Language Learning Strategies for Digital Classrooms

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Abstract— With the transitions from traditional print literacies to online multiliteracies around the world, digital learning is increasingly influencing language teaching and learning. An increasing number of students are responding more easily to interactive digital media or to digital compositions of image and sounds than they do to the traditional classrooms and texts. There is increasing pressure from teachers and learners to develop skills and knowledge needed in a digital age, and adopt new models and designs for teaching and learning. For those teachers who are willing to experiment new models and designs for teaching, it is important that they give students more time to adapt to the new method of instruction and apply appropriate management strategies to maximize their teaching effectiveness. With the aid of new age digital tools, and through technology enabled classroom strategies, students can be more active in language learning and develop communication skills and creativity.

Keywords— language learning, digital classrooms, teaching strategies, classroom management, new technologies.

I. INTRODUCTION

School students drive change in learning and teaching around the world. The technology, with which millennial students matured, has induced today's students to "think and process information fundamentally differently from their predecessors" (Prensky, 2009, p. 1). New digital platforms such as the Internet, messaging, and social networking sites have dramatically altered the way of communication, especially for school students. The digital devices present new tools for engaging youth in new ways of receiving education. On one hand, millennial students' shorted tolerance and focus span urge teachers to adopt alternative methods for instruction, and engage students with digital classroom learning strategies; on the other hand, the popularity and demand of digital devices in classrooms are growing at a fast rate.

The possibility of using multimedia with the Internet connection have made it possible for modern classrooms to adjust many forms of learning. By definition, digital learning is "learning facilitated by technology that gives students some element of control over time, place, pathway and pace" (Digital Now Foundation, 2014). Digital learning makes changes in the instruction and delivery system, and it can provide opportunity for students to develop language skills both in curricular and extracurricular subjects. Some of the forms of digital classroom include: 1. Interactive Whiteboards (IWB) allow images from a computer to be displayed through a digital projector, onto a large (usually wall-mounted) board. Users can interact with the content on the board using fingers or a stylus. 2. Software Applications (Apps) are designed to operate on mobile devices such as smartphones and tablet computers. 3. Web 3.0 refers to the second generation of the World Wide Web. Web 2.0 includes features and functionality that were not available before, for example. podcasts, blogs, wikis, RSS (Rich Site Summary – used for updating regularly changing web content), social networking and tagging.

In this research, it is recommended to apply new communications technologies, specifically mobile devices

aided instruction to teach students language. Students should learn to use their mobile devices to find more resources that can help them understand the stories and other relevant materials that interest them. Some instructional Apps or online games will also assist them to boost their language learning possibilities. Purposeful language should plays a vital role in those instructional Apps or online games, students need to speak and listen in order to achieve an accomplishment. Students should use language to explore relationships, develop communication skills and gain understanding of how the instructional Apps or online games function. At the same time, the instructional Apps or online games should provide an interactive environment in which students are encouraged to establish friendships, communicate, share materials and ideas, and show respect and consideration for others.

II. TRANSITION FROM TRADITIONAL TO ONLINE MULTILITERACIES LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

The transitions from traditional print literacies to online multiliteracies have been achieved around the world. It is undeniable that electronic, digital and online technologies have become an essential part of modern literacy education. According to Green (2006, p.166), teachers should provide opportunities for all students to develop the type of imitative practice required for them to "gain mastery over the information of interactive media, and to make the essential transformations to participate in, use and analyze texts critically".

In traditional classrooms, teachers deliver the contents and students try to assimilate it. However, in a digital classroom, both teachers and students can contribute to the learning content at the same time, and the learning process is becoming decentralized. When digital media carry language, language can be interactive, for example in blogs, or on Twitter feeds. In these cases, digital media "power up" or enhance the powers of language, oral and written, just as written language "powered up" or enhanced

the powers of oral language (Gee & Hayes, 2011). Digital media create a bridge between learning inside and outside of class. In a survey conducted by a children's edutainment service provider, it was found that 68% parents use online platforms to teach new concepts to their children, while 17% want to see positive behavior changes in their young ones. From a survey involved 1167 parents which was conducted recently, it was found out those digital tools can help a majority of students in positive behavioral changes and learning new concepts. Other surveys also discovered that the benefits of digital learning include development of psychomotor skills, decision making, improved academic performance, visual learning etc.

In modern education, students engage with spoken language, with visual, iconic symbols and print-saturated texts of everyday environments, mass media, social media and consumer cultures. Therefore, they should learn to deal critically with a range of texts, and learn to cope with a actually infinite amount of spoken, written and electronic texts in their daily lives. Human beings begin to learn language since the early years as babies. We start to encounter with print and writing languages in the preschool years, and through to the school textbooks and essays, and then continue to the new arena of adulthood competition, where we learn to define ourselves with the language appropriate for our every new situation and position. It is without any doubt that our learning of language is a maintenance and achievement over time.

However, it should be kept in mind that no technology, whether books, television, computers, video games, nor the Internet, by itself can change people's learning habits. Such devices take effect only in terms of how, when, where, and why they are put to use. They have different effects in different scenarios. A digital media connected to the Internet in the hands of a student with good learning habits is often a powerful device for learning, but it may not be in other circumstances. Even in the scenario of digital learning, the strategies of teaching and learning will still have great impact. Powerful learning experiences can

be provided by the digital classroom which is inventive and interesting. There are some main strategies concerning about interactive digital devices which should be part of every teacher's classroom management repertoire. Thus, teachers need to have the skills and capabilities to read and analyze cultural communities, and to modulate their programs on students' changes, selecting and developing strategies that show observable changes in their learning outcomes. On one hand, "positive teachers" means those who can reinforce students' behavior through rewards and punishments; on the other hand, they are very good at using a great range of policies and strategies in the digital classrooms.

III. LANGUAGE LEARNING STRATEGIES IN A DIGITAL CLASSROOM

How to make language learning more effective in a digital classroom? A functional strategy to language learning in a digital classroom does not advocate teaching language by providing fixed recipes for language activities. Rather it is concerned with giving instruction about the development of effective language resources for particular purposes, and giving it at the point of need within the context of real, meaningful language use. Because in this way, students are able to adjust and modify their performance to better meet contextual demands and varying situations and eventually improve their learning standard. According to Unsworth (1993, p.351), what can be considered as knowledge and understanding in classrooms is mainly determined by the range of resources that are available to students, the status which is assigned to these resources in classrooms, and the kinds of learning activities undertaken in connection between students and resources. Taking teaching narrative language in a lower primary classroom as an example, fairytales can be the most interesting and stimulating content. Teachers are able to find a wide range of resources about fairytales from different media. In the classroom, students can watch a video clip related to the main theme and note down some details for the flowchart

of characters and plots. When finishing their flowcharts, students can examine the story on which the video was based to see how the video differed from the text. In this means, students will explore how the setting and characters were portrayed through language in the book, while in the video they were portrayed visually and differently. A successful instructional App or online game should be in some way responding to the fact that students in different communities come from different social and cultural contexts and are dramatically diverse. With the instructional Apps or online games, teacher should share the fairytales from different cultural backgrounds with students, and encourage students to discuss their stories with other group members and share their finished texts with classmates in other groups. In this means, students will have more opportunities to communicate with others and appreciate stories from different cultural backgrounds. Teacher should provide an environment that enables students to use language as often as possible in various situations with a wide range of people, and modify the classroom to make it a suitable place for learning. There should be a secure area of activity for students to engaged in a number of diverse digital tasks in classroom. Anstey (2004, p.136) argued that in order that students have models of language from which to generate their approximations and learning, it is seen as essential that they be immersed in a multimedia and language-rich environment. It means that classrooms should have extensive examples of digital texts, representing a variety of genres. Specific times should be set aside for students initiated interaction with digital texts as well as teacher initiated interaction. It is advisable to let students display their finished texts to the digital devices, as well as some pictures relating to the topics being taught. Some role-playing Apps or online games can assist students to adapt language for learning purposes: teacher will provide opportunities for students to put themselves in someone's position in a story and behave in an appropriate manner. By making students really "experience" language through

these activities, they will establish the sense of language and be able to master a language gradually.

Throughout the entire digital classroom instruction, the teacher need to be attentive to whether the students are following the instructions. During the instruction, the teacher need to move around the room to monitor and provide assistance to students. The instructions in a digital classroom should be at a navigating-level, for example, how to post your ideas online during the activity and how to acquire more resources. The different instructions about how to deal with the resources and use the features of the language, as well as understand the pattern are effective means of content scaffolding and structuring. With the intention to provide scaffolding for students' comprehension, a word list can be found in the text on their iPads, and students can use translation apps if necessary. In a digital classroom, as most students can access to their smart phones and instant translation apps easily, making such kind of word list could be used to discuss different interpretations. It is undeniable that this example of teaching is still very much attached to traditional classroom. In tradition, English teachers usually use wordlists and close work on vocabulary as a way of assisting students' comprehension. However, this procedure may serve as a way in the transition from a traditional to a digital classroom, until the potential of technology can be fully utilized.

In a digital classroom, online resources are always accessible and accessing different resources is possible at all times. However, teachers need to make clarifications about strategies for finding resources, which imply participating in the meaning of the language. Therefore, The instruction of the technology for useful resource searching becomes a crucial part for teachers' work, and it is the teacher's scaffolding of the language that becomes even more important. For beginners, teachers need to demonstrate how to take on the text when running into comprehension problems. For the resources, teachers should recommend to the students to download related app

and states that it is not the only option. In this way, teachers support a literacy activity involving the students in how they can utilize this in an out-of-school situation. During this practice, students are not only participating in the meanings of text, since the reading of the related apps is also a specific text that requires specific comprehension strategies, but also students are scaffolding how to use this specific text functionally.

IV. CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT IN A DIGITAL LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

Rule is still one of the most important universal prevention and intervention strategies. In his study of pupils' perception of rules, Cullingford (1988) argues that by the time children reach the end of their primary education they take the need for rules for granted. Sometimes, teachers may apply rules of behavior unfairly, but children are aware of the principle that schools must have rules, and they don't question those fundamental rules. In general, rule is based firmly in the systematic and consistent use of the various forms of reward and punishment in the classroom. On one hand, punishment serves as a powerful signal to students that they have crossed the line and that their behavior will not be tolerated. However, punishment should only apply to repeated and persistent misbehaviors, and only misbehaviors that "threaten student welfare or represent a serious ongoing barrier to student learning" should be strictly published (Rinne, 1997). On the other hand, praise is one of the most common forms of positive reinforcement. According to Tony (1996), teachers can make effective use of praise to improve classroom atmosphere and reduce behavior disruptions, in order for all students to benefit from a positive educational experience. But sometimes, praise alone may not be sufficiently reinforcing to the student, teachers may need to initially pair praise with the use of a token economy or tangible reinforcement to make it effective. In this case, once the target behavior has stabilized at appropriate levels, the additional reinforcer should be gradually faded, leaving

only the praise (O'Leary, 1977). Apart from praise, there are many other tangible means by which teachers and supervisors can reinforce students' behavior. With the assistance of digital mobile devices, these strategies can include virtual smile stickers, special badges, merit points. Special certificates for specific behavior can also be granted from the virtual world in students' mobile devices.

Having students self-monitor their progress is also a powerful strategy in teaching students how to behave in a digital classroom. Self-monitoring means that students are self-reliant and responsible not only because they are coerced by outside forces, but also because they feel impelled from within themselves. Rinne (1997) believes that the students can demonstrate responsibility by fulfilling their obligations to other people, as well as to themselves, without being asked or prompted. The Good Student Game is an example of how teachers can focus on promoting positive behaviors using a mobile device. Teachers teach and monitor positive behaviors (e.g., staying seated and working quietly) with their mobile devices and students learn how to self-monitor these behaviors. Over time, students will internalize the appropriate behaviors.

According to Jenson (1982), group contingency can also be used as a positive strategy to improve students' academic achievement. A group contingency is a system for the delivery of a contingency to an entire group, based upon the behavior of the individuals in that group. The effects of group contingencies on school behavior have been carefully examined for over twenty years. Several recent studies show that group contingencies are effective in reducing many difficult school behaviors, such as classroom misbehavior and aggression. One good example of using a group contingency to reinforce classroom behavior was presented recently by Speltz, Shimamura and McReyonlds, describing individual contingency versus three different types of group contingencies. In this study, twelve learning disabled students ranging in age from seven to ten were included. The goal was to increase

practice time spent working problems, in order to improve proficiency. For the students, each problem resulted in one point. The points could then be exchanged for valued rewards. In this study, spontaneous peer helping behavior was reported, in which peers helped each other structure the task. As the result, each of the procedures was effective, with an average performance increase of 66%.

V. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, many students currently develop their language learning skills as much from interactive digital media as from traditional texts and classrooms. The result has been that an increasing number of students are responding more easily to interactive digital media or to digital compositions of image and sounds than they do to the traditional classrooms and texts. Another obvious effect on learning with the digital media is to help students understand media more effectively. With the assistance of digital media, it is much easier for students to visualize and grasp a concept, and also help them with their language skills. The implication is that classroom practices must pay immediate attention to the interactive digital media that students access and assist them to develop their language skills accordingly. Positive strategies with interactive digital media can and do make a difference in classroom behavior is undeniable, but their application are not rigid, and there are perpetual development and complement in their classroom usage.

The introduction of new teaching strategies requires a shift in the minds of both teachers and students. Teachers need to experiment with new strategies in the digital classroom. For those teachers who are willing to experiment these new models and designs for teaching, it is important that they give students more time to adapt to the new method of instruction and apply appropriate management strategies to maximize their teaching effectiveness. With the aid of new age digital tools, and through technology enabled classroom strategies, students will be more active in language learning and develop communication skills and

creativity.

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