], the learners read their poems to a partner, who shared the mental images evoked by the text. Students then

made any necessary amendments to their poems to help convey the intended imagery and used software to create a digital 'transpoemation'.

Through this activity, students were challenged with the task of integrating knowledge they had gained during the learning program, including understanding of literary devices and digital platforms for communication, to create animated poems about place featuring evocative imagery and music. While many of the students were unfamiliar with the software, Emert [32] describes how they were motivated to overcome this barrier in order to create transpoemations that articulated their understandings and experiences, explaining: "As they selected the text, the illustrations, and the music for their films, the students had the opportunity to develop intrapersonal insights and to encapsulate a meaningful cultural narrative to share with others" [32], p. 363. Emert [32] provides extracts from learners' draft writing, illustrating the poignancy of the resulting transpoemations including one learner's pronouncement: "I come from rain like monsoon" (p. 358).

3.3. Reflecting on the Navigation of Intercultural Spaces

The literature in our textual corpus also emphasises the importance of arts-based approaches to languages instruction for reflecting on the complexities, challenges, and opportunities of navigating intercultural spaces. In particular, the use of narrative is identified as a creative channel via which learners can draw meaning from their experiences. As Emert [17] remarks: "Storytelling—a skill that crosses cultures—is an apt strategy for working with language learners who are negotiating new social and educational terrain" (p. 413). Narrative-based approaches are presented as simultaneously allowing students to express their own voices and sense of self, and take on new identities and personas, as reflected by one of the learners in the 'Literacy through Drama' project in Greece who noted "I love being someone else and play with Aya in the puppet theatre" [36], p. 47. Narrative-based approaches are also presented as important opportunities for students to draw on their strengths, and, as Ohler [17,42] describes, "become heroes of their own learning adventures" (p. 9).

Emert [17] describes a literacy program that focused on navigating "old and new cultures", in which learners were invited to respond to a story about a child who was struggling to adapt to a new school. As Emert [17] explains, "This was a rich topic for these children, who, each day, experience cultural barriers to acceptance" (p. 404). Following reflection and brainstorming, the children were invited to write their own digital stories in which characters were faced with a dilemma. The learners then created interactive slides that allowed readers to take the central plot in different directions according to the characters' choices. Importantly, in developing these digital stories, the learners "had the opportunity to cast themselves as experts" and draw on their knowledge without having to "focus on the personal traumas they may have experienced" [17], p. 411.

Kennedy et al. [35] note how formal curricula may offer impoverished, reductionist, and/or "tokenized" representations of culture, instead arguing for deeper and more genuine engagement with notions of identities and intercultural interaction (p. 61). Focusing on the learning affordances of journal and poetry writing for English language learners undertaking fourth grade in the United States, Kennedy et al. [35] consider the experiences of two Chin refugee background learners from Burma, Grace and Sui, exploring the negotiation and construction of cultural identities within their writing. As the language teacher in Kennedy et al.'s [35] study explained: "I wanted the Chin students in our school to be able to share their stories in a way that no prompted writing essay would really address. Having gotten to know them well, I knew they all had amazing stories to tell and plenty to write about, if only given the space to write from their hearts" (p. 61).

Kennedy et al. [35] describe what they term "self-found poems" or the "literary equivalent of a collage" which is based on the idea of "found poetry" [35,43] in which learners identify others' key words and phrases that resonate with them and shape these into poems (p. 62). In self-found poetry, the learners draw on key parts of their own writing to synthesise into poetry [35]. Kennedy et al. [35] provide excerpts from the children's

self-found poems that illustrate their complex engagement with notions of cultural and linguistic identities, including Grace's declaration: "I'm bullied, because I speak different languages. I am also an American I know how to speak English" (p. 64). Through these self-found poems, "Engaging multiliteracies and multimodalism raised awareness of the many assets refugee youth brought with them, as well as the many challenges they experienced in their cross-cultural crossings" [35], p. 68. This agentic approach was identified as an important means of self-expression in which: "youth are able to author themselves, their voices, and their unique identities" [35], p. 57. In identifying how "English language learning has historically been a site of colonization", Kennedy et al. [35], p. 57, emphasise the importance of creating spaces that "honor learners' multimodal literacy practices and support their development and complication of organic identity expressions..." (p. 57).

3.4. Creating Connections between Home and School Language Practices

The research included in our scoping study also illustrates the value of arts-based engagement for establishing strong connections between home and school language practices. An important element of drawing on learners' existing language resources is to incorporate differentiated "entry points" [30], p. 307; see also [35] or pathways to engaging with the curriculum. For instance, in the 'Journeys from Images to Words' project, Arizpe et al. [30] worked with teachers and learners at a Glaswegian primary school to harness imagery as a communicative tool to support the children's engagement with literature that explores the theme of migration and journeys, including *The Rabbits* (2000), *Gervelie's Journey: A Refugee Diary* (2008), and *Boy Overboard* (2003).

Arizpe et al. [30] utilise a range of arts-based strategies to support the children's engagement with these texts, including Bednall et al.'s [44] concept of a 'River of Reading', which Arizpe et al. [30] describe as a "visual collage using the accessible metaphor of a river to represent children's reading outside of school, at home and in their local communities" (p. 311). The 'River of Reading' task provides learners with an opportunity to create a visual representation of the text types that are significant to them, such as extracts from comic strips and magazine articles to "buil[d] on the visual skills students brought from their experiences with familiar home and popular culture literacy practices" [30], p. 315.

Other visually mediated learning activities in the 'Journeys from Images to Words' project included the use of speech and thought bubbles, illustrations, and "narrative graphic strips" as multimodal responses to text (p. 313). The authors also describe the use of photojournals, where students were invited to "photograph elements of home life and organize them into collages in order to share events and stories in the classroom" [30], p. 313. Through engaging with texts that explore the topic of journeys and migration, the children had the opportunity to consider the complexities and emotional aspects of intercultural engagement, and ultimately to "explore the intercultural worlds we inhabit" (p. 308). Arizpe et al. [30] include learner quotes that indicate the importance of these educational experiences, with one child exclaiming: "I loved reading the books . . . It made me think about my family and our journey from Pakistan. It made me write my own journey story so that other people can know more about what can happen to families around the world" [30], p. 309.

Dunn et al. [31] describe an arts-based project focused on intercultural and multilingual encounters, that they implemented for children with refugee experiences attending an Australian primary school. Dunn et al. [31] created a series of lessons exploring the adventures of Rollo, a young robot who travelled from a distant planet and lost her dog, Sparky. Dunn et al. [31] describe how Rollo, played by a member of the research team, arrived in the classroom with no knowledge of English, inviting the children to determine which language she was using and why she needed help. Dunn et al. [31] explain: "Our purpose in positioning Rollo in this way, apart from creating opportunities for strong identification with her situation, was to provide opportunities for the children to be empowered as language experts, for all of them had more English than she did and were therefore positioned as teachers rather than learners" (p. 483).

Over the course of the project, additional characters were introduced to build on Rollo's story, incorporating new language via oral and digital text, such as Sparky the dog's email messages containing clues regarding his location. The children used a range of technologies to respond to these texts and to help shape the evolving story of Rollo, Sparky, and the other characters. As the collaborating teacher in this project articulated: "the children were developing both language and narrative competence as they lived a story rather than read a story" [31], p. 488. Noting the importance of considering the children's experiences with trauma when selecting the program content, Dunn et al. [31] explained "we wanted a character and a story that might offer some resonances to their own experiences but one that also provided sufficient emotional distance to ensure protection" (p. 483).

4. Discussion

The research in this scoping study provides important insights into the value of arts-based instructional approaches as differentiated "entry points" into language learning for children with refugee backgrounds [30,35]. These alternative and creative pathways into the curriculum are intended to build on learners' strengths and offer equitable opportunities for engaging with new knowledge. For instance, in discussing the importance of valuing children's home language practices and offering a range of creative, visually mediated ways of engaging with the curriculum, Arizpe et al. [30] observe "these strategies created a level playing field where students could construct meaning from the text and from their context by using their visual skills, home literacy practices and previous personal experiences" (p. 314).

However, these studies do not construct arts-based, multimodal engagement as simply a means of entry to more traditional approaches to language instruction. Rather, these projects recognise the inherent value of multimodal, artistic communicative forms and their "legitimacy and promise . . . as a powerful means of engaging marginalized students beginning with their strengths, not their deficits" [16], p. 212. Arizpe et al. [30] caution against considering "a movement from the coded image 'towards' the word" or a view "that words reflect more refined, higher order thinking", advising that "The images are useful because they act as cues and also have intrinsic value in themselves" (p. 318).

Overall, the authors included in this scoping study promote the value of arts-based language learning programs for expanding listening skills, oracy, vocabulary, and intercultural engagement. Further, most of the studies share a common emphasis on integrating digital modalities into arts-based instruction as an essential means of preparing refugee background children for 21st century communicative demands. The latter emphasis on digital literacy is identified as particularly important for learners who have encountered disruptions in access to formal education and opportunities for engaging with technologically mediated forms of communication. As McArdle and Tan [16] suggest "Any current understanding of lifeworlds and of social and cultural capital needs to take these new technologies into account" (p. 216).

4.1. Implications for Scholar-Practitioners

In addition to the key themes we have discussed, our engagement with the literature has identified important considerations for scholar-practitioners seeking to integrate arts-based approaches to languages education with learners from forced migration backgrounds. Firstly, while learners may encounter challenges when navigating traditional classrooms due to a lack of formal schooling experience, it should not be assumed that they will be any more acquainted with less structured educational approaches and/or arts-based learning activities see [31,36,39]. As with any classroom, it is important to provide clear expectations for learning in non-formal settings and seek community consultation regarding cultural appropriacy. Likewise, it may take some time for learners to realise that their languages and knowledges are genuinely valued in these educational spaces, both as educational

resources and as valuable sociocultural, linguistic, and epistemic repertoires in themselves see [30].

The literature also identifies the importance of collaborating with the appropriate discipline experts to ensure that arts-based approaches do not "become surface "busywork" [16], p. 216. In describing the 'Art as Language' program, McArdle and Tan [16] emphasise that "The arts were not separated from language learning, nor treated as a "trim" or as peripheral. We provided explicit instruction, both in English language development and artistic language, skills, and techniques" (p. 220). The research included in our scoping study identifies the importance of artists and teachers working together see [16], with Dunn et al. [31] noting the critical role of the classroom teacher in extending and reinforcing language learnt through the drama sessions. In fact, many of the studies in our textual corpus describe a planning phase prior to the arts-based interventions, in which classroom teachers, teaching assistants, visiting artists, and members of the research team consider the students' life experiences, and sociocultural, linguistic, and learning requirements to ensure the program will be responsive, engaging, and challenging see [16,32].

Another notable commonality in these projects is their culmination in an exhibition or performance for an audience of peers and/or family members. For example, Emert [32] describes how the 'transpoemation' project concluded in "a learning fair environment", that provided an important opportunity for alternative assessment, advising: "In teaching others what they had learned, the students were able to provide evidence of their own learning" within an "authentic social setting that invited them to cast themselves as experts" (p. 361). Such agentic roles affirm the value of students' epistemic and intercultural perspectives and provide a striking contrast to how "they are typically cast in the role of 'at-risk child'" [32], (p.363). Likewise, Vitsou et al. [36] describe how the 'Literacy through Drama' project was "completed with a theatrical performance by the children in front of their community and relatives back again in the camp", with one learner noting: "I really enjoyed our drama play at the end of the school year . . . all together we showed to our families what we did in the Greek school" (p. 47). Inviting an audience to attend a performance or exhibition of curated work can also help inform learners' creative choices throughout the program and offer authenticity to arts-based practice that is sometimes lacking in educational contexts [31]. However, as Wellman and Bey [39] observe, it is important to be sensitive to family members who may not feel comfortable or able to attend such exhibitions due to experiences of disenfranchisement, unfamiliarity with formal educational systems, or the challenges of resettlement.

Finally, while the literature discussed in our scoping study argues for the importance of meaningful language learning experiences in which students have opportunities to communicate about topics that matter to them, the authors also identify the need for caution when navigating content that may be triggering see [30,31]. Educators need to be prepared for the way that learners may "use art as a means for sharing, or working through their past experiences" [39], p. 38, and have the appropriate specialist supports in place to offer trauma-informed/healing focused assistance. Likewise, the complexities and nuances of navigating intercultural spaces and identities are important considerations. As Arizpe et al. [30] note: "While generating discussion of migration in the classroom is vital, a conscious effort must also be made to avoid treating new arrivals as ambassadors of a coherent, essentialized culture. This runs the risk of cementing their alterity by valuing migrants for their ability to represent difference, instead of valuing them for their more realistic, hybrid identities" (p. 319).

4.2. Potential Considerations for Future Research

Our engagement with this small yet robust corpus of research exploring arts-based approaches to languages instruction with learners from displacement backgrounds raises important questions regarding educator preparedness. As the research attests, successful implementation of arts-based programs of learning necessitates educator awareness of the potential instructional value of such approaches, and knowledge regarding ways to

embed these learning experiences within existing curriculum frameworks, facilitate classroom engagement, and collaborate with artists and discipline experts [16,29,31]. Further, understanding of trauma-informed and healing-focused instructional approaches is also essential to teacher preparedness. Wellman and Bey's [39] study of pre-service educators' experiences working on an eight-week after school arts program offers important insights into the potential to enhance professional preparation via involvement in such opportunities. Further research regarding educator preparedness to harness the benefits of arts-based forms of languages instruction when working with learners from displacement backgrounds could inform initial teacher education programs and future professional development opportunities.

It should also be noted that many of the projects featured in this scoping study take place in settings where there are fewer restrictions regarding curriculum content and assessment, such as after school programs or summer camps. While this flexibility is not always possible in more formal educational contexts, one potential approach is to create 'pockets' of less structured learning experiences during lessons, where the emphasis is on creativity and communication of meaning. As Kennedy et al. [35] suggest: "Shifting, even in small ways, toward a participatory model of learning that honors the cultural wealths and deep knowledges of all learners can have a positive impact on the learning experiences of refugee youth in the long term" (p. 67–68). Further research to document ways of incorporating arts-based interventions in more formal educational settings, perhaps even considering how such approaches might support languages assessment, could build on the foundational research discussed here and guide educational policy regarding inclusive practice for learners with disrupted formal education backgrounds.

Finally, while our intention in this research was to document the creative ways in which arts-based instructional practices are currently being employed in languages education for young learners with displacement backgrounds, we also wish to acknowledge the potential value of these approaches as research methods. As McArdle and Tan [16] note: "Arts experiences can prove a powerful means for generating rich data, sometimes making learning and thinking visible in a direct and immediate way, not available through more traditional research methods" (p. 216). Particularly in contexts where educators and learners have varying levels of proficiency in shared languages, such approaches can offer richer and more equitable means of engagement [16,30,45]. Each of the 12 studies included in our review deliberately elevates learner voices, for example through focus groups, student directed interviews, or textual artefacts, to evaluate and shape the learning program being described. These creative and student-centred ways of co-constructing educational experiences have great potential to inform inclusive practice in a range of learning contexts. We encourage interested practitioners to engage with the studies described here, both as a source of inspiration for arts-based instructional practices and as a means of exploring creative and innovative methods for research and program evaluation.

5. Conclusions: Co-Creating Spaces of Hope

Importantly, these accounts of arts-based, multimodal languages education foreground such approaches as a means of "restoring hope for a positive future" [36], p. 45, emphasising the potential for languages education to fortify and sustain learners experiencing the trauma and violence of displacement and the challenges of resettlement. The projects included in our scoping study share a common emphasis on honouring learners' knowledges, experiences, and understandings, and highlight the value of fun, interesting, and engaging educational experiences that elevate learner voices and build on existing strengths. Such approaches have the potential to offset the deficit constructions that refugee background learners may encounter in more traditional educational environments, providing culturally and linguistically inclusive and responsive learning spaces. Importantly, these studies also illustrate the need for high expectations and targeted opportunities for learners with forced migration experiences to engage with the complex and critical linguistic repertoires essential to 21st century communication.

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