

University of Nebraska - Lincoln

DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln

Faculty Publications: Department of Teaching, Learning and Teacher Education Department of Teaching, Learning and Teacher Education

3-13-2021

The Interplay of Emotion, Cognition, and Learning in the Language Classroom

Aleidine J. Moeller

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/teachlearnfacpub>



Part of the [Curriculum and Instruction Commons](#), and the [Teacher Education and Professional Development Commons](#)

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Department of Teaching, Learning and Teacher Education at DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln. It has been accepted for inclusion in Faculty Publications: Department of Teaching, Learning and Teacher Education by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln.

1

The Interplay of Emotion, Cognition, and Learning in the Language Classroom

Aleidine J. Moeller

University of Nebraska-Lincoln

Challenge Statement

Emotions are inextricably linked to our actions, behaviors, and dispositions. To promote deeper learning, emotion and cognition must be in sync to maximize learning. How can we connect our learners' emotions in ways that fully capitalize on the interplay with cognition and engages them in the language learning process?

Abstract

This article seeks to broaden the discourse on world language teaching to take a more holistic view of learning and teaching that supports and promotes the integration of feeling and thinking. A summary of the research on the role of emotions in learning is documented and classroom examples are provided that demonstrate ways to integrate emotional learning designed to optimize language learning. When positive emotions are activated, learners allocate more cognitive effort to the learning tasks and display a greater sense of efficacy. By creating a positive, caring classroom climate filled with meaningful and challenging learning tasks, learners can experience a sense of joy of learning.

Learning is dynamic, social, and context dependent because emotions are, and emotions form a critical piece of how, what, when, and why people think, remember, and learn.

–Mary Helen Immordino-Yang - *Emotions, Learning and the Brain*

2 *One Vision—Multiple Perspectives*

How can we connect our learners' emotions to world language and culture learning in a way that fully capitalizes on the interplay with cognition and engages them in the intellectual work of their classes? Which strategies can maximize emotions for our students in order to enhance their language learning? What are ways that language teachers can understand and leverage emotions more productively in the classroom?

In an era of high stakes testing, the role of connection, belonging, and caring may seem like a low priority, but recent research in the fields of neuroscience, psychology, and education has revealed the critical impact of emotions in learning. Emotions influence our actions, our behavior, and how we learn. Feeling emotionally connected to one's peers, teacher, and content is especially crucial in a world language classroom where learners often report feeling overwhelmed and anxious. How do we connect learners in ways that promote social belonging, curiosity, and inquiry in the language classroom? Such characteristics are above all emotional skills that promote social interactions that connect learners with content and material in ways that motivate and engage them. These emotional skills positively impact learners' disposition toward learning and, as demonstrated in the research, ultimately result in greater learning. This article explores ways teachers can harness emotion to cognitively and pedagogically promote learner engagement and enhance language and cultural proficiency.

Pedagogical Significance of Emotions

Research has revealed that the single most important strategy that teachers can use to help learners succeed in our classrooms is to care about them as learners and as human beings: "to be effective, teachers must connect with and care for children with warmth, respect, and trust" (Bergin & Bergin, 2009, p. 150). Researchers call such an approach *pedagogical caring*, as its effects are both greater emotional engagement and higher academic achievement. Hawk and Lyons (2008) define pedagogical caring as:

...a repertoire of skills and dispositions that enhance the pedagogical relationship, a portfolio of pedagogical activities that offer guided participation and practice, and scaffolding approaches to help our students become more competent in the content and skills of the course, more self-directed in their learning, more cultivating of the value of relationships, and more capable in modeling an ethic of care to others (p. 324).

Such strategies ensure greater emotional attachment to the education context and higher academic achievement.

Noddings (2013) reminds us that a teacher works with a student "directly but not equally" (p. 186) as supported in Vygotsky's theory of zone of proximal development where the role of the mentor is to guide the mentees to reach their potential (1980). The relationship between the mentor and mentee is both cognitive and emotional as both depend on one another to successfully navigate the end goal. Emotion and cognition depend on one another in complex ways.

Fuller (2006) found that when our emotions are stimulated, they play a pivotal role in directing cognitive attention and resources to the content we are studying. Immordino-Yang (2016), a leading expert in emotions and learning, states, “Emotions act as a kind of ‘rudder’ for cognition, one that drives the direction of our thinking and also alters our cognitive processes in ways that are sometimes productive and sometimes just the opposite” (2016, p. 33).

Engagement with our emotions is fundamental for optimizing learning in the classroom (Eyler, 2018). Thinking and feeling need one another. Scoffham and Barnes (2011) note that, “within the full register of emotions experienced by humans, happiness is a positive force which enriches our sense of meaning, enhances our capabilities and enlarges the scope of our thinking” (p. 547). How can we promote this feeling of happiness in our language classroom that maximizes learning and engagement?

Building a World Language Happiness Climate

Displaying our own joy and enthusiasm creates an atmosphere and affective tone that cultivates learning. Where is the emotional hook in the material that connects the learners’ lives and their emotional responses to the learning? Setting the stage and creating a welcoming learning environment is crucial. For example, as students walk into language class, they are greeted by the teacher and welcomed into the classroom with an upbeat song playing in the target language as the video is streaming on the screen. On the whiteboard the words What, Who, When, Where, also in the target language, are listed next to the screen. The students know that whoever can name the band, when they were popular, the genre of music, and what the song is about, will get speaking points. Of course, the earlier they arrive in the classroom, the more time they will have to look up the answers on the Google site of the target culture. Skimming and scanning for information to extract the necessary answers creates a positive competitive learning environment that builds enthusiasm among class members. They are cognitively engaged and ready to share their results. The stage and tone have been set through the emotional appeal of the music, and the learning connected to the task/material builds on the positive, emotionally upbeat environment that has been created.

As the bell rings, the teacher asks volunteers to come to the front and fill in their responses to the who, what, when, and where questions while students at their desks prepare to add on to that list. This activity allows for an opportunity to explore a variety of perspectives, all of which allow the teacher to better understand the learners’ background knowledge and affords the learners the opportunity to see the diversity of possible responses—underscoring that there may not be one clear answer. To promote voice and choice in the classroom, the teacher can administer a quick [Poll Everywhere](#) to determine how well the students like the song and if this particular musical genre should be used again in future language lessons. An open-ended question requesting suggestions for musical genres or specific songs can additionally create a feeling of partnership in the learning process.

Barker (2017) notes that when we “remove people’s emotional connection to their work and treat them merely as machines that produce effort, it’s soul killing”

(2017, p. 87). The emergence and expansion of the testing culture has had a negative washback effect on classroom instruction, often resulting in teaching to the test. When the sole purpose of learning becomes a grade or test score, something that feels impersonal or external to self, it appears meaningless to learners. Learners then experience a lack of motivation for excelling and putting their full energy and time into the learning process. Noddings (2003), whose research expertise lies in caring and education, reminds us that education is fundamentally about students, not only passing on of information. Putting students at the center of learning leads to “intrinsic interest or trust and admiration for the teacher” which causes greater investment in learning on the part of the learner (2003, p. 185).

In the language classroom, too often the focus is still on teaching grammar and vocabulary, learning about language rather than what one can actually do with language. The learning tasks must be purposeful and meaningful to the learner to ensure a connection to the content and to maintain motivation (Dörnyei, 2001). Teachers can foster personal connections by providing clear short- and long-term performance-based learning goals that allow learners to see their language progress and reflect on how well they are able to perform the learning task, leading to self-regulation (Moeller et al., 2012; Ziegler & Moeller, 2012). In addition, by providing learners the opportunity to choose how they want to demonstrate successful performance of a learning objective, motivation is increased that can lead to higher achievement.

Purposeful Learning and Accomplishment

Scholars in the field prioritize the ability to set goals and the development of self-discipline to attend to these goals as keys to finding joy in learning. When learners experience small successes, there is motivation to continue investing effort resulting in successful achievement of desired ends (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997; Dörnyei, 1994; 2001). Personalized learning goals allow for voice and choice on the part of the learner and provide the much-needed purpose in a learning task. Moeller et al. (2012) found that when students had the ability to set their own goals, their achievement in Spanish skills in reading, writing, speaking, and listening improved significantly.

The NCSSFL/ACTFL Can-Do Statements (2017) provide the performance goals in learner-friendly terms aimed at ensuring and assessing proficiency gains over time. These Can-Do Statements can be personalized by the students to enhance motivation in completing learning tasks. For example, a teacher may require that learners demonstrate how they can introduce themselves in a variety of social contexts using appropriate verbal and non-verbal communication. The teacher is intentional about providing the tools and strategies to meet standards (Can-Do Statements) and to build conceptual scaffolding in students so they can use this to build knowledge to accomplish these learning goals themselves. The learners have the option to choose a formal or informal introduction and determine how they will demonstrate achievement of this task.

For example, perhaps a student would like to introduce himself to the exchange student from Spain, someone he has wanted to know for some time

(purpose, meaningful, authentic). As he creates an action plan to carry out an introduction, the steps required to successfully navigate an introduction become clear. The student has to determine how to greet her. A handshake? A wave? Is there a physical gesture that accompanies the opening greeting? What is the appropriate non-verbal gesture? Does he greet her formally, or informally? What vocabulary and phrases will he need to know as well as the appropriate grammar structures? What topics will be appropriate to address? Is it appropriate to ask her out for coffee? The complexity of the task required in carrying out such an introduction poses challenges, but because the task has purpose and meaning to the learner, the effort will be put forth. How will the student indicate he successfully navigated an introduction? Perhaps he can ask the exchange student to sign a note indicating the introduction occurred, or have the exchange student record a quick voice mail or text message on his cell phone in Spanish indicating he was successful in his task. Students feel empowered when the task at hand is purposeful and meaningful to their authentic lived life and when they have a voice in what and how they learn and how they demonstrate their learning. The challenges of the task are met with motivation as the goal is meaningful to the learner. The feeling of success experienced by the learner is empowering and is a source of true joy at having accomplished this task. Personal emotional attachment, social engagement, and investment by an individual provide the all-important meaningfulness of the task. When we are emotionally engaged and exerting effort, we can truly experience the joy in our work (Barker, 2017, p. 90).

Teacher-Student Connection

Evidence suggests that strong teacher-student relationships predict greater knowledge, higher test scores, and greater academic motivation. In a study of sixth to eighth graders who believed that their teacher cared about them, the learners were more motivated to try hard and pay attention in class, and they earned higher grades (Wentzel, 1997). Among school-age children, the effect size of teacher-student relationships is larger than most educational innovations or curriculum changes (Cornelius-White, 2007).

Cozolino (2013) found that “supportive, encouraging, and caring relationships stimulate students’ neural circuitry to learn, priming their brains for neuroplastic processes. (p. 17).” Positive teacher-student relationships are especially crucial for low achievers. Hamre and Pianta (2001) conducted a longitudinal study that indicated that relationship problems with kindergarten teachers predicted maladjustment in later years in schooling and was strongest for boys, African-Americans, children with poor verbal ability and children with initial behavior problems. At-risk children who developed positive relationships with teachers were less likely to develop later behavior problems at school.

Cavanagh (2016) identifies three key elements that define emotion: “feelings, physiology, and expression.” These elements work together to form an affective, emotion-laden experience. When we are happy, our eyes sparkle, we produce a smile, and our body posture communicates joy. Together these components form an emotion. Neuroscience has shown that when we are happy, we release

dopamine into the blood stream that causes elation which we now know enhances cognition and learning (Wanzer et al., 2010).

As an elective content area, in order to ensure growth and sustainability of the world language program, teachers must find ways to recruit and retain students. One of the most effective teaching tools is showing our own enthusiasm for our subject matter. Displaying our own joy creates an atmosphere of happiness that cultivates learning. Teachers can promote affective responses to learning by making emotional connections to the course material and content. If students feel little or no connection to the knowledge they learn in school, the academic content will seem emotionally meaningless to them (Immordino-Yang, 2016). By creating interactive, collaborative learning tasks that appeal to the learners, teachers can spark emotional reactions that engage learners cognitively in the content.

For example, the teacher might place a poster of an art work in each corner of the classroom, each representing a different period of art. Students select the one that they are drawn to (limiting five-six per painting) and as a group are asked to create a list of vocabulary that describes the painting. Building on the vocabulary list, each group is asked to construct five sentences describing the painting. These descriptions are recorded on strips of paper and placed in a container. Once all groups have completed their sentences, students in pairs draw three descriptions from the container and must negotiate and decide to which painting the description belongs. They present their results to the class and a discussion is led by the teacher to further explore details and gather additional ideas from their peers. The strips of paper are placed on the painting when the class comes to consensus in matching the descriptors with the appropriate painting. Once all pairs have participated, the class is divided into four groups and are asked to prepare a presentation on the painting of their choosing. The teacher provides a rubric indicating elements that must be included in the presentation (e.g. description of painting, genre, painter). The teacher offers optional presentational formats such as a digital poster, podcast, video, narrative via online collaborative document, or one of their own choosing. Expressing preferences, supporting opinions, and describing products are all important language functions that are practiced within the context of a topic of their own liking. To connect and extend the learning to the community, equipped with language and knowledge, the students might be asked to identify and describe their favorite painting in the local art museum, create a digital poster that describes the painting and its importance in the art collection. Such a learning task can also be used with music, books or movie genres. By demonstrating the relevance of the content to their own lives, a positive climate is created in which students can experience a kind of joy in learning. Such collaborative activities organized in socially connected environments (pair work, small group, large groups) evoke emotional responses that play a particularly important role by enhancing memory (Cavanagh, 2016).

Creating a Learning Climate of Belonging

Much scholarly research has focused on the social dynamics underpinning achievement by examining the impact of a student's sense of social belonging.

Researchers have found that social connectedness predicts positive outcomes in academic achievement (Bandura, 1977; Vygotsky, 1980; Jennings & Greenberg, 2009; Dörnyei, 1994). Building a culture of belonging means all students feel comfortable and welcomed. Humans are social creatures who seek to bond with others (Gamble et al., 2014; Schultz & Dunbar, 2010) and strive for social belonging—it promotes motivation. This phenomenon is nowhere more evident than in the social media that has taken the world by storm. Sharing stories, feelings, events, sadness, and joy in the public sphere has become a near obsession. How do we harness this to have the same impact in the language classroom?

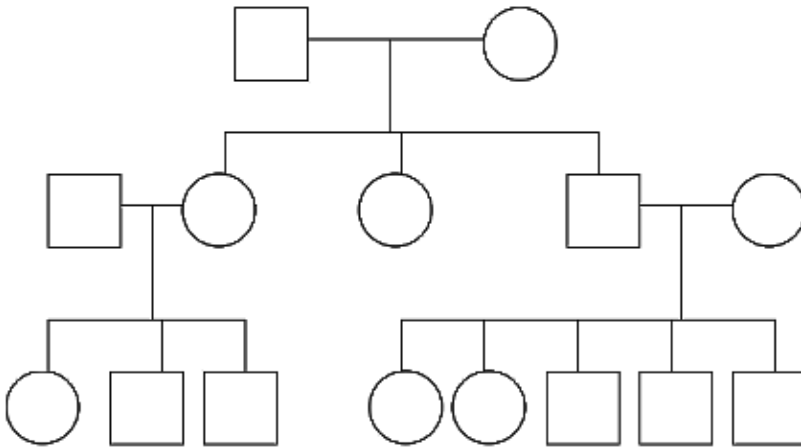
Achor (2011) posits that relationships are key to happiness and that social connection is the greatest predictor of happiness. Jennings and Greenberg (2009) suggest that instructors promote “prosocial and cooperative behaviors through establishing warm and supportive relationships and communities” (p. 506). The teaching-learning relationship is rooted in social bonding. Social connections provide a sense of belonging that is crucial for emotional well-being. Learners thrive when they can communicate with each other through activities that harness emotion for pedagogical gain. When students get to know each other and to trust their peers, a climate is fostered that is conducive to learning and productive social interactions. When students feel they belong, retention, progression and graduation rates improve.

The language classroom offers innumerable opportunities for interpersonal, collaborative work in a variety of groupings that include pair work, small group, or large group learning tasks. Language learning requires a variety of modes of communication that include interpersonal, interpretive and presentational skills. Returning to the opening song activity noted above, the music sets the emotional tone and immediately engages the learners cognitively in the content through the who, what, when, and where learning activity. An additional task may have learners work in pairs to identify a title for the song they heard. Such a collaborative activity promotes creativity allowing those learners who are Word Smart and Music Smart (Gardner, 2011) to shine. The teacher can choose to distribute the lyrics of the song divided into stanzas to small groups of students who are asked to identify which emotion the stanza evokes and to highlight the words that support their decision. The combination of music, collaborative work, and the engaging learning task spark curiosity in a low affective learning climate that maximizes cognitive engagement. Such activities are aimed to pique curiosity, promote sociality/collaborative learning, introduce learning through meaningful, authentic materials, that provide the much-needed joy in learning. Research has confirmed that these learning approaches and strategies evoke positive emotional responses that have demonstrated higher achievement.

Genuine happiness involves engagement in meaningful activity, connection to other people, a sense of purpose, having a voice and choice, and the ability to experience and feel joy (Brighouse, 2005; Noddings, 2003; Seligman, 2012). How do we rekindle that joy of learning where the journey is the focus and not the grade, where the rewards become insignificant and the work itself provides its own powerful incentive?

One of the most important sources of happiness is immersion in a meaningful and complex activity, such as learning a language within the context of a classroom. When learners find meaning in the work, the level of involvement is significantly increased. Csikszentmihalyi (1997) uses the term *flow* to describe the total exertion and immersion in a task—a state in which one becomes unaware of time, becomes totally immersed and involved in the activity at hand. Brown's (1997) research revealed that when learners have control over what and how they are learning, they are more interested and the learning is more deeply seated, what Bruner (1960) calls *agency*. Erikson (1993) underscores the importance of being included and feeling a sense of belonging, but notes that we must also feel that what we do matters, a goal worth struggling for. This correlates with Duckworth's (2016) focus on what she dubs *grit*, that is, purpose, effort, and engagement underscoring that effort matters more than ability.

Figure 1. Graphic for Family Problem-Solving Task



Problem-solving tasks have been shown to increase social connections, deeper learning, and higher achievement (Dominowski & Bourne Jr., 1994). The following problem-solving task requires learners to work together to successfully create a family tree. In groups of four, students are provided a graphic of a family tree. The circles indicate female family members and the squares are males. Each of the four students in each group are given two or three sentences that describe, in the target language, the relationship of an individual in the family tree (for example: *Oliver has one brother and one sister*). Students may only communicate their descriptors orally, and they are not allowed to simply share the written texts. One of the group members serves as the recorder who fills in the information as the activity progresses. This activity requires critical and strategic thinking and positive collaboration. The group works their way through the descriptions to determine the relationships of the various family members and records these on the family tree. The task is quite complex, requires constant interaction with group

members, and offers just the right amount of challenge that requires persistence to complete the task. Muddling through to solve the puzzle builds social connections among the learners as each contributes to a common goal. The savvy students quickly catch on that beginning with the grandparents will provide a good foundation and reduce the number of possible options. This problem-solving task meets all the criteria for emotional well-being and cognitive engagement that increases motivation and learning: positive interdependence, promotion of interaction, individual and group accountability, development of teamwork skills, and group processing. Figure 1 and Table 1 provide the graphic and descriptors for this problem-solving task.

Table 1 contains the descriptors, one set for each member in the group, that are used in this task. For lower level classes, these can be written in the target language. For more advanced language learners, using English increases the challenge.

Table 1. Prompts for Family Problem-Solving Task

Andrea is Matthew and Stephanie's aunt. Susanne's grandmother is Alexandra.
Peter's grandfather is Fritz. Paul is Ralph's uncle and Peter's father. Fritz is Paul's father.
Oliver has one brother and one sister. His sister is Nicole. Nicole's cousin is Peter.
Paul has two sisters. One (Andrea) is not Nicole's mother. Claudia is Oliver's aunt. Steven's aunt is Sabine and his uncle is Martin.

As students struggle to solve the problem, they have to rely on their peers and must negotiate through trial and error. The social, emotional and cognitive engagement in such an activity is off the charts, there is laughter, positive reinforcement of one another, and bonding as all work together to successfully complete the puzzle. Bandura (1977) and Vygotsky (1980) underscore that teaching and learning is primarily a social interaction. Learning takes place in a social space, the classroom. We are learning with and from one another. Our social nature drives our learning most especially when we discover new knowledge and seek to communicate this with others. The interplay of learning and teaching in the classroom drives learner motivation and sparks curiosity when learners are fully engaged in the learning process. When learning becomes its own reward, learners experience a sense of joy and happiness that transforms work to pleasure.

The connection between our nature as social beings and the emotions that give our interactions meaning has significant impact on student learning, as emotions are very much connected to our cognitive processes. Vygotsky (1980) notes our ability to learn individually is quite limited. Eventually we need other

people to reach our full potential as learners. The social element of education is not optional but necessary if students are to succeed. Creating a healthy learning climate where students want to learn, where they become intrinsically motivated, and where their learning becomes intrinsically rewarding requires that teachers understand the conditions that can make this happen. As Csikszentmihalyi (1997) recommends:

[Teachers must be] sensitive to students' goals and desires, and they are thus able to articulate the pedagogical goals as meaningful challenges. They empower students to take control of their learning; they provide clear feedback to the students' efforts without threatening their egos and without making them self-conscious. They help students concentrate and get immersed in the symbolic world of the subject matter.

It is important, as seen in the example above, that learning tasks involve interaction with others as this develops the cognitive abilities through collaboration with peers. Working collaboratively promotes a sense of belonging and promotes social development.

Humor, Play, and Storytelling

Humor is a universal phenomenon that evokes amusement and an emotional response such as laughter or smiles (Chen & Martin, 2007). However, while humor is universal, it is also culturally specific. Martin & Ford (2018) note “there are important different cultural influences on the way humor is used and the situations that are considered appropriate for laughter” (p. 30). For example, Westerners regard humor as something positive and as a natural source of amusement (Apte, 1985). Easterners, specifically in China, do not necessarily regard humor as a desirable trait as they stress seriousness and see humor as potentially diminishing their social status (Redowicz & Yue, 2002; Yue & Hui, 2011, 2015). It is important to understand how humor is viewed and the types and sorts of humor used in the culture and language under study. Humor can take many forms such as physical, self-deprecating, word-play, parody, satire, and topical. Language teachers can introduce culturally authentic videos that serve as examples of humor reflective of the culture under study and have learners compare the use of humor to their own culture. Such an intercultural activity can serve to expand learners' perspectives on what is regarded as funny and entertaining, as well as when and in which social contexts humor is appropriate. By examining such cultural practices learners can understand the underlying values of a culture through the lens of humor.

At the classroom level, humor is used to enhance classroom joy, to develop a sense of community, but is most effective when it is content related. Humor and amusement have considerable physiological benefits some of which are tied to cognition (Berk, 1996). Humor is a means to reduce anxiety, learn more effectively, and help learners to perform their best (Berk, 1996). A significant body of research explains why we remember things that make us laugh. Humor is critical in thought, communication and social interaction (Goel & Dolan, 2001). Studies in neuroscience reveal that humor systematically activates the brain's dopamine

reward system (Goel & Dolan, 2001) while studies in cognitive science show that dopamine is important for both goal-oriented motivation and long-term memory (Wise, 2004). Educational research confirms that humor, when effectively used as an intervention, improves retention in students of all ages (Banas et al., 2011).

In order to fully understand a joke, or humorous cartoon, we have to use more of our cognitive resources. Simply put, we have to put forth more effort and attention to discourse features to get the joke. Cavanagh (2016) notes:

In the presence of humor, students detect and then have to resolve the incongruity between the original expectations and the humorous twist. This process of making one interpretation and then having to revise it, results in a deeper level of mental processing than being exposed to the correct interpretation from the beginning. One is required to relate the information to more than one set of concepts and ideas, to reflect and elaborate on both the meaning of the initial interpretation and the revised interpretation (2016, p. 75).

Humor can be integrated in the language classroom by introducing humorous images related to course content, or it can serve as a context for a lesson. Students can be asked to provide a caption for a novel visual in the target language that captures the humor in the image. These images, or humorous captioned images (memes), evoke laughter and amusement and bring out the creativity in students while promoting a positive, enjoyable learning environment. Connecting images and the target language, or binding, promotes deeper learning and higher retention and reduces anxiety in the classroom. Telling a joke in the target language in the form of a story as an opening activity garners learners' attention, evokes laughter, and serves as a great source of interpretive communication. Learners particularly remember outrageous stories that have a humorous element. Humor builds community through shared laughter and connects us as we join in collective fun and enjoyment. Lewis et al. (1990) suggest that the "positive emotions expressed during learning (e.g. interest, surprise, joy) are likely to reflect active cognitive engagement with the contingency, 'mastery,' and a sense of efficacy" (p. 748).

Games are an immense source of social and cognitive engagement. Games are engaging, fun and learners are more likely to invest time in play and games because they are intrinsically motivated out of genuine interest and excitement. Games engage us with challenges and as Csikszentmihalyi (1997) notes, they are designed to produce flow, when, learners literally are learning without realizing it. Csikszentmihalyi's (1997) research revealed that flow is most efficiently reached by a combination of self-chosen goals, personally optimized obstacles, and continuous feedback that make up the essential structure of gameplay. Language games that create a positive competitiveness among a group of learners builds knowledge and social connections in the context of a lesson.

An example of a game that demonstrates Csikszentmihalyi's criteria for flow is an activity titled *Numbered Heads Together*. Students are divided into groups of four, each individual in each group is given a number, either 1, 2, 3, or 4. This task is particularly useful as a review of learning that has occurred during a unit,

or lesson. The teacher poses a question or problem, based on a topic related to the curriculum. All members in the group discuss the question for one minute, each one contributing an idea, answer or solution. The group then has to agree on which idea, answer or solution will be their group answer. The teacher calls out a number randomly 1-4. Students with that number respond for their group, no consultation with peers allowed, and record their response on a whiteboard. Once the teacher signals, the students raise the whiteboards containing the responses. All correct answers are recorded and the team with the most positive responses is rewarded. This activity is team building, promotes peer learning, provides immediate feedback, and requires deeper processing of the information to enhance memory. Such an activity combines emotion and cognition that improves learning in a low affective learning environment through an interactive communicative task that builds social connections.

Storytelling is another particularly effective strategy in language classrooms. It serves as a vital source of language input, follows a structured narrative or story logic, entertains through role play, and makes use of language, images, and sounds. Stories can incorporate physical gestures and animated voices, and they can be acted out to entertain. Authentic stories from the target culture can relate moral values and cultural perspectives that evoke positive emotional responses. Willingham (2009) suggests stories “are treated differently in memory than other types of material (p. 67).” As Cozolino (2013) states, “[stories] connect us to one another, help to shape our identities, and serve to keep our brains integrated and regulated. The human brain co-evolved with storytelling, narrative structure, and the tale of the heroic journey as told in cultures throughout the world” (2013, p. 17).

When teachers use narrative structure, they enhance learner memory, and learners can follow the action more easily, especially when accompanied by images. Using the target language only, together with gestures, tone, enthusiasm and the aid of images, the teacher can involve learners in a mini language immersion experience that allows learners to experience how well they can comprehend and follow the story line without having to understand every word. For example, when teaching prepositions, the teacher can make use of story through images. The teacher starts by preparing and presenting a series of images that tell a story. As the teacher narrates each new episode in the story, an image is projected on the screen to aid comprehension.

In one story, the teacher, in the role of storyteller, begins by projecting the image of a mouse in a hole in the wall who is clearly hungry. The mouse is tempted to follow the smell of cheese on the dining room table, but fears the cat that lives in the house. The mouse decides to risk it, jumps on the chair, onto the sofa, onto the lamp, then the table. Suddenly the cat appears, the mouse runs back into the hole. Close call. The mouse is still hungry . . . waits until the cat falls asleep under the sofa. The mouse quietly sneaks into the living room, into the dining room, jumps on the chair, then the sofa, the lamp, and then the table. Enjoying the first bite of his bounty, the cat appears, snatches him up, and where is the mouse? In the cat. The end. The unexpected ending draws an emotional response from the

listeners. As follow-up activities, the teacher asks the learners in pairs to create an alternative ending. To assess comprehension, the teacher distributes an envelope containing the images as well as the texts. Students first place the images in order, then match the text to the images. In addition, using only the images, partner A re-tells the story to partner B, followed by partner B re-telling the story to partner A.

Such story telling activities promote research-based strategies that include making use of images that expand short term memory, repetition that moves learners from language input to comprehension, gestures and tone that clarify meaning, and enthusiasm that evokes joy and emotional engagement.

Conclusion

Positive emotions such as happiness, joy and humor have been empirically shown to be beneficial for student learning, but too often they are not part of the conversation about teaching and learning. In an era of standardized testing, common assessments, standardization of curriculum, and success as defined by grades and high stakes tests, the lack of connection of the learning materials to the lived lives of our students have had negative impacts. It is worth reiterating Barker's (2017) precaution: "remove people's emotional connection to their work and treat them merely as machines that produce effort, it's soul killing" (p. 87).

As language teachers it is our responsibility to think intentionally about productive ways to help our students make emotional connections with the language, culture, material, and content of our language classes. If we can demonstrate the relevance of language and cultural learning for their lived lives, their futures, their own sense of purpose, then we are likely to create a positive atmosphere in which students can experience the joy in learning.

Seeking ways to facilitate successful intersections of affective responses and learning in our classrooms will ensure learners are more attuned to the work in our classroom and more inclusive in the connections they make. By creating a pedagogically caring learning climate where learners are actively and creatively engaged through social and collaborative learning tasks, we can spark the joy and create the flow that transform our classrooms into inclusive, caring, learning communities that provide the all-important sense of belonging.

References

- Achor, S. (2011). *The happiness advantage: The seven principles of positive psychology that fuel success and performance at work*. Random House.
- Apte, M. L. (1985). *Humor and laughter: an anthropological approach*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Banas, J.A. Dunbar, N., Rodriguez, D. & Liu, S. (2011). A review of humor in educational settings: Four decades of research. *Communication Education*, 60 (1), 115-144. DOI: [10.1080/03634523.2010.496867](https://doi.org/10.1080/03634523.2010.496867)
- Bandura, A. (1977). *Social learning theory*. Prentice-Hall.
- Barker, E. (2017). *Barking up the wrong tree*. Harper Press.

- Bergin, C. & Bergin, D. (2009). Attachment in the classroom. *Educational Psychology Review*, 21(2), 141-170. DOI: [10.1007/s10648-009-9104-0](https://doi.org/10.1007/s10648-009-9104-0)
- Berk, R. A. (1996). Student ratings of 10 strategies for using humor in college teaching. *Journal on Excellence in College Teaching*, 7(3), 71-92.
- Brighouse, H (2005). *On education*. Routledge.
- Bruner, J.S. (1960). *The process of education*. Harvard University Press.
- Brown, A. (1997) Transforming schools into communities of thinking and learning about serious matters. *American Psychologist*, 52 (4), 399-413. <https://psycnet.apa.org/doi/10.1037/0003-066X.52.4.399>
- Cavanagh, S. R. (2016). *The spark of learning: Energizing the college classroom with the science of emotion*. West Virginia University Press.
- Chen, G. & Martin R. A. (2007). A comparison of humor styles, coping humor and mental health between Chinese and Canadian university students. *Humor: International Journal of Humor Research*, 20(3), 214-234. <https://doi.org/10.1515/HUMOR.2007.011>
- Cornelius-White, J. (2007). Learner-centered teacher-student relationships are effective: A meta-analysis. *Review of Educational Research*, 77(1), 113-143. <https://doi.org/10.3102/003465430298563>
- Cozolino, L. (2013). *The social neuroscience of education: Optimizing attachment and learning in the classroom*. Norton.
- Csikszentmihalyi, M. (1997). *Creativity: Flow and the psychology of discovery and invention*. HarperPerennial.
- Dominowski, R. L., & Bourne Jr, L. E. (1994). History of research on thinking and problem solving. *Thinking and problem solving* (pp. 1-35). Academic Press.
- Dörnyei, Z. (1994). Motivation and motivating in the foreign language classroom. *The Modern Language Journal*, 78(3), 273-284. <https://doi.org/10.2307/330107>
- Dörnyei, Z. (2001). *Motivational strategies in the foreign language classroom*. Cambridge University Press.
- Duckworth, A. *Grit: The power of passion and perseverance*. Scribner.
- Erikson, E. H. (1993). *Childhood and society*. W.W. Norton.
- Eyler, J. R. (2018). *How humans learn*. West Virginia University Press.
- Fuller, R. C. (2006). *Wonder: From emotion to spirituality*. University of North Carolina.
- Gamble, C., Gowlett, J. & Dunbar, R. (2014). *Thinking big: How the evolution of social life shaped the human mind*. Thames & Hudson.
- Gardner, Howard E. (2011). *Frames of mind: The theory of multiple intelligences*. Hachette UK.
- Goel, V. & Dolan, R. (2001). The functional anatomy of humor: segregating cognitive and affective components. *Nature Neuroscience*, 4, 237-238. <https://doi.org/10.1038/85076>
- Hawk, T. F. & Lyons, P. R. (2008). Please don't give up on me: When faculty fail to care. *Journal of Management Education*, 32(3), 316-338. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1052562908314194>
- Immordino-Yang, M.H. (2016). *Emotions, learning, and the brain: Exploring the educational implications of affective neuroscience*. Norton. Quote retrieved February 6, 2021. <https://www.kqed.org/mindshift/45201/why-emotions-are-integral-to-learning>

- Jennings, P. A. & Greenberg, M. T. (2009). The prosocial classroom: Teacher social and emotional competence in relation to student and classroom outcomes. *Review of Educational Research*, 79(1), 491-525. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0034654308325693>
- Lewis, M., Alessandri, S. M. & Sullivan, M. W. (1990). Violation of expectancy. Loss of control and anger expression in young infants. *Developmental Psychology*, 26(5), s745-51. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0012-1649.26.5.745>
- Martin, R. A. & Ford, T. (2018). *The psychology of humor: an integrative approach*. Elsevier Academic Press.
- Moeller, A. J., Theiler, J. & Wu, C. (2012). Goal setting and student achievement: A longitudinal study. *The Modern Language Journal*, 96(2), 153-169. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-4781.2011.01231.x>
- NCSSFL/ACTFL. (2017). *NCSSFL-ACTFL Can-do statements*. <https://www.actfl.org/resources/ncssfl-actfl-can-do-statements>
- Noddings, N. (2003). *Happiness and education*. Cambridge University Press.
- Noddings, N. (2013). *Caring: A relational approach to ethics and moral education* (2nd ed). University of California Press.
- Schultz, S., & Dunbar, R. (2010). Bondedness and sociality. *Behaviour*, 147(7), 775-803. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/27822152>
- Scoffham, S. & Barnes, J. (2011). Happiness matters: Towards a pedagogy of happiness and well-being. *The Curriculum Journal*, 22(4), 535-548. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09585176.2011.627214>
- Seligman, M. E. P. (2012). *Flourish: A visionary new understanding of happiness and well-being*. Simon and Schuster.
- Vygotsky, L. S. (1980). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes*. Harvard University Press.
- Wanzer, M. B., Frymier, A. B., & Irwin, J. (2010). An explanation of the relationship between instructor humor and student learning: Instructional humor processing theory. *Communication Education*, 59(1), 1-18. DOI: [10.1080/03634520903367238](https://doi.org/10.1080/03634520903367238)
- Wentzel, K. R. (1997). Student motivation in middle school: The role of perceived pedagogical caring. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 89(3), 411-419. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-0663.89.3.411>
- Willingham, D. T. (2009). *Why don't students like school?* Jossey-Bass.
- Wise, R. (2004). Dopamine, learning and motivation. *Nature Reviews Neuroscience*, 5, 483-494. <https://doi.org/10.1038/nrn1406>
- [Yue, X. D. & Hue, A. N. \(2015\). Humor styles, creative personality traits, and creative thinking in a Hong Kong sample. *Psychological Reports*, 117\(3\), 845-855. https://doi.org/10.2466/04.17.PR0.117c28z4](https://doi.org/10.2466/04.17.PR0.117c28z4)
- [Yue, X. D. & Hui, A.N. \(2011\). The relationship among humor styles and creative thinking among Chinese students in Hong Kong. *New Horizons in Education*, 59, 137-144.](https://doi.org/10.1177/0013164411411111)
- Ziegler, N. & Moeller, A. (2012). Increasing self-regulated learning through the LinguaFolio. *Foreign Language Annals*, 43(3), 330-348. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1944-9720.2012.01205.x>

