EXPLORING THE COLLABORATIVE POTENTIAL OF TABLET DEVICES IN HOME AND SCHOOL SETTINGS

M. Peter, L. Morgan

University of Technology, Sydney (AUSTRALIA)

Abstract

Although much has been written about the use of tablet applications in formal and informal settings much of the current literature has focused on the value of tablets as learning aids or on the development of typologies of learning apps. Closer observation of the use of tablets in schools and homes reveals the existence of levels of collaborative talk between students and between adults and children. The authors of this paper argue that more attention needs to be given to the potential role of tablet technologies in creating ‘dialogic spaces’ (Wegerif 2018) where meaningful interactions can challenge and develop children’s language. It can also be posited that, given the right conditions, interactive talk around tablet-based technologies can develop students’ enthusiasm for using language for sharing and constructing knowledge.

This paper will draw on data from two major studies: one of these was focused on informal (home) use of tablet-based technologies and the other was focused on formal (classroom-based). The focus of both these studies was on the kinds of interactive talk generated by collaborative use of different apps on the tablets and on the level of engagement displayed by the children in the study. The participants in these studies were (21) children aged between 3 and 6 years old, their parents and one teacher.

The theoretical framework for this paper draws on two complimentary elements: Bronfennbrenner’s ecological model and Bourdieu’s notion of Habitus. Bronfenbrenner’s ecological system theory proposes that a child’s development is influenced by the environment and the people with whom the child interacts (Bronfenbrenner 2005). Support for that learning, including language learning and development, occurs through social relationships and interactions between a child and the people in his or her surrounding environment (Bronfenbrenner 1994). The notion of Habitus enhances this focus on the child’s perspective by capturing not only the exterior influences coming from the surrounding environment but also the formation of the parents and teachers motivations around their provision of an interactive approach to the use of tablet technologies.

The results of multimodal analysis of the data in this study highlighted the value of tablet technologies as tools for interactivity among children and between children and adults. Examples of the ‘dialogic spaces’ created by parents and teachers are presented as well as an analysis of the interactions that took place. It will be shown that meaningful interactive talk is fostered between and among children and between children and the ‘more knowledgeable other’ when teachers and parents focus on collaborative tasks and the creation of an environment where children’s agency around decisions relating to the use of the tablet is fostered.

The data analysis that will be presented will show that the multimodal elements on the tablet screen and those that are features of family and classroom practices (gesture, proximity etc.) around the tablet collectively transform the tablet to a meaningful and engaging communication tool that enhances and extends opportunities for language development. The essential differences between the tablet and other artefacts such as books and toys in this regard will also be explored.

Keywords: Language, interaction, tablets.