

The University of the West Indies

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Transformative Pedagogy:

A Practical Approach to Language Awareness

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Abstract

A wider recognition of regional variations of English at a societal level is needed. Topics of declining literacy rates and poor examination results in English are often the focus of discussion among persons across the Caribbean and show that this need for further acknowledgement has implications for the classroom. Notably, where education authorities, and linguists alike, are concerned, there is an attempt to move past theoretical discussion on the matter and provide practical responses to the prevailing issue. It has long been stated that the current resources being used in the Language classrooms of the English-Speaking Caribbean do not consider the variations between the students' native dialect and the targeted standard. The textbook, which is often the first source of materials to which teachers and students refer, in most cases is irrelevant to the cause and perpetuate one of two assumptions. The first is that the standard variety of English is already known and completely understood by the students, or that English should be taught as if it were a second language where the student knows very little about that variety. Misconceptions such as these are extended, beyond textbook use, as other sources compiled by teachers tend to be of similar ilk. Based on the notion of Caribbean Language Education, Dennis Craig focuses on the Creole-influenced vernacular and the need for appropriate methodology to meet the needs of Caribbean learners of English (Simmons-McDonald & Robertson, 2014). Accordingly, a three-step orientation process is proposed which, when implemented in the classroom, reduces students' risk of unfavourable cognitive and communicative effects which come about when the development of a person's first language is hindered (Craig, 2006). This paper seeks to add momentum to the movement toward concretising the theory through practical application. In doing so, ten teachers will participate in an upcoming focus group where their views will be expressed regarding the use and potential implementation of digital comics as a tool for raising language

awareness and teaching Standard English to Barbadian students. These participants will be randomly selected from a larger cohort of teachers participating in a preceding workshop which is intended to facilitate exposure to innovative ways of raising Language Awareness. The qualitative data will be collected and a thematic analysis of same will be done. The expectation is that the focus group will elicit varied responses on the subject. However, it is hoped that the views of the participants reflect advancement beyond mere recognition of the variations and toward actual transformation in pedagogical practices.

Keywords: Language Situation, Language Awareness, Transformational Pedagogy

References

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