


Chapter 8

Academic, Emotional, and Social Growth in the Second Language Classroom: A Study of Multimodality

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ABSTRACT

This study sought to understand the relationships between socioemotional learning (SEL), second language learning, and digital literacies, and specifically addresses multimodal instruction and composition. Twenty-two students in an intermediate high school French classroom were asked to read an authentic francophone novel and take on one character's persona by creating an Instagram post that reflected that character's viewpoint. Students shared their posts with the class, discussed connections to the novel, and reflected on their composition process. Three data sources were iteratively coded using inductive and deductive methods. The Four Resources Model was adapted for this activity and framed the analysis. Students showed evidence of humor and empathy which led to decreased language anxiety and improved socioemotional learning. The use of an authentic text and the integration of commonly used, real-world social media tools encouraged SEL and helped lower language anxiety. Recommendations and implications for instruction are discussed.

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INTRODUCTION

This chapter seeks to bring several different topics together in dialogue, namely digital literacies, second language (L2) learning, and socioemotional learning (SEL), to explore affordances for student learning as a whole. Digital literacies, particularly the use of multimodality, and L2 learning have often been researched in recent years. However, the interplay between L2 acquisition and SEL has not been well documented or researched, and the interplay between these three areas, not at all. In this chapter, multimodal instruction and composition in L2 learning will be explored.

The chapter begins by exploring previous research in the realm of L2 acquisition and SEL. Next, the authors conduct a close examination of an instructional activity, students' resulting work and reflections. Finally, recommendations and implications for instruction are summarized.

PREVIOUS RESEARCH

Multimodality and L2 Learning

Multimodality has become a much-researched topic since Kress & Van Leeuwen (2001) described multimodality as “the use of several semiotic modes in the design of a semiotic product or event” (p.20). Within the field of L2 learning, many researchers have theorized and performed research on the use of multimodality in the L2 classroom. Vigliocco, Pernis, and Vinson (2014) argue for a multimodal approach to the study of language learning, as face-to-face communication has always been multimodal, for example gesture and tone play an important role in communication, in addition to spoken words. Other researchers have highlighted that multimodal communication has become much more important in the digital age and have noted that the expansion of multimodal meaning-making should be accounted for in learning and teaching. Learning to read a webpage, for example, “means developing the skills to understand not only the text on the page, but the whole multimodal ensemble of writing, images, layout, graphics, sound, and hypertext links” (Hafner, Chick, & Jones, 2015 p.1).

When students are asked to read a text, it is therefore incumbent on the instructor to support not only their L2 development, but their understanding and interpretation the text. In fact, reading a multimodal text is often beneficial for learners as the other modes can scaffold understanding of the L2 (Plass et al., 1998; Royce, 2002). This is because, as Abraham and Farias (2017) state,

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