

Exploring children's L2 writing through a multimodal science project

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While research into early second language writing has accumulated considerable evidence describing how young English language learners (ELL) engage in academic literacy in mainstream classrooms in Australia or the USA, much less is known about how children learn through writing within a language or content-based curriculum (CLIL) in instructed foreign language (FL) contexts. At the same time, CLIL writing research in Europe has focused primarily on comparing the written performance of high school students enrolled in either traditional EFL or CLIL plus EFL classrooms. As a result, information on the development of academic literacy skills and content knowledge with young FL learners is extremely limited. The present study aims to advance our understanding of children's FL writing within a primary school science unit by exploring the impact of genre-based pedagogy on children's written explanations. Over the course of three weeks, a grade 4 class teacher implemented a multimodal teaching unit on simple and complex machines with two intact classes of 9-10-year-olds. After guided instruction, which combined scientific content with literacy awareness-raising activities, the children, working either individually or in pairs, designed their own complex machine and video recorded an oral explanation. The children then produced a handwritten explanation during a live Zoom session with the researchers. The results of a functional analysis of the children's written language use (Fang & Schleppegrell, 2008) and knowledge of the explanation genre will be presented, and conclusions drawn for the teaching of writing in CLIL classrooms with younger learners.