CALL Dimensions: Options and Issues in Computer-Assisted Language Learning		
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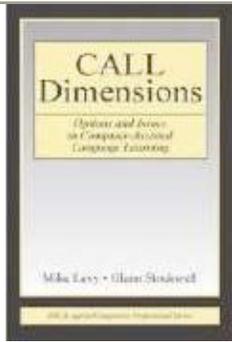
Overview

The goal of Mike Levy and Glenn Stockwell's *CALL Dimensions: Options and Issues in Computer-Assisted Language Learning* is to build a detailed picture of modern-day computer-assisted language learning (CALL) for language teachers, researchers, and materials designers and evaluators. To begin their discussion on CALL, Levy and Stockwell identified a number of keyword descriptors, called "CALL dimensions" (p. 9), based on a corpus of CALL journals and books collected between 1999 and July 2005: design, evaluation, computer-mediated communication (CMC), theory, research, practice, and technology. These dimensions correspond to the middle eight chapters of the book, while the remaining three chapters help to introduce the field and conclude the book. Each chapter begins with a brief introduction and then spotlights examples from the literature which serve to not only describe noteworthy developments in the area, but also to model what work in the area may look like when written for (and accepted for publication in) a CALL journal or book.

Chapter 2 begins the discussion of CALL dimensions by focusing on design, including materials, task, syllabus and course design. One major theme of the chapter is that CALL design is "heavily dependent on context" (p. 12), which is also a theme seen throughout the remainder of the book. The articles and websites highlighted in this chapter exemplify designers' varying "points of departure" (p. 11), for example, a teaching philosophy, a theoretical approach to language learning, or methodologies for learning a particular language skill. Such departure points influence both the

CALL product and the decisions made for how the technology will be used. The section on Design of CALL Tutors, or programs that are able to evaluate learners' responses and provide feedback, emphasizes how time, technological skill, and available resources can lead to CALL products that differ widely in their sophistication.

Chapter 3 builds on the theme of context shaping CALL, emphasizing the difficulties one faces when evaluating CALL materials and tools since they vary widely. Examples from the CALL corpus showcase a range of simple to sophisticated techniques for evaluating CALL materials, technology implementation, and students' attitudes towards using CALL (e.g., checklists, surveys, large-scale frameworks). The end of the chapter focuses on two widely-used evaluative frameworks for CALL: Chapelle's (2001), based on the interactionist approach to second language acquisition, and Hubbard's (1996), a more methodology-based approach to evaluation. Here language teachers, researchers, and CALL designers begin to understand the complexities involved in large-scale, small-scale, and third-party evaluation. The authors' discussion of such intricacies rounds out this strong chapter.

Chapter 4 on computer mediated communication (CMC) stresses that CMC is unique in that it is a collection of tools, including chat, email, and audio and/or video conferencing programs, that allows students to interact with other users of the language through computer technology. Such interactive programs contrast with stand-alone software or websites, which limit student interaction to language the computer rather than a human being provides. This chapter provides an overview of the various CMC tools and discusses how different CMC technologies can influence the type of language students produce and with which they interact.

Chapter 5 focuses on the role theory plays in CALL research, design, and integration; it stresses the view that CALL research and practice be principled rather than haphazard. A number of widely used theories in many of the social sciences are highlighted here, emphasizing the cross-disciplinary nature of CALL research and practice. One of the most useful aspects of the chapter is a synthesis of the theories used in select CALL authors' publications and identification of how these theories contributed to the design and analysis of the research (see pp. 124-125).

Chapter 6 is organized around six research strands in CALL (e.g., use of feedback, reading on the Web) that are described using articles from the CALL corpus. In the discussion section, Levy and Stockwell provide suggestions for beginning and experienced researchers interested in planning, conducting and publishing CALL research.

Chapter 7 addresses CALL classroom issues and is organized around different language skill areas. Such organization allows the authors to showcase areas where the technology is particularly strong, such as for grammar and vocabulary, and to point out areas where the technology can be limiting based on its current stage of development, as is the case with speaking and pronunciation. As in previous chapters, the role of context is emphasized in the discussion section.

The final CALL dimension identified by Levy and Stockwell is technology, the focus of chapter 8. There is a brief overview of both new (e.g., SCORM, XML) and older (e.g., Hot Potatoes) technologies that appear in the CALL literature. Building on the

previous chapter the authors draw from both select CALL publications and anecdotal information to focus on the theme of using technologies that work within a particular context and with a particular set of constraints, for instance, institutional constraints.

To conclude the book, chapters 9 and 10 focus on CALL integration and what they term "emergent" and "established" (p. 239) CALL. Here the authors distinguish between two groups of CALL practitioners: the specialists who subscribe to the emergent view of CALL by focusing on being critical of existing technologies and refining them so as to more positively effect research and pedagogy, and the traditional language teacher who is not concerned with manipulating technologies but rather focuses on using them creatively 'as-is' (established CALL). These two types of technology users may face different constraints, to varying degrees, for example technology skills, time, interests, etc., separate from those of the institutions at which they work; and these constraints affect not only the technologies used but also how they are used. Such particular constraints will, in turn, affect issues of CALL design and evaluation, both of which are "inseparable" (p. 239) and require an understanding of the means and the ends. This chapter ties together many of the themes seen throughout the book while also expanding on many of the previous chapters.

Critique

The lack of publications synthesizing the CALL field makes this book an invaluable resource for CALL professionals as well as for those new to the field. Many of the publications chosen to exemplify aspects of each CALL dimension are well known by professionals in the field and oft-cited, and can serve as strong models for students beginning work in CALL. Levy and Stockwell's combined experience allows readers to see the bigger picture in the discussions at the end of each chapter, something not often seen in CALL publications.

Despite these obvious strengths, I have a number of criticisms. I was surprised to see a lack of attention paid to teacher education, a very important and frequently covered topic in CALL publications. For those wishing to understand CALL in a broader sense, specifically with regards to the growing role of technology and CALL in many graduate-level teacher education programs, the glaring omission of this very timely issue will not go unnoticed. In addition, many times throughout the book I got the impression that CALL practitioners are an isolated group where one must have the technical skills to work alone on materials design and implementation. While the end chapter distinguishes between CALL specialists and the more traditional language teacher, in my experience technical support staff, other teachers interested in technology, and CALL conference-goers are happy to help those lacking technology skills design CALL materials and integrate them into their classrooms. This access to help issue, of course, surfaces at length in many of the latter chapters, but as a constraint. It also deserves to be considered in a positive light, as available human capital. Lastly, I disagree with the binary distinction made in the last chapter between those subscribing to the emergent or established view of CALL--one or the other. I believe many CALL practitioners, specialist or not, subscribe to both views, as they concern themselves with manipulating technologies to fit specific needs and simultaneously struggle with how best to use existing technologies creatively with

their classes.

In all, this is a very readable and comprehensive look at the field of CALL as it currently stands. The book has a number of strengths and would be a valuable addition to any introductory CALL course, as well as recommended reading for CALL researchers and evaluators.

References

Chapelle, C. (2001). *Computer applications in second language acquisition: Foundations for teaching, testing and research*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Hubbard, P. (1996). Elements of CALL methodology: Development, evaluation and implementation. In M. Pennington (Ed.), *The Power of CALL* (pp. 15-32). Houston: Athelstan.

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