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CALL Environments: Research, Practice, and C

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CALL Environments: Research, Practice, and Critical Issues

Joy Egbert and Elizabeth Hanson-Smith, Editors (1999)

Alexandria, VA: TESOL

Pp. xi + 523

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US \$39.95 (members \$35.95)

After more than thirty years, the field of computer assisted language learning (CALL) still lacks a solid theoretical framework. Up until now most CALL literature has been technology driven. Joy Egbert and Elizabeth Hanson-Smith have compiled a book that offers a comprehensive framework for CALL. The contributions they have compiled teach us ways to adapt computers for language learning activities computers can do. The authors have taken eight major themes from the second language acquisition research to organize their book. These conditions that support optimal classroom language learning are discussed for explaining the ways in which CALL can enhance and facilitate ESL learning. The book offers practical suggestions for a variety of learning situations, from an individual learner to a classroom.

The first chapter of the book gives an overview of computer-enhanced learning environments. The authors discuss these environments critically, always keeping in mind language learning and learning conditions. The rest of the book

with one of the eight conditions for optimal classroom language learning. Each part contains a theoretical framework, its application in classroom practices, and related issues that affect SLA. There are suggestions and ideas for further classroom-based exploration and academic research.

The eight parts of the book correspond to the major themes from classroom-based SLA:

1. *Learners have opportunities to interact and negotiate meaning.* Part I of the book suggests how teachers create opportunities for students to interact, and also offers some advice on how to design learning centres.

2. *Learners interact in the target language with an authentic audience.* Computer-based technologies provide opportunities for interaction with an authentic audience. The very concept of authentic communication, in local networks or through the ease of use of the Internet, facilitates new opportunities for authentic audiences. These interactions now mainly involve the use of written text, but as technology advances, oral interaction is becoming more common. [-1-]

3. *Learners are involved in authentic tasks.* SLA research emphasizes the importance of authentic tasks for learning languages. Technology can be used to create authentic tasks in language teaching. A variety of resources, including computer programs and telecommunication tools that allow for authentic interaction. Technology is changing the idea of authentic tasks in the content-based classroom. At the end of the book, the evaluation of software can be found.

4. *Learners are exposed to and encouraged to produce varied and creative language.* Opportunities are needed for acquiring a language. CALL can provide learners with opportunities to obtain authentic language and can facilitate interaction to negotiate meaning, and also provide a rich context. Examples of CALL activities are provided. The very clear and concrete instructions given as to how to use CALL programs are helpful in setting up a CALL environment. The information in chapter 14 about where and how to find resources is helpful. Effort.

5. *Learners have enough time and feedback.* A brief but clear explanation of recent ideas about time and feedback is given in Part 5. This section helps us focus on the idea of appropriateness when assessing students' learning. Outcomes of CALL activities are given, as well as ideas for setting policy for CALL environments. When planning a CALL program, and when reflecting on and evaluating an existing program, these ideas are helpful.

6. *Learners are guided to attend mindfully to the learning process.* Research shows that individual differences in learning styles, strategies, and motivation also play a fundamental role in language learning. CALL can cater to differences among learners. Computers provide many possibilities for adapting CALL environments. Chapter 20 deserves a special note as it addresses the topic of cultural sensitivity, suggesting how to take into account this important issue in the CALL environment.

7. Learners work in an atmosphere with an ideal stress/anxiety level. After addressing the means and analyzing how the use of computers can cause stress and anxiety to learners, students to a CALL environment in order to ease the transition. This section also includes environments such as MOOs (multi-user dimension, object oriented; these are multi-user people communicate in real time).

8. Learner autonomy is supported. CALL environments related to autonomy and their role in this section. Chapter 25, about authoring programs, and chapter 26, about open and distance language learning and language learning autonomy and independence. Chapter 27 describes designing language software in order to enhance the autonomy of the learner. [-2-]

In chapter 28, Carla Meskill gives a last word on CALL from a critical point of view. She renounces a promise and that it is we as teachers who must drive its uses in the classroom.

There is a reference section at the end of the book, which includes an extensive bibliography of electronic forums for teachers and students, Internet resources including freeware and shareware publishers.

CALL Environments is a well-balanced book. It provides a strong theoretical framework, evidence for classroom practice and further investigations.

It is common to find a lack of unity in edited volumes. This is not the case here; Joy Egbert has done an excellent editing job. One can only suggest that Part V, Time/Feedback, which deals with time, have dedicated some attention to assessment tools.

This book is well-suited for anyone interested in CALL. It can be used as a resource book for a CALL methodology course, and as a professional resource for ESL/EFL teachers who

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