

Abstract

Developing Aspects of Language Competence through Computer-Facilitated Immersion: A Study of Secondary School Students in a Creole-Speaking Environment

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Most Jamaican children enter school with fluency in the Jamaican Creole but little ability to use Standard English, and limited opportunities to hear and interact with it (e.g. Bryan, 2004; Christie, 2003; Pollard, 1998). Teaching strategies that involve immersion have been recommended by practitioners and education policy, but there are limits on how and how much this can be achieved in the typical classroom.

A significant amount of research has shown that computer-facilitated systems now offer opportunities for language learning through high levels of interaction among students. This kind of interaction has been found capable of promoting learning through collaboration and problem solving among learners (e.g. Mitchell & Myles, 1998; Pica, Lincoln-Porter, Paninos, & Linnell, 1996).

This study observed and describes how Creole-speaking classroom children develop language competence in a computer-facilitated environment that immerses them in interaction with text in the form of readings and feedback generated in the environment. Classroom strategies that involve constructivist

learning and second language acquisition would seem to apply in such an environment, and the study observed how they apply. In effect the study observed what and how children learn in such an environment, in order to discern application of theory and to induce meaning that might guide practice.

The study observed that computer-facilitated learning environments can support learning strategies that are based on communication and interaction (e.g. Salaberry, 2000a; Weasenforth, Biesenbach-Lucas and Meloni, 2002; Young, 2003). Immersion in text promotes competence especially when strategies are in place to provide scaffolding to learning and to promote high levels of student interaction.

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