Chapter 6
Producing Pathways to Proficient Pronunciation with Learner–Designed Pronunciation Stations

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ABSTRACT

The chapter reports on a study examining learning stations designed by English as a second language students in order to improve pronunciation. This on-going Design-Based Research study focuses on promoting, sustaining, and understanding an educational innovation (Bell, 2004). The longitudinal study identifies favorable and unfavorable aspects of learner-designed pronunciation station teaching. Results extend previous iterations of data collection and analysis of student assignments with reference to technology resources and online survey results as part of strategic (re)designing of the activity. This pedagogy fosters student responsibility for learning and utilizing learning opportunities they create. Discussion is provided about how poststructural theory corresponds with design-based research as data collection and analysis methodology to illuminate discourses of autonomy as agency, motivation and investment, and resistance. Design-based research frames the postmodern and action oriented design based research goals of "examining the assumptions underlying contemporary educational programs and practices" (Reeves, McKenney, & Herrington, 2011, pp. 60-61).

ORGANIZATION BACKGROUND

The intensive English program at this university is an academic preparation program for incoming international students who have a total score lower than the required entry level proficiency for undergraduate and graduate programs. The intensive English program is part of a university serving students from a city on the East Coast of the United States. It is attended by a large number of students from across the region, throughout the nation, and around the world. It maintains an international presence with campuses in other locations worldwide. A long-time leader

in professional education, it is among the nation's largest educators in the combined fields of medicine, dentistry, pharmacy, podiatry and law. In addition, this university offers more than four dozen doctoral and more than 100 Master's degree programs that contribute to research and scholarship. This institution seeks to create new knowledge that improves the human condition and uplifts the human spirit achieving this goal through a commitment to recruiting, retaining, and supporting outstanding faculty that prize diversity of thought, excel in scholarly endeavors, and support the aspirations of capable students.

The intensive English program provides English as a second language instruction in a multiple proficiency level area and multiple skill frame work. This specific intensive English language program offers courses in all proficiency levels from elementary level to advanced level. Classes are given in writing, reading, speaking and listening; all classes include instruction in pronunciation, vocabulary and grammar. Students also choose an elective class and a cultural education class based on the student's needs and learning styles. These smaller classes are offered throughout the year so students can make progress on a continual basis. Admission requirements to the intensive English program include availability to students who have completed high school studies.

New students are tested in all the skill areas and placed in the appropriate level at the beginning of the program. During the term students are evaluated through activities, examinations and homework, and they receive a final grade at the end. If the students have done well, then he/she will be moved to the next level. A student's progress depends entirely upon participation in class, good study habits and hard work. The intensive English language program offers classes in reading class (to improve reading speed and comprehension), writing class (to gain practice in academic writing), listening/speaking class (with a focus on fluency, pronunciation and vocabulary development), elective classes (learning English in a class of their choice), and Cultural Education Program classes (opportunities to use the English language in an informal setting).

SETTING THE STAGE

The technology utilization in the program was very basic. Teachers used technology such as cassette tapes, video movies in VHS format, and basic word processing software programs on teacher computers. There was very little Internet access and computer lab use at that time. Prior to the initiation of this project involving instructional technology, neither administrators nor instructors involved their students and courses in extensive computer lab work for learning English as a second language. My graduate assistantship included teaching undergraduate students in a technology for education course delivered in computer labs. Thus, the transition for me to begin using these same labs was seamless. I had three years of experience teaching in these labs before the learner-designed pronunciation station project began. It was a logical conclusion to influence the English as a second language program to the use of the same computer labs.

CASE DESCRIPTION

Decision making about which pedagogical activities will augment students' investment and motivation for 21st century English as a second language education must be taken seriously. This chapter focuses on exploring multiple data sources about learner-designed materials to develop a poststructural theoretical perspective for English as a second language education (Kumaravadivelu, 2003; 2006; Pavlenko, 2002; Perren, 2008; 2009). This chapter discusses the challenges and effects of station teaching in a university intensive English program utilizing multiple technology resources.

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