Transforming the ICT Learning Environment for English Language Learners

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English Language Learners (ELLs) enter online or hybrid classrooms endeavoring to unlock the mysteries of learning English. These students are in search of a quality learning experience leading to English language acquisition defined by new opportunities to transform their lives and open doors for future accomplishments. A variety of educational strategies are required that extend beyond traditional expectations. Reading, writing, speaking and comprehension expanded to connect the classroom and global learning environment are essential. Key components of these endeavors are developing and utilizing innovative technology and coursework, while incorporating outstanding resources and methods to positively impact educators and students.

Keywords: environment, ICT, online, hybrid, transformational

INTRODUCTION

This discussion and accompanying study examine the Information and Communications Technology (ICT) learning environment for English learners and focuses on the following four essential aspects of English learning that are tantamount for success:

1. Leveraging technology in the online classroom
2. Incorporation of ICT innovations and best practices
3. Strengthening a complex culture for learning
4. Facilitating and contextualizing pivotal learning

Each of these key concepts is investigated and discussed as it pertains to the ICT learning environment and influences quality educational experiences. Specific activities and examples of curriculum and teaching strategies will be outlined along with the measurable attainment of goals and objectives. Skillful facilitation allows students to interact with one another and the instructor at a higher level (Palloff, 2007), and interactive learning constitutes a core concept in defining a community of inquiry (Garrison, et. al., 2001) and is crucial when developing online courses for students. The study will explore the role of each essential aspect in a multicultural ICT online learning situation. It is being developed with the purpose and objectives of including an overview of the key strategies for success in language acquisition focusing on ICT, and outlining exemplary pedagogy that can actively engage learners in defined subject-matter contexts. This topic will be approached utilizing examples appropriate for a variety of cultures and content areas including English in an interdisciplinary setting. It also can be expanded to include English for Specific Purposes (ESP) and English as a Foreign Language (EFL) curriculum and methodology. Reading, writing, speaking and comprehension expanded to connect the

classroom with the global learning environment is crucial, however these key aspects of English language learning can only be accomplished when innovative curriculum is designed that will stimulate learning and make it relevant and connected to real world experiences and essential requirements that will tie all of the coursework and language learning objectives together. Significant and engaging connections leading to successful language learning will be presented to contextualize and look more deeply at each strategy in terms of documenting its impact and the opportunity for teaching and learning. This discussion and study will culminate in recommendations for future expanded studies and investigation to support students and facilitate their journey for English learning.

LEVERAGING TECHNOLOGY IN THE ONLINE CLASSROOM

Successful implementation of technology will enable educators and students to realize numerous benefits and ensure the value of ICT for language learning. In order to achieve optimum success in the ICT online classroom, it is essential to leverage technology in the best interest of each individual learner. Technology has the advantage of being able to engage students with diverse learning styles and surpass traditional passive instruction (Matthews, 2017). While some learners may have a better command of English and be interested in exploring content or subject-specific academic interests, others will be simultaneously engaged in language-dependent activities. Technology designed to meet the needs of these students in the online classroom will allow students to acquire language through active engagement rather than direct didactic instruction. Open-ended activities and flexibility will encourage students to explore and branch out on their own resulting in student focused growth and stimulation of interest. Additionally, technology that will support contextualized learning where useful language is taught that is embedded within relevant ICT contexts rather than in isolated language fragments is beneficial. Technology that will allow students to make greater connections among the language and relate to fellow students will strengthen the knowledge that they have already gained. Once students are confident and continue to build upon previous knowledge i.e. vocabulary, comprehension, reading and speaking, technology can be incorporated to deliver more complicated materials. When students can relate to real life contexts and grasp the essential aspects of ICT online learning, this will lead to intrinsic motivation and independently continue the language learning process. It is also important to realize that students have different levels of technological expertise. A student's technical skills and ability may be impacted by age, resources, geographical access to the internet, or financial situation. In addition to content knowledge and online course requirements, it is important to provide support to strengthen technology expertise for struggling students who may be experiencing multiple difficulties and attempting to acquire the knowledge essential for all students.

INCORPORATION OF ICT INNOVATIONS AND BEST PRACTICES

Engaging students and keeping them on task and enthusiastic regarding the learning progress is tantamount to their success. Innovations and best practices that focus on digital transformation, actively engaging learners and challenging them to excel, will empower students and ignite a culture that will enhance learning and enable students to reach their full potential. Innovations that are amenable to active learning modalities such as design learning, task-based learning, gaming, project based or problem-based learning inspire current teaching and learning methods. Students benefit when educators provide substantial flexibility and adaptability in an online curricular setting that is tailored to students' demonstrated interests while achieving specific curriculum outcomes. Global ICT education that addresses best practices in technology across nations and integrates ICT in numerous aspects of teaching has the power to positively impact numerous teachers and students (Zhang, 2016). There are lists of technology teacher tools and activities designed to enhance learning and strengthen the online classroom curriculum. Most of these can be accessed according to subject and grade level and address pedagogical practices for teachers using ICT. Other authors delve more deeply into the effectiveness of ICT

integration in schools as it relates to increased student achievement (Ghavifekr, 2015). The cognitive development of learners and measurable attainment of goals and objectives is essential for ensuring that students continue to achieve and realize success.

STRENGTHENING A COMPLEX CULTURE FOR LEARNING

Due to the multiplicity of educational opportunities and settings for learning, students are faced with myriad decisions regarding the best way to pursue a quality education and realize their goals. The outcome of these decisions is to pursue educational endeavors that fit with their unique learning style and allow them to thrive in their environment. For numerous reasons including flexibility, transportation, choices, and networking, students choose online learning programs that allow them to keep pace, retain their current employment and advance in their career path. In an ICT setting, the goal is for students particularly in the English language virtual classroom to gain the knowledge and expertise required to excel and outperform students in a traditional classroom setting. The online setting provides a complex culture for learning in an innovative environment that can transform the educational experience. By working online with fellow students in discussion groups, community activities, reflective journaling, shared responses and receiving positive feedback, an atmosphere of learning is established that reflects a quality educational experience for both students and teachers with positive interactions for all students regardless of their intellectual abilities. Struggling students may need additional motivation and guidance to encourage them. The culture for learning is strengthened and students are challenged to excel as interactive activities and positive reinforcement combine to create impressive outcomes.

FACILITATING AND CONTEXTUALIZING PIVOTAL LEARNING

Educators are certainly sincere in their efforts to build innovative and engaging online course activities designed with high expectations for learning. However, it is crucial to build context that will relate to students' interests in addition to the nuts and bolts of online course design with topnotch technology features. It is essential for educators to analyze the needs and abilities of their students, build context and focus on making connections that will challenge and engage students. Revitalizing old routines will prove beneficial for both students and educators. Online learner feedback throughout the course is valuable for making adjustments and ensuring that students are progressing well and objectives are being met. Self-guided study is another way to help online learners understand the context for their journey including forums with fellow students and questions focusing on key concepts. Real world examples and simulations are valuable when it comes to putting knowledge into practice (Pappas, 2019). Pedagogical approaches that facilitate contextualized pivotal learning and encourage ongoing change and growth provide the innovative and analytical capacity for students and educators to explore new opportunities and open windows for further learning, particularly in the online setting.

In an interview with leading business leaders in the construction industry, the concept of product and outcome was emphasized. The aspects of trial and error are often incorporated in knowing what one wants to achieve and the steps required to reach the point of successful accomplishment. When the results are not sufficient, changes are made and adjustments required to achieve the desired product. The example was provided of an inventor experimenting and taking steps to put together the right parts in order to achieve the desired results. Once the knowledge base continues to expand, this knowledge can be applied to other areas (D. Turner, personal communication, September 3, 2019). In the ICT online setting, activities should be included to support and encourage trial and error, experimentation, and positive reinforcement to expand the knowledge base through actively engaged learning.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Globalization and technology have substantially changed the ways that we work, teach and learn. Interactive online coursework is at the forefront of educational innovation and creative endeavors, and increased numbers of students are choosing online education courses. As we continue to promote technology enhanced educational ICT innovations, our students will benefit and learning will be accelerated. Educators who communicate passion for their work in an online setting have the capability to inspire and motivate their students to high ideals celebrating their accomplishments. As the process of transforming the ICT learning environment strengthens and evolves, learners will have even more opportunities for growth and the realization of their aspirations. State of the art technology coupled with powerful pedagogical innovation and active learning opportunities will make a significant difference in the virtual classrooms of the future. Future expanded studies are recommended that address each of the four areas outlined above in depth and illustrate concrete examples relating to the ICT learning environment that can be adapted to a variety of ability, age, and online classroom settings.

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