

Chapter 2


Critical Thinking through Multimodal Pedagogy: Exploring Immigration in Primary EAL

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ABSTRACT

*This study explores the integration of multimodal resources to develop critical thinking and multiliteracies among primary English as an Additional Language (EAL) students on the topic of immigration and refugees. Through a didactic intervention incorporating a sculpture, a picturebook (*The Capybaras*) and a video, students engaged in activities promoting empathy, social awareness, and critical reflection. Using the Pedagogy of Multiliteracies and the Learning by Design approach, students connected prior knowledge to new concepts, critically analyzing visual, auditory, and linguistic elements. Findings reveal that students significantly developed a critical perspective on immigration, demonstrated through discussions, empathy, and proposed alternatives. The multimodal resources facilitated a deeper understanding of refugee experiences, highlighting the importance of diverse modes of representation in fostering critical engagement. This research underscores the value of multimodal literacy in primary education for enhancing students' sociocultural awareness and critical thinking skills*

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INTRODUCTION

Education in the 21st century is undergoing constant transformation, driven by technological advancements and globalization, which have expanded the traditional boundaries of the classroom. Digitalization offers unprecedented access to information through multimodal resources such as videos, images, and written texts (Carrington, 2005). However, this abundance of data does not inherently lead to meaningful learning. Instead, it requires the development of critical thinking and decoding skills to select, organize, and process information effectively (Reyes-Torres & Portalés, 2020; Walsh, 2009).

Within this evolving educational context, the Pedagogy of Multiliteracies, introduced by the New London Group (1996), emerges as an innovative proposal to address current challenges by integrating multiple modes of communication—linguistic, visual, auditory, gestural, and spatial—into an active process of meaning-making known as *Learning by Design* (Cope & Kalantzis, 2015; Kalantzis & Cope, 2012).

By combining reflective learning with real-world experiences, this framework promotes a critical engagement that enables students to analyze and question their surroundings (Cope & Kalantzis, 2015; Zapata, 2022). Duncum (2004) highlights the dynamic and social nature of multiliteracies, incorporating emerging technologies and multimodal resources as essential tools in the teaching-learning process. In line with this perspective, learning an additional language goes beyond merely acquiring linguistic competencies to include the development of personal, intercultural, and social dimensions that empower students to participate actively and thoughtfully in a global society (Reyes-Torres et al., 2020). This approach surpasses conventional teaching methods by reconfiguring reading and writing as practices deeply interconnected with cultural and social analysis (Kern, 2000; Paesani et al., 2016; Tavares, 2024b).

Furthermore, this approach gains particular relevance in a global context marked by migration, armed conflicts, and refugee crises, phenomena that directly impact the educational sphere. Inclusive education, as emphasized by Moskal & North (2017), must ensure that all students, including minorities and refugees, have the opportunity to fulfill their potential without encountering barriers. In this regard, multimodal learning serves not only as a means of facilitating language acquisition but also as a catalyst for fostering critical literacy. It promotes empathetic and responsible citizens equipped to address contemporary challenges through a reflective and committed perspective (García Franco et al., 2022; Jiménez-Aleixandre & Puig, 2012).

This chapter explores how critical thinking and meaning making can be developed in the English as an Additional Language (EAL) classroom through a multimodal approach focused on immigration and refugees. A teaching sequence was implemented in a third-grade primary school class using the picturebook *The Capybaras*

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