

## REVIEW OF *TECHNOLOGY IN THE L2 CURRICULUM*

### Technology in the L2 Curriculum

Stacy DuBravac

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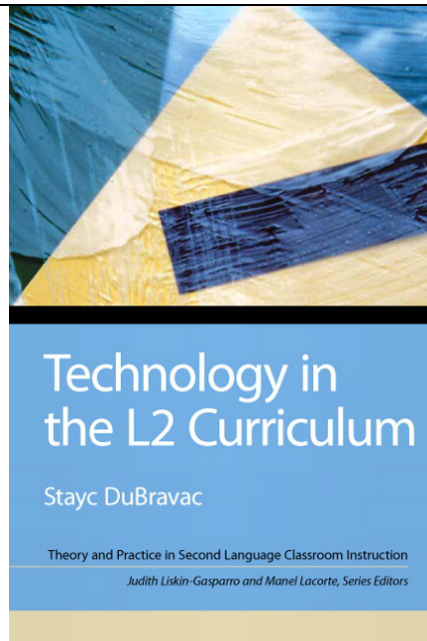
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### Review by **Jacob A. Kletzien**, **Sookmyung Women's University**

*Technology in the L2 Curriculum*, by Stacy DuBravac, is a recent offering by Prentice Hall in the Pearson series of Theory and Practice in Second Language Classroom Instruction edited by Judith Liskin-Gasparro and Manel Lacorte. Intended for a wide range of current and future language teaching professionals, this book covers a comparably broad range of topics that should help prepare teachers toward more effective and informed use of technology in their classrooms. Tipping the scales heavily in favor of theory, this book does meet its goal of being a viable main text for CALL courses in undergraduate/graduate teacher teaching programs; however, due to a limited focus on practical application, it is unlikely to serve as a sole text, with the supplementation of practical materials likely needed.

Texts aimed at broad audiences inherently struggle with the need to cater to both absolute beginners and to those who come to the text already possessing some knowledge of the content. In the past, texts have left room for the discussion of offline technologies for those who are new to or lack connection to the online world (e.g., Dudeney & Hockly, 2007). *Technology in the L2 Classroom*, however, plants itself firmly in a world where basic familiarity with computers and basic Internet use can be assumed for both teachers and learners. Building off this assumption, the book seems to deal with a pitfall of having no clearly defined audience, which can be the case with many language instruction books, by focusing loosely on American World Languages educators. Readers and teacher educators from other areas or fields can then take the mostly general information in this particular text and tailor its suggested tasks to their particular languages and contexts. CALL and SLA theories are woven into each chapter, providing strong justifications for the choice to use (or not) technologies in any classroom, but the practical aspects are often left vague, perhaps due to a one-size-fits-all approach. Experienced L2 technology practitioners will have no problem supplementing the strong theoretical foundations of this text with their own technological know-how and resources, which can make this a strong text in their teacher training courses; however, novice teachers or those inexperienced with CALL will likely struggle at times to operationalize the theoretical knowledge and would benefit from more guidance and clearer walkthroughs on the use of the technologies covered in this text.

The organization of the text walks readers through the history of the field, giving them context and justifications for the use of a wide range of technologies. The book is organized into four main sections: a) the history of CALL and Web 1.0 technology; b) the placement of technology in methodological and instructional contexts; c) the range of synchronous and asynchronous tools; and d) the area of assessment. Completing the text is a look at the future of CALL, which is necessary in the rapidly changing world of CALL, wherein a book becomes dated the moment it is published.

In the first section, the authors cover the basic concepts as well as the history of CALL and web technology. In Chapter 1, they introduce the basics of CALL, the introduction of technology-enhanced language learning (TELL), the history of the Internet and the World Wide Web, and current developments (e.g., cloud computing, web 2.0, e-classrooms). They then review the history of language teaching methodology by highlighting the relationship between historical pedagogical beliefs and the use of technology in language teaching, ending with a look at technological considerations educators need to keep in mind. The focus here on password security makes clear the overarching focus on web-based L2 technology.

The focus in Chapter 2 is on evaluating and using technology. Starting with an analysis of the underlying assumptions teachers have about learners, themselves, and pedagogy, the chapter then includes a review of the differing criteria teachers have for technology. The chapter concludes with a thorough look at copyright law for educators.

The third chapter comprises an examination of the World Wide Web, its history, and its potential uses for educators. Perhaps in part attributed to the pitfalls of writing for a broad audience, the author shares a broad range of web-based technologies with very little demonstration of applications. Many hyperlinks are given (although they must be entered by hand, as there is neither a text webpage nor a supplemental CD), but the reader is only told what can be found at that particular site and is left to explore it on their own. Readers with a good amount of experience with these technologies will likely be familiar with a number of the hyperlinks and find no need for in-depth explanations, but novice teachers may desire more detailed explanations or walkthroughs of the use of some of these technologies. As with subsequent chapters, the tasks in chapter 3 focus more on exposing the reader to the aforementioned technologies, without delving much deeper into the specifics of how they could be used. While there are tutorials available online for most if not all of these tools, learners looking for a text that contains pictures and detailed walkthroughs will be disappointed.

Following this comprehensive look at the CALL field, the authors delve into a look at SLA theories and their place in CALL in the second section of the text. The first chapter in this section, chapter 4, is perhaps the clearest exemplar of the strengths of this text. By examining the histories of the theories behind learning and language, methodology, and CALL applications and tools, the authors demonstrate the ways in which teaching and technology have grown side-by-side and intertwined. As one theory is explained, connections to others and those from related fields are presented in a straightforward manner. While the practical tasks again leave the reader somewhat on their own, the explanation of a wide range of important theories and the connected research makes this chapter the strongest in the book.

The next chapter continues the examination of the overlap between theories, but the focus shifts to theories of activities and tasks and their connections to CALL. The chapter starts with a discussion of sociocultural theory and CALL, and moves on to other theories behind particular activities. Again, the chapter leans far more into the territory of theory than it does practice, as the authors tend to explain why technology use is effective in general rather than how to use certain technologies in particular.

Chapter 6 provides an overview of how technology can be used in ways that meet different sets of standards, including the National Standards in Foreign Language Education Project's 5 Cs standards, as well as those of the International Society for Technology in Education. The chapter is divided into two sections to examine how these standards pertain to students in the first section, and to teachers in the

second. The standards and how technology may be used to meet them are explained in some detail, and while the focus is primarily on the teaching foreign languages in the context of the US, often in tertiary-level classrooms, the standards offer a starting point for educators working in other L2 contexts interested in integrating technology.

In the third section of the book, the authors examine the predominant types of web-based learning technologies available to teachers today: synchronous and asynchronous computer-mediated communication (Chapters 7 and 8 respectively). In these two chapters, they lay out the circumstances in which they would want to use such technologies, as well as justifications for doing so drawn from contemporary research. Once more, although there is a wide array of options explained to the reader, specific technologies are not explained in any great detail. Tasks are provided for readers to practice the use of the tools on their own, but for readers with limited prior experience, the self-study orientation of this text may not work. In the hands of capable teacher educators, this lack of specific demonstration is no large problem, as they will have had experience both with the technologies and with their applications. As is seen in other chapters, though, the list-like mentioning of technologies and inclusion of hyperlinks is likely to be seen as cumbersome to those with less experience.

The final section explores the intersections between CALL and language assessment. Chapter 9 centers on computer-based testing, from formative tools that teachers can create and use in their own classes, to summative commercially available assessments. The authors discuss in length the history of computerized testing and the considerations teachers should make when deciding whether to implement them in their own classes. Yet, as is seen in other chapters, the authors focus more on exposing the readers to the tests and testing sites, rather than on explaining in any great detail how to use any of the tools mentioned.

Chapter 10 wraps up the assessment section with a look at alternative assessments, in particular projects, performances, and ePortfolios. Once more, the intersection between advancements in popular teaching methodology and teaching technology are highlighted, as the author delves into different ways to effectively use technology to get the most out of alternative assessments.

The final chapter explores the future of CALL. DuBravac has done well in selecting technologies that have become well established and that seem likely to have staying power. This chapter doubles down on those technologies and the trends they represent by looking toward their future. Trends in evaluation, the Internet, tasks, communication, and assessment are all examined. Because the historical progression of CALL has been thoroughly documented throughout this book, the readers of this chapter can rest assured that the predictions are not based on a gaze into a crystal ball, but rather on rational, evidence-based analysis of the field and its future.

*Technology in the L2 Curriculum* could be a strong choice for teachers considering a theory-driven text intended to inform students, promote discussions, and serve as a solid reference tool for students. In that aspect, there is nothing to critique. Like theory-driven course texts for other subjects (e.g., Ortega, 2008, for SLA) this text serves as a compendium of relevant theories and current research. In each chapter, the authors highlight several important theories and studies and end with useful suggestions for further reading. They handle the history of CALL as well as that of SLA well, providing readers with a good understanding of what to expect in the field and why. They also cover important practical considerations like password safety and copyright law thoroughly, which are important for all Internet-using teachers. In addition, they accomplish this with a straightforward and clear style. As a theory text, there is little to be improved upon.

However, this title is sold in a series that promises practice as well as theory, and that is the shortcoming of this first-edition text. Whereas other practical texts (e.g. Dudeney & Hockly, 2007) come with supplemental materials such as CDs or DVDs, have easy one-click access to link suppositories or other materials, or offer step-by-step guides for activities, this book comes as is: 272 pages and only one picture (of how cloud computing works). Tasks seem to follow a pattern that seldom strays from a simple cycle

from exposure to self-teaching, with little elaboration and few concrete examples that would be necessary for readers with limited experience integrating technology.

For a book that covers theory so well, it is somewhat disappointing to see how little seems to have gone into making this a practical text as well, which might be a direction to take in a second edition. For example, instead of just writing about del.icio.us, this book could have its own site set up, so that teachers could simply click links to the resources they read about instead of typing URLs (several in excess of 30 characters) by themselves. There are certainly benefits to sending readers to the various sites for those substantive introductions, FAQs, and walkthroughs, as these sites will be constantly updated, whereas the book cannot offer such a level of detail. Even so, the lack of any step-by-step guidance and the absence of linking to good examples of technology applications are hard to overlook. While there is little that could be done to improve the theoretical aspects of this book, much could be done to improve the practical applications, if this text is to be viewed as a practical guide to technology use in L2 teaching.

Overall, *Technology in the L2 Curriculum* is a useful text and is likely to be seen in technology courses in teacher training programs in the years to come. It is not the stand-alone text it may wish to be, but subsequent editions, hopefully with more attention to task design and supplemental materials, may be able to offer the reader the balance of theory and practice that the series title implies.

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#### **ABOUT THE REVIEWER**

Jacob A. Kletzien is a former ELFellow (Korea 2011-13) and currently an assistant professor in the TESOL-YL program at Sookmyung University (Seoul, Korea), where he teaches YL literacy and SLA theory courses. His MA thesis (University of Hawai'i at Mānoa, 2010) focused on the evaluation of the use of a course management system.

Email: [jacobkletzien@gmail.com](mailto:jacobkletzien@gmail.com)

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