

## REVIEW OF *TECHNOLOGY AND TEACHING ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS*

### Technology and Teaching English Language Learners

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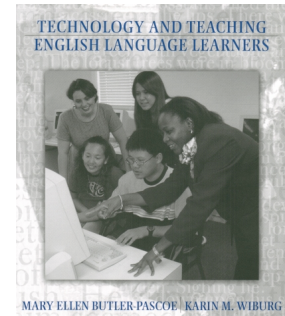
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#### Review by Kaley Bierman, University of Central Florida

*Technology and Teaching English Language Learners* is a professional text designed with the goal of equipping future language teachers with the tools technology provides for the English as a Second Language (ESL) learning classroom. The book is broken into eight chapters with a preface and index. The chapters cover subjects including communicative language teaching, content-based instruction for ESL students, using technology for oral language skills, using technology for teaching reading and writing, teaching thinking skills, culture in the classroom, and assessment. Each chapter deals with the issues surrounding these topics and their connection with technology.

The book uses an interactive style that introduces a question/answer format to relate the key issues within the text. For example, a sample question reads, "How does technology support language as communication in authentic settings?" Each section begins with a question like this one and is followed by a short answer to the question. Then examples and implications for the topic are shown. Each chapter ends with a summary of key ideas, a learning activities section for students to complete, resources for technologies, and resources for teacher development. The text supports the teaching method of communicative language learning. There is a chapter devoted to the history and development of this method citing such authors as Nunan and Brown. It also shows how to use technology when using the communicative approach in the classroom. This text is best used for CALL training for educators going into ESL classrooms. Professors using this text will find it presents many practical issues and ideas they will probably be addressing with their students; and students will find this text one they may want as part of their professional library due to the resources it provides in the field of educational technology.

There are many strengths associated with this text. One that is helpful to those unfamiliar to the technology field is the use of visuals and illustrations that show Web sites and activities mentioned in the text. If the text mentions a Web site specifically, a picture of the site may be shown to clarify and illustrate. This is helpful not only to those who may not be familiar with the technical language or examples, but also for visual learners who learn best by seeing what they read. Another strength of this text is the resource list at the end of each chapter. This section gives Web sites, software programs, and other important sources that teachers may find helpful to implement the ideas presented in the chapter. The resource list may also be an incentive for those studying from this text to keep it as a resource for their classrooms. The text is also useful due to the fact that examples are presented from a variety of ESL levels. Those in the K-12 field will find helpful examples as will those involved in the adult ESL field.

Another strong point in this text is the presentation of how technology will affect classrooms in the future. This is helpful because teachers need to be aware of the changes that may affect them in the future. Also,

teachers may like that the text has learning activities associated with each chapter at the end of the chapters. They may assign these as activities for use in or out of class to help students make meaningful connections to the text. These activities are already designed for group work, which will also benefit teachers looking to save time during lesson planning. There are a few drawbacks to these activities, but these will be discussed separately.

Finally, the text presents a variety of cross-cultural/inter-cultural issues related to ESL (and second language learning in general) and shows how technology can play a part in resolving challenges brought up by such issues in the classroom. For example, the text addresses, "How can technology be used to facilitate respect for cultural differences within an ELL class?" The text then gives an example of how prejudice may be overcome by the development of projects involving the World Wide Web. The access of students to perspectives from students all over the world is an important factor for teachers to keep in mind as technology, and the Internet more specifically, becomes a prominent pedagogical resource in the majority of classrooms.

This book does have a few drawbacks. First, for those not familiar with technology or for those yet unfamiliar with some of the main challenges brought up by ESL learners, some of the writing in this book may seem foreign at first. The incorporation of terms from both the technology and ESL fields can make the reading difficult for some. Although it is apparent that the authors wanted their book to be an accessible source for non-experts, it sometimes falls short of this goal with the extended use of technical terms and wordy sentences. A second problematic issue is that some of the suggestions may be unrealistic for many classroom teachers. For example, the book suggests that students be assigned teleconferencing to enhance their speaking skills. This is an excellent way for teachers to incorporate technology with the communicative approach. Unfortunately, many teachers do not have access to the technology needed for such an advanced activity, thus making it a less viable option. Another example shows how teachers have used international projects accomplished via the World Wide Web to teach language skills. Although in this case the technology is available to many, time and organizational management of this type of project may make it unusable for some, especially those with large classrooms. Although, this attribute has a weak side it is commendable that the book offers a variety of options for the use of technology and some of the examples do have alternate activities from which teachers can choose.

Finally, the learning activities at the end of each chapter may be difficult for some students to perform. For example, some of the learning activities of chapter 3 require students to use examples from their classrooms and have knowledge of school policy in their region. This may be difficult for students who are not currently teaching or international students in MATESOL programs who would be unfamiliar with current regional policy. Thus, teachers using this text would need to take these issues into account and plan accordingly, either to avoid those exercises, or have the information available for the students to access.

Overall, this text provides many insights into the use of technology to enable language learners to acquire English to their full capacity. With its many strengths teachers can take technology to a whole new height of usefulness in their classrooms. And, for those unfamiliar with technology, this book presents them with basic information about the tools that can make their classroom not only a technology friendly place, but a learning friendly place as well.

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## **ABOUT THE REVIEWER**

Kaley Bierman is an MATESOL student at the University of Central Florida. She is in her final two semesters and hopes to graduate in May 2005. Her goal is to teach ESL in the United States.

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