



FROM THE SPECIAL ISSUE EDITORS

The papers published in this issue of *Language Learning and Technology* are indicative of current research and exploratory intervention work dealing with the use of new technologies in language learning contexts involving children, teachers, and teacher education students. The range of papers represents diverse areas of interest within second and foreign language learning that is mediated by new technologies. These include new technologies as a *language learning medium*; sociocultural studies of new technology uses focusing on students' *interactions* with software interfaces and the social interactions occurring around the computer as students work; evaluative studies of ways of Internet use as a *language learning resource*; and students' new technology *uses and purposes* that are not usually associated with school-based language acquisition (e.g., gaming, text messaging, instant messaging, participating in fan-based Internet spaces).

In the opening paper, "[Child-to-Child Interaction and Corrective Feedback in a Computer Mediated L2 Class](#)," Frank Morris reports findings from a study of corrective feedback on and subsequent repairs to written target language enacted during child-to-child, computer-mediated interactions within a fifth-grade, elementary Spanish immersion class in a southeast region of the United States. This study focusses on a typical teaching-learning activity within the school computer lab where students were paired, but without being told who their partner was or where s/he was sitting in the classroom. Each pair used the discussion function of Blackboard, a Web-based commercial course management interface, to complete an off-line, hardcopy jigsaw task. Morris found that implicit, negotiated corrective feedback more often led to immediate target language error repair than did other types of feedback, such as explicit negative feedback.

Carla Meskill focuses on computer-supported classroom discourse in her article, "[Scaffolding the Learning of At-Risk English Language Learners with Computers](#)." At the center of her study is a very experienced elementary school teacher who works with beginning-level English language learners from low-income homes, in a mid-size, post-industrial city within the US. Meskill's analysis is grounded in the assumption that English is not a socially autonomous system, but is contingent on current and historical patterns of speaking and doing within socially defined contexts. The teacher explicitly recognizes the importance of not simply teaching her students to encode and decode, but how to recognize and navigate the "language of school" as well in order to help them effectively "participate in mainstream instructional activity." Meskill examines what she refers to as "triadic scaffolds," comprising teaching strategies, the computer's role in instructional scaffolding, and what is accomplished by students and their teacher within this teaching-learning context. Findings suggest that in this particular case, the target language interactions that occur between the students and their teacher while using computers may be just as important, if not more important, than the actual software-based language learning resources they are using.

The third paper, by [Cameron Richards](#), addresses ICT-supported learning activities. It reflects the author's commitment to ensuring that children's computer uses in language learning classrooms are not approached by teachers as merely "add ons" to the



curriculum. Richards reports on the trial, refinement and development within teacher education programs of what he calls, "information and communication technology-supported learning activities." These activities are deliberately learner-centred, rather than computer-driven, and frame learning as a cycle of activity, analysis, reflection, and transformation. He calls for teacher educators to encourage their pre-service teaching students to see themselves as *designers* of "effective and integrated learning" and not as merely transmitters of information and skills.

The issue concludes with Ravi Purushotma's account of the roles popular culture can play in supporting and enhancing foreign language learning. In "[You're Not Studying, You're Just...](#)" Purushotma argues that popular culture offers a rich range of readily-modifiable texts that can provide valuable alternatives to traditional high school classroom approaches to foreign language learning dominated by textbooks and isolated lists of vocabulary words and grammatical structures. He makes his case by reference to *The Sims*. This simulation game, which is popular in many countries around the world, can be modified to create a bilingual environment that provides strong, contextualized learning support for the target language while maintaining much of the pleasure to be had from gaming. He concludes by discussing similar possible benefits to be had from modifying voice-activated games, music videos, internet browser software, and from loading language lessons to one's mobile phone for language learning on the go.

Together, the four papers in this special issue trace important and useful terrain for subsequent research study. Purushomata's paper, in particular, points to important new areas of investigation. In assembling this issue we were struck by the absence of submissions reporting research into young people's language acquisition within informal, non-school contexts. A large and growing corpus of studies conducted outside the field of second language acquisition strongly suggests that children are using more sophisticated and complex digital technologies outside school settings than in their classrooms or kindergartens. Moreover, many of these studies address second language use and acquisition (cf., Marsh 2005). We recommend this corpus of studies to researchers working in the area of second and foreign language acquisition and strongly encourage the development of a similar focus within their research purview.

As guest editors of this issue we extend particular thanks to our reviewers for their time and valuable feedback. We also want to acknowledge the work of Associate Editor Irene Thompson and Managing Editor Pamela DaGrossa in supporting and overseeing the production of this issue.

Sincerely,

Michele Knobel & Colin Lankshear
Special Issue Editors

REFERENCE

Marsh, J. (Ed.) (2005). *Popular culture, new media and digital literacy in early childhood*. London: RoutledgeFalmer.