REVIEW OF *THE POWER OF CALL*

Martha C. Pennington, Ed.
The Power of CALL
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Reviewed by Charles Kisner, Center for the Advancement of Language Learning

When the University of Maryland Baltimore County asked me to teach a graduate course in computer-assisted language learning (CALL) this past school year, I began searching for a text that would serve as the foundation for the course. After examining many different titles, I decided to use Martha Pennington's new book, *The Power of CALL.* At the end of the semester, my students and I agreed it was an excellent choice. The book meets its two main goals: to provide a comprehensive overview of computer-assisted language learning; and to present some ideas which might "fire the imagination of teachers, course developers, and software designers."

The book is a collection of nine chapters that are clustered around three main topics. Part 1, Background, provides a comprehensive overview of computer-assisted language learning. This section recounts the history of computers in the classroom, outlines the advantages of technology, and provides the theoretical foundation for the rest of the book. Part 2, Technology, examines three important CALL technologies: networking, hypertext, and concordancing. Part 3, Language Skills Areas, provides specific examples of how CALL can be used to teach reading, writing, and speaking. Each chapter is authored by one or more experts in the field.

The book has two major strengths. Most importantly, it cites the research that shows that CALL can be highly effective. For example, in "The Power of the Computer in Language Education," the book's opening chapter, Martha Pennington discusses the growing body of research that shows that language lessons delivered via computer "may be inherently more salient, less threatening, and more easily available than some other presentational modes..." She also cites a wide variety of studies that show that CALL is more focused and more individualized than many other learning media thus increasing the "effectiveness of instruction for some individuals or populations of learners." Each ensuing chapter provides quantitative or qualitative evidence that CALL promotes a better teaching and learning

environment." Pennington's chapter alone, I would argue, is worth the price of the book. It can convince even the most skeptical technophobes to reevaluate their positions.

Although the book's main strength is its articulation of a theoretical position based on the research, it is also quite readable and practical. The language is clear and concise, free of the technical jargon that can discourage many language teachers. Furthermore, the selections focus on language-learning rather than technical issues. Various specialists explain how to use computer software, interactive simulations, hypertext, and virtual reality to create rich, authentic language learning environments which can engage students and speed the process of second language acquisition. The book is full of practical tips. For example, Tom Cobb and Vance Stevens suggest specific ways to use CALL in the reading classroom. They define "reading courseware" and provide guidelines for evaluating good software programs. Marianne Phinney shows how to use CALL in the writing classroom. She reviews the advantages of composing on the word processor and she discusses the shift to collaborative writing via computer and email. In still another chapter, Martha Pennington and John H. Esling discuss the potentials (and drawbacks) of using CALL to improve speaking skills.

Despite its many strengths, *The Power of CALL* has one obvious weakness, however: it focuses too narrowly on instructional software and pays too little attention to the Internet. Although Robert Hoffman provides a chapter on computer networks, and Marianne Phinney has a short section on email, the book fails to adequately examine instructional tools like, MOOs, MUDs, IRCs, and lists. The World Wide Web and virtual reality are barely mentioned, and emerging technologies like artificial intelligence, and WebCasting are totally ignored.

But despite these shortcomings, *The Power of CALL* should be required reading for anyone studying the subject. It thoroughly cites the research, provides a sound theoretical basis for adopting CALL, and offers practical suggestions for integrating it into the language classroom. *The Power of CALL* shows that language teachers should no longer debate whether technology can play an important role in the modern language classroom. Teachers need not be threatened by technology, for the research shows that well-designed CALL programs can engage our students and energize our classrooms. Language teachers of the present Ö not just the future Ö have a responsibility to go beyond the confines of their textbooks and learn how to integrate technology into their classes. As Philip Hubbard reminds us in his contribution to the book, "computer-assisted language learning has moved in the past decade from being a mere sideshow, a curiosity, to holding a solid position in modern language teaching."

ABOUT THE REVIEWER

Charles Kisner is a researcher at the Center for the Advancement of Language Learning (CALL) in Arlington, Virginia. He follows trends in language learning and technology and helps language teachers integrate technology into their classrooms. He also teaches a course in CALL at the University of Maryland Baltimore County.

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