Interactive Multimedia Language Instruction:

En route to a more effective and efficient language acquisition

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We are just now witnessing some of the most exciting changes in the course of human history. Extraordinary innovations and advancements in the field of science and technology have enabled remarkable ways to achieve increased productivity and efficiency in every aspect of our lives. And the aspect of education is no exception, of course. As you are about to witness during his session, computer assisted learning has induced fascinating changes in our traditional classrooms. With respect to language education, in particular, we are seeing a vast array of innovations which act as catalysts to more effective and efficient language acquisition.

By introducing what's new and innovative in this context, I do not mean to show any disrespect for the traditional language teaching theories and practices. In fact, many theories and methods which have withstood the test of time continue and will continue to be favored by educators worldwide for years to come. With traditional theories and methods, we improve them, discard the nonproductive features in them, but much remains which is then integrated into a succeeding approach. It would, thus, appear altogether meaningless to be comparing the old and traditional teaching practices to the new and modern. As the former president of TESOL, the late Mary Finocchiaro, once stated, "...the real issue [which ought to be of our concern] is not modern versus traditional teaching, but more efficient, more effective and more stimulating learning." With the continuing advancement sin educational technology, computer assisted instruction is proving to be a powerful tool extremely suitable for providing the current educators the means to teach more efficiently and effectively, as well as being suitable for providing language learners the means to a truly stimulating learning.

The use of computer in language instruction has had a less than an

impressive impact up to now due to the limited capabilities of computer. However, computers are fast becoming an indispensable part of language learning. One of the reasons for this is that technology is finally catching up with what we know to be necessary for language learners as well as with what is known and accepted as being sound pedagogy. It is rather surprising to learn that we have already been using different media in our classrooms for yearsfrom filmstrips, slides and record players, later to audio and video cassettes, anything to facilitate and augment our students' ability to comprehend new materials being taught. Thanks to the recent technological advancements, all of these media are brought to one place, allowing language learners instant access to the sounds and sights of English speaking countries. Now, all or at least most of the media which we have attempted to bring into our classrooms in parts and pieces can come in a neat bundle, in a multimedia computer interface. Many have already realized the value of this truly powerful and resourceful teaching tool which can greatly maximize the many spatial and other circumstantial limitations inherent in EFL cultures.

Contrary to the early multimedia educational products which were based on large data banks of stored up information, often from large picture libraries and encyclopedias, today's multimedia software programs are more directive, reflecting specific educational goals and objectives. Multimedia technology is especially effective in language instruction because the technology enables learners a truly multi-dimensional learning experience, with high quality sound, graphics, animation, photographic images and motion video along with the text. Hence, multimedia technology caters to all of our senses; still pictures, motion video, sounds and colors captivate the learner's attention and induce effective and lasting acquisition of new learning.

The list of many outstanding facets of multimedia language instruction is assuredly long and impressive indeed. Still, too many of our language instructors are skeptical about this technology for fear of repeating the bad experiences they have had with the much-hyped language labs, the remnants of which still remain collecting dust in some dingy corner of our school storage rooms. If such bad experiences have taught us nothing else, we know now for certain that educational and pedagogical needs, not the technological innovation, must be the driving force behind any educational program. With this in mind, we must evaluate and assess carefully the value and worth of investing our effort and capital to use this powerful medium. In order to make a responsible

decision about the use of multimedia courses in the classroom, it is only fit and proper that we consider carefully the specifications for the kind of English language software that is suitable for students and our respective schools' curricula.

First of all, in terms of its content the software should offer a comprehensive curriculum for English as a Foreign Language. The program should cover at least six years of language learning. All of the language skills must be covered, that is listening, speaking, reading, and writing, plus grammar and vocabulary. It must be also encompassing enough as to address students of varying levels, i.e. from beginners to advanced, and from age 11 and up.

Secondly, the program should, of course, be based on a sound pedagogy by enabling students to interact with the programthat is to say, allowing students freedom to choose which skill area to enter, which topics to select, and which activities to do. It should be motivational; the program should not only be visually attractive so as to provide positive stimulus, but students should also be provided with instantaneous positive feedback when they have performed well on an exercise. The learning path should not be pre-determined. Following a "constructivist" approach, the student should have access to some form of their own records. Teachers should be allowed access to a more detailed record on the student and class level. Moreover, the focus of the program should be on real-life tasks and not academic or literary English. Genres should be as close to authentic as possible. For example, reading tasks should approximate real-life reading tasks such as advertisements, stories, articles, postcards and letters, while listening tasks should approximate real-life listening situations such as radio, television and answering machines. The software program should be accompanied by a comprehensive Teacher's Guide. So as to make the necessary provisions for the different learning styles, a variety of tasks on each topic should be provided. The program should ideally expose the students to the cultures of different English-speaking countries, also. In addition, the program should treat English as an international language and not the exclusive property of one country. This means that the accents used should be from both North America and the United Kingdom, as well as Australia. The program should include some testing components for the various skill sections as well as entry and exit tests to help evaluate student progress. Various explanations such as help, grammar rules, and contextualized translations should be available to students in their native language. An on-line bilingual "talking" dictionary would

of course prove indispensable.

Next, we must evaluate the software from the standpoint of our students and the type of student environment it should provide for the students. The program, at the least, should not prove burdensome to the user. In other words, the program should not require an extensive knowledge in computing. It would be ideal if students could be presented with a simple point-and-click graphic interface which requires minimal keyboarding. Students should not only be able to have free choices between topics in a module, but should also have a choice of freedom or of a more structured approach to the same material. Students should receive input in a variety of ways, including sound, text, and visual modes. They should be able to record their voices and compare them to a native-speaker. Furthermore, they should be able to work at their own pace; hence, sessions should not be limited by time or number of problems.

Surely, the technological capabilities of the hardware and software ought to allow some benefits for the teachers as well. The software should assist the teacher with class management by allowing access to enter and edit student lists. The teacher must have the option of creating reports on both the class and student level, and the teacher should have the option of organizing the contents of the program in a way he/she sees fit for the students in the form of organized lessons.

Now, I am about to introduce to you a truly outstanding multimedia English instructional software which have lived up to all that an ideal multimedia language software promises to be. English Discoveries, an Interactive multimedia Instructional(IMI) courseware, is such a program. IMI type of educational technology bears a special meaning in our discourse, because it is based on a system of associative links with the computer at the heart of the system. IMI programs provide learner control of the ordering of the activities, thereby providing a "democratic learning environment". They feature multiple representations and learning contexts where the user can choose from different presentations and representations of the same material. They also accommodate different learning styles and, where possible, present information in the form of a metaphor to reflect or duplicate reality.

This truly powerful courseware consisting of 12 CD-ROMs takes students from the level of an absolute beginnerthe ABCs and basic survival vocabularyto the most advanced. Allow me to just quickly gloss over some of the basic facts about English Discoveries with you. The production of the program occurred

entirely in Israel by EduSoft in collaboration with Berlitz, which provided the text for the entire series. It took two years to produce this massive courseware which covers 8 years of curriculum. The entire content of English Discoveries is based on internationally accepted curricula, for example the Council of Europe Threshold Level, and the input of curriculum designers from around the world. This is quite possible the most advanced and sophisticated English instructional courseware to date. A great deal of effort has been put into the software to bring as much authenticity and practicality of communicative English as possible.

As the celebrated American linguist, Noam Chomsky, once stated, "the fundamental human capacity is the capacity and the need for creative self-expression, for free control of all aspects of one's life and thought." In this day and age of global communication, effective self-expression is not only an inherent desire innate in every individual but a vital necessity in assuring a person's success and status. Moreover, so much of one's ability to express him/herself in ways meaningful to the fellow global villagers nowadays rests heavily upon his/her level of mastery in English. The responsibility which is bestowed upon us, the English educators, is now greater than ever. It is, in fact, precisely this weighty responsibility, and the commitment we feel thereof, that has brought us all here today.

On this day, as we gather from our respective working fields to share our stories, observations and thoughts about our past and current teaching practices, not only is there a renewed sense of commitment to this responsibility, but there is also a certain sense of urgencyurgency which is derived form our recognition of the dire need to secure for our students optimal means to acquiring proficiency in English. Now, more than ever before, it is our duty, our mission, to search and research to find this optimal means to most accurate and efficient English acquisition. With the help of such powerful teaching aide as English Discoveries, you can now **deliver** the new learning in the most efficient, effective and stimulating way.

If our time spent here together, albeit short, has enabled you to see even a small portion of the many amazing capabilities of multimedia instructional material, then I have succeeded. Should you wish to address more specific issues or even just to chat with our staff or me, please feel free to come up to us after the presentation. Thank you.

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