

Review of *Language teaching with video-based technology: Creativity and CALL teacher education*

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Language teaching with video-based technology: Creativity and CALL teacher education

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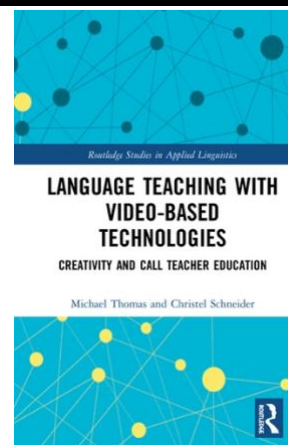
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Second language (L2) teaching contexts are rapidly changing and require teachers to make constant adjustments to keep up with these changes. One of the areas that has shown remarkable changes is the technology used in L2 teaching and curriculum design, which has become increasingly available over the last three decades (Kessler, 2006). Accordingly, the area of computer-assisted language learning (CALL) has been attracting great interest both from second language acquisition (SLA) researchers and from L2 teachers as a viable, and even crucial, pedagogical option that provides L2 learners with more optimal learning opportunities to engage in meaningful, authentic interactions (Plonsky & Ziegler, 2016; Ziegler, 2016). In spite of the growing interest and increasing availability of digital technology in L2 teaching contexts, these advantages are not being fully utilized in many L2 teaching contexts around the world. Furthermore, the lack of teacher training courses on various topics in CALL and insufficient understanding of CALL teaching methodologies and principles prevent the successful integration of technology in L2 teaching.

Given these gaps between abundant instructional opportunities that have been created by recent technological development and the current state of L2 teaching in terms of underutilization of various new technologies, *Language Teaching with Video-Based Technology: Creativity and CALL Teacher Education* co-authored by Thomas and Schneider introduces a creative way of using video-based technology in L2 classrooms and teacher training courses. Particularly, the book focuses on critically exploring the potential of utilizing a three-dimensional (3D) immersive environment that can be realized through real-time, virtual computer graphics engines called “machinima”.

Machinima is a neologism that was coined from *machine* and *cinema* in the late 1990s. The term is used for 3D immersive videos generated by the users (Morozov, 2008). By utilizing machinima, the users can experience any on-screen activities through their own avatar (or their on-screen graphical representation) in an immersive, virtual environment. Thus, the use of machinima in an L2 classroom enables learners to experience authentic, realistic L2 tasks without actually engaging in the exact tasks in real life. Therefore, the strengths of machinima may be best utilized particularly in English for Specific Purposes (ESP), English for Academic Purposes (EAP), Content-Language Integrated Learning (CLIL), Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT), and Project-Based Language Teaching (PBLT) courses, where learners are expected to

learn by doing through experiential learning.

Thomas and Schneider's primary aim in writing this book was to explore the potentials and challenges of L2 learning in a virtual, immersive 3D environment using machinima. Their secondary goal was to provide the readers with technical and pedagogical knowledge to creatively incorporate video-based technology into their L2 teaching based on the students' specific needs and objectives. As stated by the authors in the preface, the book primarily targets students and researchers in the fields of applied linguistics and language education. Furthermore, CALL practitioners, teacher trainers, and language program coordinators who are designing curricula for their CALL courses may find the theoretical and practical implications discussed in the book useful for designing their video-based CALL course materials.

Structurally, the book comprises six chapters with a preface and a list of abbreviations and glossary, which is very helpful for readers who are not familiar with the terms of language teaching methodologies and video-based technologies. After establishing the context of the entire book in the introduction chapter (Chapter 1), the following two chapters (Chapters 2 and 3) critically review and discuss the potentials and limitations of video-based CALL teaching with machinima. In Chapter 3, the authors introduce the principles of TBLT, PBLT, and CLIL, and discuss previous research findings in these areas. Five cases that piloted the use of machinima in actual L2 classrooms and two cases of machinima-based teacher training courses are presented in Chapters 4 and 5. The final chapter (Chapter 6) discusses the overall evaluation of the potential of machinima in video-based CALL courses and concludes with current instructional limitations and implications for future CALL research as well as for teacher training courses.

The introductory Chapter 1 opens the discussion by identifying some major issues and challenges in current CALL teaching and teacher education, such as five factors that are preventing the successful integration of technology into language classroom. Chapter 1 then shifts to the discussion of the main focus of the book, which is the potential of video-based technologies in L2 learning, particularly in virtual, immersive learning environments. To introduce the technology in question, the authors describe the primary features of machinima and potential pedagogical opportunities that can be created through the use of the technology. Then, the authors introduce the case studies that are later presented in Chapters 4 and 5 with the descriptions of the methodologies employed to conduct these case studies. The chapter concludes with an overall outline of the book and the summaries of each chapter.

Chapter 2 provides a critical review of previous research on video-based CALL teaching that utilized the virtual, immersive environments with machinima. The chapter starts with the historical background of the growth of 3D immersive technology and its influence on CALL teacher education. While the authors describe the general factors that prevent the successful incorporation of various technologies into language teaching (e.g., limited institutional resources, teachers' expertise, and their expectations), they also discuss the potential benefits of utilizing the virtual immersive environments in L2 learning in relation to cognitive and affective rationales for L2 acquisition. As claimed by the authors, the use of 3D immersive environments through machinima provides numerous unique advantages for L2 learners. For example, virtual, immersive experiences through machinima allow L2 learners to have authentic exposure to the target language input, pragmatical uses, and cultural artifacts in multiple modalities. Furthermore, the 3D immersive video technology enables learners to engage in authentic L2 interaction with rich visuals, thereby promoting learners' agency, engagement, and motivation. The authors also discuss the potential uses of machinima for special education, less commonly taught language courses, and teacher training programs.

Chapter 3 provides a thorough overview of TBLT, PBLT, and CLIL, and theoretical rationales of these approaches. This chapter outlines key theoretical principles of TBLT and its pedagogical rationales in CALL teaching contexts from SLA perspectives. This comprehensive overview of TBLT functions as the basis for sequential discussions on the potentials of PBLT and how it can be best promoted by integrating 3D digital technologies with creative processes of project-based learning. The authors conclude the chapter by introducing CLIL as an ideal venue for technology-mediated PBLT in terms of developing learners' linguistic and content knowledge, as well as raising their intercultural awareness in authentic, immersive environments.

To examine the pedagogical potential of machinima in actual language classrooms, the authors dedicate Chapter 4 to reporting the results of the five case studies that were conducted to pilot various ways of using machinima in different L2 classroom contexts. The authors begin the chapter by describing the background of the projects. They present three research questions that guided the five case studies and brief descriptions of the contexts of these five cases: a commercial language school in Germany (Case 1), university ESP and general English courses in the Czech Republic (Case 2), a secondary school CLIL course in the Netherlands (Case 3), university-level Turkish courses in Turkey (Case 4), and Polish courses at a military university in Poland (Case 5). These case studies were analyzed quantitatively and qualitatively through the data elicited from questionnaires, interviews, and focus group discussions. Overall, the learners' and teachers' evaluations of the piloted lessons indicated that the use of machinima in L2 classrooms increased learners' engagement and motivation at least in the short term. As an important factor, it was reported that the lesson that involved the learners in the actual machinima creation processes as a collaborative project was the most successful and rewarding for the learners. The use of relatively short video clips of machinima was also identified as an important factor. However, several major limitations that negatively affected learners' evaluations are also presented in this chapter (e.g., the low video quality of machinima; the amount of extra work required for teachers; and the difficulty in finding an appropriate, ready-made machinima that fits well with the instructional objectives). As a result, the majority of the students reported their preference for traditional videos over machinima, but the authors nonetheless showed the promising potential of machinima once the shortcomings they listed are better addressed by researchers and teachers in the future.

Whereas Chapter 4 explores the potential and challenges of machinima in classroom contexts, Chapter 5 focuses on the two cases of CALL teacher training courses in which trainees engaged in a collaborative machinima production project. The authors discuss the trainees' evaluations of the usefulness of machinima in their own teaching practices. Similar to the five case studies in Chapter 4, these two cases were analyzed quantitatively and qualitatively using the data that came from questionnaires, interviews, focus group discussions, asynchronous interactions in a learning management system (Moodle), and ethnographical observations. Based on the data collected with these methods, the authors described the processes and changes of the trainees' machinima learning as they engaged in each training course. The authors also identified several technical challenges that were evident during the process of creating machinima. Particularly, teacher trainees with little pre-training knowledge of virtual worlds experienced a steep learning curve. In spite of these challenges, the authors elucidated the benefits of using machinima and its potential positive impacts on L2 learners' linguistic knowledge as well as their affective states.

The final Chapter 6 reviews the entire book by highlighting the main points, major findings that emerged from the case studies, and the significant implications discussed throughout the book. The authors conclude the book by discussing the limitations of current research on video-based CALL in general and describe the directions for future research with specific research questions and a model for future CALL teacher training courses. This section in particular will be of great interest to applied linguistics researchers as it provides an excellent road map predicting where research in the CALL field can potentially go.

Across the entire chapters of the book, the authors provide numerous implications for creatively and successfully utilizing virtual, immersive video technologies in CALL classrooms. Particularly, the detailed descriptions of the case studies that described field tests of machinima in actual L2 teaching contexts and teacher education courses provide unique contributions to the field of CALL teaching and research. From pedagogical points of view, the authors' honest discussions of the challenges and the limitations of using the current machinima technology in L2 classrooms are insightful not only for teachers who are thinking of using machinima in their lessons, but also for any CALL teachers who are planning to utilize video-based technologies in general in their teaching practices. Furthermore, the descriptions of the processes, results, and discussions of these case studies and future research questions that the authors derived from these cases are very informative for researchers and graduate students who are planning to conduct video-based CALL research for their future projects. Another strength of the book is the well-written, accessible reviews on previous CALL research that focus on video-based technologies and virtual, immersive environments. The authors also did an excellent job presenting concise theoretical and empirical overviews

of TBLT, PBLT, and CLIL in the first three chapters. Therefore, the book is also recommendable for those who are not yet quite familiar with the book's topics but are interested in designing and conducting video-based CALL instruction in the frameworks of TBLT, PBLT, or CLIL.

Although the inclusion of the case studies is the biggest strength of the book, there are also some potential limitations. One such limitation is that the beneficial effects of using machinima in the case studies were evaluated only through the results of the learners' self-evaluations and the teachers' observations of their students' language performance. Thus, there is a need for future research to utilize valid and reliable language assessments for a more objective investigation of how the use of machinima can contribute to L2 learning. Another potential limitation is a lack of potential solutions for some challenges identified in the case studies. For example, it was reported that some learners and teacher education trainees, particularly whose language proficiency was limited, struggled with using machinima or failed to complete their courses. Considering the steep learning curve for becoming a flexible machinima user, guidelines on how to assist those who struggled with using machinima may be essential for the readers. These small points aside, the book overall showed that much research and continuing work are needed, and the authors demonstrated how exciting this work indeed can be. One expectation is that the work will become more feasible and enriching as teachers become more frequent users of machinima over time.

Overall, this volume is a valuable addition to the field of CALL research and teaching, highlighting benefits and specific challenges related to the integration of the video-based immersive technology with machinima into actual CALL classrooms. I highly recommend this informative volume by Thomas and Schneider not only to CALL teachers and researchers, but also to those who are interested in exploring the potential of using video-based technologies in L2 classrooms. This book will help such individuals develop further research questions for the advancement of the CALL field.

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