

PERFORMING BEYOND THE COMFORT ZONE: GIVING A VOICE TO ONLINE COMMUNICATION

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Abstract

The difficulty of catering for the development of oral production skills has long been deplored in distance language teaching (Abrioux, 1991; Williams & Sharma 1988), and not much has changed since these observations were made. Oral activities are still conspicuously absent from online offerings, and students' complaints about this usually head the list of disadvantages associated with Web-based language learning (Felix, 2001). However, during the last few years practitioners have begun to incorporate sophisticated applications in the form of voiced bulletin boards (Wimba), voiced chats (Traveler) and audiographics (Lyceum). This paper discusses what these applications have to offer in the context of creating meaningful constructivist activities in distance education and their potential role in addressing the fundamental problem of performance anxiety in language learning.

Keywords

Online learning, audiographics, language learning, CALL, synchronous voiced chats, virtual worlds, performance anxiety

The purpose of this paper is to introduce three innovative resources which allow speaking online in attractive virtual settings and under user-friendly conditions. Our aim is to demonstrate the potential of these for setting up constructivist activities in a non-threatening environment in which students might be less inhibited to express themselves orally than in traditional face-to-face settings.

Websites

Hilde's Hexenwelt <http://www.arts.monash.edu.au/affiliates/hexe-hilde/>

Lyceum <http://www.open.ac.uk>

Traveler <http://www.digitalspace.com/traveler/>

Wimba <http://www.wimba.com/>

All Websites cited were verified on 4.6.2004.

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