SYLVIA SPIELMAN-DAVIDSON
Toronto District School Board
OISE/University of Toronto
Toronto, Canada
E-Mail: sspielman@oise.utoronto.ca
E-Mail: Sylvia.SpielmanDavidson@stel.tdsb.on.ca

Focus on form within the zone of proximal development

Research Questions

The process of learning will be investigated in a sociocultural framework. Vygotskian theory emphasizes the social origins of learning.

1. What learning of the present conditional occurred during the dialogues of grade 8 French immersion students engaged in collaborative tasks?
2. Do students engaged in collaborative dialogues show progress from other regulation toward self-regulation?

Participants

- eight, 13- to 14 -year-old grade 8 French immersion females from an intact class
- eight comparison students from another class with a different teacher in the same school

French Immersion Program

- second language program
- in this grade 8, 50% of the curriculum delivered in French, e.g., French Language Arts, History, Geography, Math

Role of the Researcher

- offered guidance in implementation of the unit, e.g., discussed my experiences piloting the materials in my own classroom
- occasionally answered students' questions, clarified instructions
- attended all classes to ensure dialogues were being recorded, e.g., technical difficulties
- transcribed dialogues and created tailor-made tests.

Data Collection

Design

- Pre, Post, Delayed-posttests
- four types of tests: 1) cloze; 2) paragraph; 3) interview; 4) tailor-made tests
- 4-week intervention period (collaborative tasks)
- dialogues were audiorecorded

Treatment

- instruction and peer feedback in dialogues
- study group underwent a unit revolving around the teaching of the present conditional over a 4-week period (approximately 11 hours)
- the activities undertaken were adapted from the unit developed (Day et al., 1989) and used in an experimental study (Day & Shapson, 1991)
- major activity undertaken was the writing up of a plan of an imaginary space colony
- this context elicits the present conditional in hypothetical situations

e.g., If we lived on another planet, we would build a house out of glass.

Rule: If + imperfect, present conditional

- 2 dictoglosses were added
- main tasks during treatment: writing, revising, proofreading
- students undertook all tasks in pairs

Measures

- 2 types of tests: general (unit) and tailor-made tests based on each dyad's dialogues

Creation of tailor-made tests

- Conditional-related episodes based on language-related episodes (Swain & Lapkin, 1995) were identified in the dialogues
- tailor-made test items were created based on CREs (talk about the conditional)

Data Analysis

- general pre, post and delayed-posttests underwent statistical analyses
- tailor-made test items derived from the dialogues were matched up with identical items on the pretest
- qualitative analysis of CREs in relation to the test data

Findings

- statistical differences in favour of the study group at posttesting
- maintenace of high scores at delayed-posttesting on the tailor-made tests (Tables 2 and 3)
- CREs were classified into 3 types of conditional-related exchanges (CRXs): a) single (74%), b) double (21%), and triple (5%)
- CREs were divided into 3 categories: a) formal features (39%), b) tense selection (39%), c) lexical meaning (23%).

Table 1

Group results: Tailor-made test scores and solutions negotiated in dialogues

	Week 3, 4, or 5 Posttests		Week 16 Follow-Up Tests	
*1 point per question	86.9%	(212/244)	86.1%	(210/244)
1 point per correct reason	79.5%	(194/244)	77.9%	(190/244)

Correct Solutions		Incorrect Solutions		Unresolved	
84%	(205/244)	92.7%	(190/205)	90.7%	(186/205)
13%	(32/244)	50%	(16/32)	56.2%	(18/32)
3%	(7/244)	85.7%	(6/7)	85.7%	(6/7)

*Solutions negotiated in dialogues

Table 2

Matched general and tailor-made test items: Pre, post and delayed-posttests

Week 0	Weeks, 3, 4, or 5	Week 16
Pre General test 0% (0/17)	Post General Test Unavailable	Delayed-Posttest General Test 59% (10/17)
Pre General test 0% (0/17)	Post Tailor-made Test 100% (17/17)	Delayed-Posttest Tailor-made Test 94% (16/17)

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