Sparking the imagination: creative connectivity and emotional investment in language learning

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Google scholar searches for “language learning” and “emotion” and “creativity”

1999 2,190
2005 4,120
2015 13,000
2023 20,100

Riding a wave

Building on diverse interdisciplinary strands in SLA

* Building on diverse interdisciplinary strands in SLA
  e.g. the work of Barcelos (teacher beliefs), Benosch (using Ahmed’s ‘sticky objects’), Johnson & Golombek (Sociocultural perspectives; mindful teacher education), Pavlenko (emotions and bilingualism, auto/biographical perspectives), Kramsch (interculturality and the multilingual subject), Kubanyiova (aesthetic and ethical dimensions of language learning and teaching), Barkhuizen (narrative inquiry) …

(A shout out to)

First generation scholarship using ‘emotion’ in language learning and teaching


"Having read the book, I concur with the testimonial John B. Carroll gives on the first page: ‘If recommended to a foreign language teacher to read curled up by the fire on a rainy day, for meditation, entertainment, and renewal. If your teaching courses in foreign language education, ‘If you want sound educational and truly cerebral cognitivism? ... in foreign language teachers concerned with the importance of affective factors in language learning will find support for their point of view.” (p. 504)


DFG’s Transdisciplinary Framework for SLA in a Multilingual World

Emotions drive every level of “The Multirelated Nature of Language Learning and Teaching”, even if not discussed explicitly at each of the “The macro level of ideological structures”. I.e.

- Belief Systems
- Cultural Values
- Political Values
- Religious Values
- Economic Values

... are emotional regimes
We all know there’s a ‘crisis’ but …

Modern foreign languages in England – the search for a ‘method’

- Neo-liberal, ideologically driven ‘knowledge’ agenda
- Unprecedented government intervention through ‘centres for excellence’, and adherence is imposed through inspection and performance tables
- Rigid methods that promulgate “processing instruction”

“Language learning in England: why curriculum reform will not reverse the decline or narrow the gaps” (Joana Cardim-Dias, Education Policy Institute)

The problem is framed as one of ‘method’ rather than ‘principle’

The classroom as an instructional space

- Not just in K12 settings, but in adult classrooms e.g. for migrant ESOL students where learning the national language is tightly geared to citizenship rights
- Teachers are cast as “brokers of citizenship charged with promoting ‘British values’ and they are also trainers in employability” (Dearden, p. 247)
- Individuals are called into becoming a subject (Foucault) as a ‘learner’, a ‘speaker of another language’, a ‘recipient of lexico-structural knowledge’
- “Language learners are not just communicators and problem solvers, but whole persons with hearts, bodies and minds, with memories, fantasies, loyalties, identities” (Kramsch, 2006, p. 251)
Creativity: a false friend?


The spirit of ‘emotional engagement’ and ‘creative pedagogies’, rooted in ancient wisdom

“The correct analogy for the mind is not a vessel that needs filling, but wood that needs igniting — no more — and then it motivates one towards originality and instils the desire for truth”


“The mind in creation is as a fading coal, which some invisible influence, like an inconstant wind, awakens to transitory brightness” (Shelley, 1821, 53)

A Romantic’s view

“The IMAGINATION … dissolves, diffuses, dissipates, in order to re-create; or where this process is rendered impossible, yet still at all events it struggles to idealize and to unify. It is essentially vital, even as all objects (as objects) are essentially fixed and dead. (p. 205)

A scientist’s view

[Citing Leo Szilard] “Logical thinking and an analytical ability are necessary attributes to a scientist, but they are far from sufficient for creative work. Important insights and even the very notion of a breakthrough were not logically derived from preexisting knowledge. The creative processes on which the progress of science is based operate on the level of the subconscious. Jonas Salk has forcefully articulated the same insight and proposed that creativity rests on an ‘imbuing of intuition and reason.’” (p. 189)


Vital force? What about structure?

Blake: believed we need to reconcile these opposing forces

Biesta: critique of the “humanist idea of a certain kind of subject who has an inherent potential to become self-motivated and self-directing”


CONNECTIVITY

‘Emotional investment’ and creativity are connected to the repertoire concept and are inherent in all discourse

“The primary means of cultivating and maintaining relationships with others and establishing intersubjective understandings is through the activity of communicating and assigning meaning to particular emotional states, behaviours and stances” (Prior 216, p. 31).


Emotions and creativity come together through ‘imagination’—making sensory connections
Reframing language as a plurilingual repertoire to extend teacher and learner cognition. We are carriers of language and culture.


Memories of a school trip
What's in a name? Illustrating names as autobiographical expressions of social and cultural identities

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M9hR-LQ0xOE&t=6s

Found in translation

→ German: Sturmfrei (when parents are away and you have the house to yourself)
→ French: frileux-euse (adjective describing someone who feels the cold easily. Also exists in Spanish as frílaco/a)
→ French: flâneur (person strolling around a city in an aimless, cool and aloof manner as observer of urban society)
→ Spanish: el entrecejo (the space between both eyebrows)

Artefacts to generate descriptions of ‘feeling’ sensations

Emotion words of describing, feeling, place, imagined relations
Drawing and sculpting sounds

Mapping emotion words in different languages onto body portraits

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Some ways to encourage putting emotional engagement and creativity at the heart of the research (and advocacy) agenda

- Introducing the expanded concept of repertoire. Being a ‘language person’ (Colin Evans) in new ways, by mobilising and reconfiguring the resources of our linguistic repertoire.
- Building confidence to be brave (the courage to create) and freeing preconceptions about what it means to be creative (“creative self-efficacy”, Tierney).
- Asking teachers and learners to consider their own experience (auto/biographical subjectivities).
- Acknowledging the historical perspective, including situating oneself in the broader ideological landscape.
- Questioning the metaphors we use.
Summary and further thoughts

- Advocacy arguments may not work if the benefits are abstracted from the immediate reality of the learner. Current advocacy arguments don’t go far enough.
- Cognitive science research is a very broad church, and has been selectively co-opted by this government to prescribe a particular model.
- There are other metaphors for learning: questioning the metaphors we use.
- Principle arches over method (so what wider principle is underpinning this action?)
- Ways to ease "epistemological loneliness" (atomised, disembodied, decontextualised) include: to incorporate 'content' alongside language through initiatives such as CLIL, cultural learning, arts-based activities, project-based tasks.
- We are all carriers of language and culture: bridging between different subjectivities e.g. through auto/biographical and other first-person work.
- The 'courage to create' can help sow seeds. Creativity = reconfiguring in new ways for fresh perspectives.

"It will not be obvious to everyone that one becomes a better teacher by describing things differently, rather than by prescribing a different course of action. [...] what makes students decide to invest time and energy in studying a foreign language is not the information the teacher gives them, but the little epiphanies experienced along the way that are often totally beyond the awareness and control of their teachers. These epiphanies are caused by unexpected ways of seeing or saying, not primarily by more efficient ways of doing things or by increased amounts of information."

(Kramsch, 1995, pp. ix-x)