Chapter 12
Enhancing Classroom Authenticity, Motivation, and Learner Autonomy Through Multimodal EFL Projects
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ABSTRACT
In German secondary education, the use of authentic literature or film in language teaching is mostly reserved to advanced classrooms, as it focuses primarily on analysis and writing, which rules out using these materials for lower-level learners. However, theories in motivation and learner autonomy suggest that a process-oriented approach involving authentic materials, real-world media, meaningful activities, and self-directed learning, as in multimodal project work, is more suitable for teenagers than traditional coursebook work. Classroom implementation might overcome certain obstacles by careful planning and communication but also points towards changes in the curriculum and in teacher education. This chapter therefore suggests introducing multimodal, (semi-)autonomous project work—illustrated by examples from teaching practice—to raise motivation, foster engagement with language, and develop real-world competences in the learners; however, more in-depth research is needed to establish effects on the learners.

INTRODUCTION
The German curriculum for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) includes world literature and, more recently, also film as standard teaching materials in advanced secondary education (Years 11-13). However, the methodological approach to literary studies and film education in L2 often resembles the approach in the L1 subject, as it is usually directed at what Blell and Lütge (2004) call the “Kunstcharakter (artistic quality)” (p. 404) of the medium, therefore involving advanced receptive and analytic competence and—not the least with a view to standardised exams—focusing predominantly on writing skills. From this point of view, the use of authentic materials such as literature, film or Web content would seem a
huge challenge—if not entirely out of the question—in lower secondary EFL classrooms (Years 5-10). In particular at those school types in the German streaming system that do not lead to Higher Education, the average learner is not expected to have the necessary proficiency, skills, maturity, interest or intellectual capacity to work with these materials in the ways described above. On the other hand, the use of less challenging, mainstream literature or film produced for entertainment, although suggested by the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) (Council of Europe, 2001), is still frowned upon by many teachers and curriculum designers. Moreover, the EFL curriculum for Years 5-10 prescribes the use of a coursebook, which does not leave a lot of room for working with longer texts or films.

Research in Motivation and Learner Autonomy, however, points to the usefulness of authentic materials and task authenticity at all levels, and especially with teenage learners. This chapter will therefore discuss how authentic film, literature and digital media may be exploited by these target groups in the form of (semi-)autonomous classroom projects to motivate students. It will first present some theoretical views on Motivation, Learner Autonomy and what will be defined as Classroom Authenticity and explain the triangular relationship between the three fields. It will then briefly introduce the concept of (semi-)autonomous project work, through which authentic materials can be made more accessible and interesting to learners. Since authentic materials nowadays should include media and communication channels used regularly outside the classroom, the chapter will present a multimodal approach for learning in general and point out the specific issues of multimodality in language teaching.

The chapter will then discuss some general issues and challenges arising from the implementation of these theoretical principles in German lower secondary EFL classrooms, such as the restrictive curriculum, the issue of accountability and teachers’ fears and prevailing attitudes, and propose practice-oriented solutions for these. It will point out why multimodal, (semi-)autonomous project work that involves authentic literature, film and digital media and encourages learners to engage with language in meaningful and motivating ways could, and should, also be used with learners whose proficiency and maturity are not suited to the type of analytic, text-based activities described at the beginning. To illustrate the pedagogic merits of multimodal project work in these specific educational contexts, the chapter will present three examples from the author’s classroom practice, describing the actual use and integration of this method at different levels of lower secondary education. Since the examples were used experimentally and this particular area has not yet been thoroughly researched within the contexts of German lower-level EFL classrooms, the chapter will briefly discuss a way of empirically establishing the actual effects of the projects on the students’ motivation and long-term learning progress, which will be followed by a brief conclusion.

BACKGROUND

Classroom Authenticity, Motivation and Learner Autonomy

Since an in-depth definition and discussion of ‘Authenticity’ in the contexts of English Language Teaching (ELT) would exceed the scope of this chapter and since academic debates on authenticity may be losing edge in any case, as explained below, the focus will be on ‘Classroom Authenticity’. Classroom Authenticity may arise from the combination of two major components: the use of authentic materials and task authenticity. Traditionally, the first involves the classroom use of texts not produced for language