

REVIEW OF *New Perspectives on CALL for Second Language Classrooms*

New Perspectives on CALL for Second Language Classrooms

Sandra Fotos and Charles M. Browne

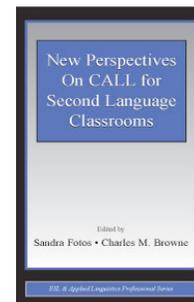
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Review by Emily A. Evans, American University

New Perspectives on CALL for Second Language Classrooms is a good choice for teacher trainers, students, or professionals interested in exploring the foundations of successful technology-based teaching and learning. Organized into five parts, the first section, "Introduction to CALL," details the historical evolution of Computer Aided Language Learning as well as current research and trends in the field. The second section, "Perspectives on Classroom CALL," contains six articles intended to address the implementation of various aspects of CALL in a second or foreign language classroom. The third section, "Implementing CALL in Institutional Settings," examines the many considerations necessary for setting up a CALL facility in an institutional setting from the ground up. Readers will benefit from reading section four, "Evaluating CALL," prior to making major hardware or software purchases since this section offers some guidelines for critically evaluating the effectiveness of the materials and Web sites available. The book concludes with final thoughts on what teachers really need to know to be successful in using CALL techniques.

The book provides a basic overview of CALL theories, current research, and practical recommendations for its implementation. For readers who have never encountered acronyms like MOO, MUD, WELL, IRC, and WYSIWIG, a glossary is provided at the end of the book to assist. Since the rapid change of technology makes materials quickly obsolete, the editors also created a Web site to accompany the text (accessible at: <http://www.erlbaum.com/callforL2classrooms.htm>). In addition to providing chapter abstracts and contact information for authors, the regularly updated companion site offers links to related language journals, free software, teacher development sites, and other online resources.

The familiar adage "technology will not replace teachers; teachers who use technology will replace those who don't" seems an appropriate motivation for readers to investigate the contents of this text on Computer Aided Language Learning. The chapters are written by researchers and practitioners in the field of CALL with the intent of bringing together theory and practice for a wide-range of potential readers. First coined by TESOL professionals in 1983, the acronym CALL encompasses a wide variety of computer aided teaching and language learning goals, including writing, multimedia, internet, distance learning, and test taking. Editors Sandra Fotos and Charles Browne begin by tracing the evolution of CALL. First rooted in behaviorism and audio-lingual drill-and-practice programs, CALL applications have generally followed the language learning theory of the day. In its present state, integrative CALL, teaching and learning move away from software and CD-ROMs to Web-based activities in which the learner controls the lesson content and learning process.

The meat of the text looks specifically at the use of CALL in L2 classrooms. Chapters the reader will find most practical will doubtlessly depend on their specific areas of interest, but a partial overview is detailed below:

Chapter 4, "Learner Training for Effective Use of CALL," written by Philip Hubbard, explains the need for providing the learner with sufficient training on software and computers. Despite the increasing amount of responsibility language learners in many countries are required to take for their own learning, Hubbard notes that traditionally teachers provide little training toward the use of CALL applications. Five principles and several general areas for appropriate learner training are offered to L2 teachers. One example is the concept of training students in a cyclical manner to use language learning programs, thereby allowing them to build a solid foundation with plenty of opportunity to review.

Chapter 6, written by George Braine, discusses the advantages and disadvantages of using Local Area Networks (LANs) as a tool to teach writing in foreign or second language classrooms via real-time (synchronous) conferencing. Critics of the effectiveness of LANs will note that empirical studies have not proven that computer networks enhance quality of writing, and that grammatical errors may be overlooked in favor of fluency (Eldred and Hawisher, 1995; Ghaleb, 1993; and Braine, 2001). One significant advantage noted in this chapter, however, is that studies have shown that LANs are apparently an effective way to reduce teacher talk and increase student interaction through online written engagement.

In *Writing as Talking*, Sandra Fotos contrasts characteristics of writing and speech in email communication. She describes an email exchange project between American and Japanese EFL university students. For teachers wishing to institute a similar partnership, a short, relatively useful, list of considerations for the exchange is provided.

When discussing the concept of WELL (web-enhanced language learning) in Chapter 8, authors Richard Taylor and Christina Gitsaki go right to the crux of the issue: many teachers are skeptical about using the Web because they don't know where to begin. The authors' common sense solution is a five stage framework, beginning with electronic communication and ending with a collaborative project hosted online.

Despite the movement towards Web-based courses, the editors of the text also include an entire chapter on "Creating Course-Specific CD-ROMs for Interactive Language Learning." Chapter 9 focuses on pushing the concept of teacher-created materials one step further by making personalized hypermedia for students to practice language through sound, video clips, and other interactive activities. One example detailed in the chapter is the creation and organization of materials (vocabulary-based reading passages, listening practice, and cloze tests) so that teachers can support the learning of vocabulary items taught in the class. Guidelines for successful implementation of this technique by educators are included.

Section three of the book was written for instructor-developers responsible for setting up and maintaining an institutional CALL facility. Practical ideas for doing a needs-analysis, planning the space, hiring appropriate staff members, purchasing software and hardware, and developing materials online are offered in chapter 10. Chapter 11 highlights many of the same issues in its description of the successes and pitfalls of implementing a large-scale CALL EFL program at a Japanese University. The detailing of the process will no doubt be useful to those intending to coordinate such a project. Chapter 12 reiterates much of the same content, but introduces another dynamic, the challenges of coordinating a collaborative project between two institutions. The authors of this segment provide additional mentoring to instructors implementing such a collaboration.

Instructors overwhelmed by the ever-increasing selection of teaching websites and language learning programs will appreciate the practicality of the two chapters in section four that look at evaluation aspects of these media. Chapter 13 looks at the pedagogical implications of using multimedia software packages and reviews the literature on evaluating language learning software, but is not very teacher-friendly in its readability. Chapter fourteen provides a systematic approach for creating a screening process and checklist tool that can be used for evaluating individual websites. Regrettably, this section is both wordy and more theoretical than necessary.

Although the book is entitled *New Perspectives*, much of the information presented seems to be old knowledge, or even just good teaching practices not specifically related to CALL. For example, among the principles for learner training in chapter 4, Philip Hubbard suggests that teachers experience the learner's perspective by trying CALL themselves. While this suggestion is certainly credible, it seems quite old-hat for teachers who regularly put themselves in their learners' shoes. Another seemingly obvious point is made in Chapter 12, where the authors note that email can offer opportunities for authentic interaction not normally found in traditional foreign language classrooms. Experienced users of CALL really have to look closely to glean new material from the text.

Furthermore, while the concept of a compilation may be useful for professionals who would not otherwise have access to works by all these authors, many of the chapters appear to be drawn from previously published versions of papers or presentations at conferences. There is little flow between chapters and the authors frequently write with varying levels of formality. Additionally, by virtue of the fact that the text is a compilation, there is a good deal of repetition. For example, the phases and history of CALL are detailed, not just in the introduction but also in chapters 8 and 9, while both chapters 5 and 6 discuss the application of LANs in writing classes in overlapping detail.

The end result is two-fold: the reader grows weary of the redundancy, and there is evidence that the authors of the chapters did not work collaboratively. Only the conclusion makes inclusive references to other parts of the text; therefore, I recommend that this chapter be read first. One additional point is that a number of the graphics supporting the content of particular studies or chapters have poor resolution. Considering that the premise of the text is the superiority of technology, this oversight is quite unfortunate.

A further complaint is that the majority of examples highlighting particular CALL properties were set in university EFL settings in Asia. One might argue that both the nature of Asian languages and the generally advanced level of technology proficiency in that region might not adequately translate to other language teaching settings. Likewise, this text does not seem to speak to the needs of all parties targeted by the editors. I did not, for example, find reference to K-12 public school settings where CALL can be just as useful a tool as in a university and where teachers are looking for ways to integrate creative and feasible projects using technology. A further edition could include such details to make this text relevant for pre-service K-12 ESL/FL teachers as well.

Overall, the text does do a respectable job of looking at the wide range of available CALL applications at the University level and condensing them into one volume. The book is beneficial mainly to someone who has little background in CALL. It could be used for introductory courses in classroom technology and teacher training programs. Alternatively, more tech-savvy individuals attempting to set up CALL environments could gain from the information available in section three, which focuses on the development and maintenance of a CALL facility. My advice to readers is to approach this book as a smorgasbord and take from it what they find useful.

ABOUT THE REVIEWER

Emily Evans received her MA in TESOL from American University, Washington DC. She is currently working at the Center for Applied Linguistics where she is helping to create an assessment of early language learning that will be delivered online. Her research interests center around gender differences and pragmatics and the effective use of CALL in second/foreign language classrooms.

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