

Who is Steering the Wheel, Technology or Pedagogy? an Analysis of an Arabic Immersion Experience in the USA

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Abstract

With technology pervading our everyday lives at home, in industry, and in academe, a fruitful area to investigate is the extent of penetration of ICT in language teaching, specifically the lesser taught languages such as Arabic. This paper is positioned at the level of reflective practice where the author and designer of a two-week Arabic language immersion camp at the University of Wyoming in Laramie ponders whether the technology used during the immersion experience is subservient to pedagogy or whether learning choices, goals and contents determine the nature and scope of the technology used. In Part One of this paper, I introduce the context of this village, a federally funded program called STARTALK designed to help American high school students develop an interest in languages that are critical to US national security in hopes that they may choose to major in these languages once they graduate from high school. In Part Two, I provide a detailed presentation of the language camp curriculum and the daily schedule of activities, identify and categorize the instances in which technology is used, ranging from traditional web resources to the more interactive and advanced web 2.0 tools. In Part Three, I address the main question of this paper and analyze the contents of the various activities conducted during the language village in order to adjudicate whether the goals of the language village in general and of individual learning sessions are being served by the various technologies used or simply enslaved by these technologies. The paper ends with a set of reflections on optimal uses of technology in language teaching contexts and recommendations for enhancing the pedagogy-technology interface for future Arabic immersion projects.