



Title of Project:

Examining Affordances for English Language Development among Adolescent Newcomers in Language and Content Classrooms

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TIRF Research Topic Investigated:

Migrants and Refugees: Teaching and Assessing English

Project Summary:

“Newcomer” immigrant students who immediately enroll in secondary school upon arrival to a new country are tasked with the tremendous challenge of developing a new language while mastering complex curricular content. This study adopts an ecological approach to examine how newcomer students utilize their home language and developing English, as well as images, gestures, facial expressions, artifacts, and other semiotic resources to navigate “communicative hurdles” in the classroom, such as instances of apparent confusion, breakdowns in communication, extended pauses preceding a response, or asking questions. I argue that a wide range of semiotic resources that help newcomer students traverse these hurdles can be understood as affordances for language development, that is, relationships among learners and aspects of the classroom environment that create opportunities for English language development (van Lier, 2000, 2004). Drawing on classroom observations, video-recordings of student interaction, and interviews and focal groups with teachers and students, this study documents the affordances for language development that students act upon, teachers’ efforts to facilitate language development, and students’ perspectives on those efforts. A deeper understanding of the semiotic resources that act as affordances for language development will provide teachers and administrators with a broader conceptualization of second language development and will illuminate the kinds of classroom environments that provide ample opportunities for recent immigrant students to develop their English proficiency.