

REVIEW OF *INTERNET FOR ENGLISH TEACHING*

Internet for English Teaching

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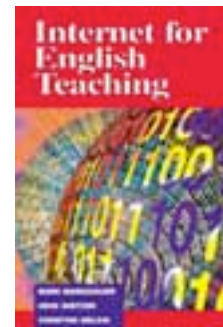
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Review by Shaofeng Li, University of South Florida

Internet for English Teaching is an excellent resource book for the ESL teachers who are interested in using the Internet in their classroom or people who are enthusiastic about conducting research in this regard. It describes different aspects of the use of the Internet in teaching English and analyzes model programs across the world where the Internet is successfully employed to facilitate the improvement of the learner's English proficiency.

The book is divided into eight chapters, each addressing one aspect of the topic in question. Ushering the reader into the concerned area, the first chapter, "Getting Started," presents features of the Internet and reasons why it should be introduced into the ESL classroom. The fact that computer-mediated communication (CMC) is asynchronous, synchronous, and based on hypermedia (or hypertext) makes it possible and practicable to incorporate the Internet into language teaching. The authors list five reasons to use the Internet for English teaching: (a) it provides authentic language materials; (b) it enhances the student's level of literacy in conducting on-line communication; (c) it enables the student to interact with native and nonnative speakers for 24 hours on end; (d) it makes the learning process lively, dynamic, and interesting; (e) it gives both the student and the teacher the power to work efficiently.

Chapter 2, "Resources for Teachers," describes the ways teachers can use the Internet to communicate with their peers, particularly through e-mail or e-mail lists. The chapter also analyzes the various on-line resources for the teacher to access such as sites, journals, and virtual libraries.

The next three chapters examine the major skills areas that are, in the authors' words, "being reshaped by the Internet: communication and collaboration, reading and research, and writing and publishing" (p. 8). Chapter 3 discusses how communication and collaboration can take place at the intra-class level (within a single class), or at the supra-class level (across classes or beyond the boundary of the class). While the former is exemplified by teacher-student and student-student communication, the latter takes on forms like long-distance communication or interclass projects. Chapter 4, "Student Research," investigates the possible research skills to be used by the student and to be taught by the teacher. After briefly reviewing basic features of the major available search engines, the authors look at strategies for using Web searches in English teaching, and finally conclude the chapter by discussing the classroom activities and projects where the research skills are to be used. This chapter, in my view, is of special importance in that in the current world people are faced with such a vast amount of information that the basic skills described in this chapter are essential for locating, analyzing, evaluating, and synthesizing information. More importantly, these skills can be learned. In chapter 5, "Student Publishing," the reader is presented with

how and why students are supposed to publish their own work on the World Wide Web. This chapter is roughly separated into three sections. The first section is devoted to displaying the changing nature of writing in the Internet era as compared with traditional classroom writing. The second outlines a project-based approach to Web publishing. In the third section, some sample Web-publishing projects are provided. The underlying tenet for the encouragement of student publishing projects is that it can "achieve the dual purposes of helping students become active masters of technology while sharing authentic texts with real audiences" (p. 66).

Chapter 6 provides an overall picture of on-line distance education. It defines distance education, talks about available on-line courses for students and teachers, and finally mentions the pitfalls of distance education and how the quality of education can be affected. In chapter 7, the authors advance some basic principles teachers need to observe in integrating the Internet into English language courses. They suggest that these principles are pedagogical rather than technological in nature, so observing them is essential since they remain useful guides even if particular tools change. The principles are divided into three areas: learning goals, teaching guidelines, and planning tips. The chapter concludes with the description of ten sample Web projects. Chapter 8 is concerned with approaches to conduct research about on-line learning. The chapter opens with a description of five types of educational research, and then analyzes five specific areas of on-line language learning research: linguistic features, interaction, attitude, context, and language impact. Following chapter 8 is a supplement on how to make Web pages.

The most praiseworthy aspect of this book is that it provides comprehensive guidelines for the effective integration of the Internet with English teaching. Every topic discussed in this book is clearly described, and the reader can find an inexhaustible stock of information, from basic principles to actual examples, from individual aspects to all-round application. It is also accessible to readers with diverse backgrounds: for laymen and professionals as well as experienced teachers and rookie educators. Furthermore, it abounds in hands-on examples, which are so critical for conducting research in education.

Despite all the above virtues, I would like to point out a few minor concerns about the book. First, the fact that it provides so much Internet-based information in each chapter, such as useful Web sites, is a double-edged sword, because the Internet is so prone to change and so unpredictable that Web sites may come and go overnight. Therefore, while the book tries to keep pace with time, it is obviously hard to do so, especially where the Internet is concerned. Second, while it is good to be all-inclusive, it is difficult to provide an in-depth discussion of all aspects of the applicability of technology in second language education. This is most evident in chapter 8 where the research methodology in education is addressed. The five approaches are all mentioned, but none of them is discussed in detail, leaving non-expert readers confused as to what to make of the seemingly profound terminology as in the "etic versus emic" dichotomy.

The flaws of the book are really minor in comparison with its virtues. In the opinion of this reviewer, this volume is a must-read for anyone interested in the application of technology, particularly the Internet, in foreign language teaching. It is definitely worth reading.

ABOUT THE REVIEWER

Shaofeng Li is currently a PhD candidate in Second Language Acquisition and Instructional Technology at the University of South Florida. His research interests include the integration of technology into second language teaching and learning, Sociocultural Theory, bilingual education, and discourse analysis. He has published a number of academic articles and is author of several book chapters.

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