

BOOK REVIEW

The innovative textbook on Computer-Assisted Language Learning

Pokrivčáková, S. et al. (2015). CALL and Foreign Language Education: e-textbook for foreign language teachers. Nitra: Constantine the Philosopher University. 110p. ISBN 978-80-558-0621-1

This recently published e-textbook by a group of authors as its title suggests, discusses computer-assisted language learning in linkage with foreign language education. The abbreviation CALL posits the idea of using computers for language teaching and learning as an innovative approach for contemporary and future schooling. In the last few decades this approach to education has been frequently debated and reviewed by both the academic world and professional teachers. Substantiation of the importance of CALL within language classes according to authors in the learning environment is indicated by the freedom from stress, the learner's opportunity to study at his/her own pace and affirmation via prompt and individualised feedback. On the other hand this approach also has its pitfalls making it crucial for language teachers to be aware of both sides of the coin. To be able to use CALL for pleasurable and effective learning in language classes is the main goal of the textbook's message.

As for the structure of the publication it is divided into five major chapters that are further developed into subsequent subchapters. The introduction explains the plan for the writing of the textbook as part of a series of methodological guides that should be useful for teacher-training courses at Slovak universities.

The first chapter provides theoretical context where readers can find useful terminology and historical background related to the topic of CALL. This chapter consists of two parts. In the first half the author clarifies terminology and the message of computer-assisted instruction, e-learning, m-learning, b-learning and different points of view regarding this approach of learning are discussed. The second part is oriented toward various historical understandings of CALL by different authors. Pedagogical principles are analyzed and an outline of possible CALL sources including educational software, Internet, multimedia and on-line

websites are provided. Accompanying the possible sources are expectations for the roles of learner and teacher.

The second chapter of the textbook focuses on various language systems. The author first approaches the teaching of vocabulary with the support of CALL. A brief description of what is suitable to broaden English vocabulary is enhanced by examples of computer assisted activities that are divided into three groups according to the context in which they are practiced: visual, semantic and interlingual. Several activities are given within each group and these are linked directly to the online web-page. The second aspect is the teaching of pronunciation with the assistance of computers. The subchapter reveals three important factors: input, output and feedback that affect the acquisition of intelligible English pronunciation. In this regard a wide range of accessible Internet materials for possible application in class is offered. The last subchapter discusses the use of CALL for the teaching and learning of English grammar. Exercises and tasks for practicing grammar features are provided by examples of computer software, interactive lessons and games. As a good hint for learners, the grammar proofreaders on stream are quite useful.

The content of the third chapter is devoted to communicative skills; therefore, it is divided into four parts. First discussed is the assistance of computers when developing listening. Serious attention is paid to podcasting and its typology as it is seen as a modern way to advance the listening of learners. On this subject the author focuses on two model activities for classes giving its aims, procedure and exercises. The second subchapter deals with CALL and the development of speaking. This skill is important to oral production and in this case the computer is considered an important communication medium. The author mentions systems that provide computer-mediated communication. To enhance speaking skills diverse examples are given. The next skill supported by computers is reading. In the introduction purposes for supporting reading abilities are grounded with a view to different techniques. This subchapter also encompasses the advantages of the application of CALL for ESL purposes as can be seen in the model activities which point to real life experience. Another skill that benefits from computer assistance is writing. In this regard the textbook provides the reader with a description of e-mail/blog use, word-processing activities as well as useful hints about the handling of the "wikispaces" portal.

The fourth chapter is dedicated to the specific areas where CALL might best be used. As an example the application of computer technology to develop intercultural communicative competence is included. The author emphasizes that culture is an inalienable part of English language classes so this subchapter

discusses the use of various authentic materials and their adaptation for lessons. The cultural aspect can also be taught through activities based on TV commercials, online magazine articles or video projects. CALL could be of assistance when using literature in ESL classes. Two sample activities combine the literary context with online activities even when using them with an interactive whiteboard. Also described is the entire procedure for work in class. Young learners in particular can benefit from computer assistance while learning language. The textbook discusses the positive and negative attributes of using multimedia in class. Two case studies within the subchapter depict activities in which media can serve the needs of young learners. As a bonus are added online websites suitable for the same purpose. The last subchapter shows how to combine CALL with English for specific purposes. The author describes the procedure for running an entire English course supported by online software at a department of informatics.

The last chapter is concerned with the definition, principles and methodology of blended learning. A closer look is given to the added value and drawbacks of this way of teaching and learning a foreign language.

It is clear that this e-textbook has fulfilled its aim of being a suitable manual for teacher-training during university courses. The evidence lies within each chapter as all authors have contributed to the creation of a guidebook that provides university students as well as a wider audience with a valuable resource for activities and tasks supported by computer technology that can be applied in everyday English classes. Although the main focus has been oriented to CALL and its implementation into education the content provides an even broader sense of teaching individual language skills. The theoretical introduction of each subchapter uncovers the most crucial aspects of foreign language education as the discussed topic is set at the beginning into a general context and later elaborated into more specific elements.

Computer-assisted language learning inevitably belongs in the current educational system of Slovakia. In this regard it is absolutely appropriate that the contributors decided to prepare a guide for practical work using this approach. Highly beneficial are the online examples, links to activities and tasks that with just one click redirect the reader to the resource material. All examples given in each section may function as tips and hints for revitalized language classes full of motivating features while employing computer assistance. Recommended multimedia resources and authentic materials may be promptly assigned in class. Adjustments may be needed at times.

Model activities that are developed in the material offer several valuable tools such as: a complete lesson plan with aims, appropriateness for specific language level and skill, description of necessary equipment. Another useful feature of this e-textbook is that tasks are added after some subchapters. These will widen horizons for those in the ESL teacher-training programme at university level.

Although the overall evaluation and impression of the publication is highly positive and practical it has a few omissions. For example not every subchapter has included the “*Tasks*” assignment. For students at university it is a useful resource for revision and a real opportunity to have these activities to work with. In some cases the students can imagine and better understand the real demands of teaching when working on preparation of their own materials as required in those tasks. Also lacking in some subchapters are samples of online activities or examples of evidence to prove what is stated.

The present e-textbook is highly recommended for in-service and for future teachers of English as a second language as well as for university students in general. It is a guide for teaching that combines language education with computer, technology and multimedia. The CALL approach enriches the traditional form of teaching foreign languages and examples given in this book are the evidence for it.

This publication is suitable for use beyond that of ESL teachers and classes. The examples and activities shown in this text are targeting English language learning but may be used as a template or role model for further adaptation among other foreign languages.

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