

GUEST EDITORIAL PREFACE

Special Issue on Web 2.0 and the Normalisation of Call

Gary Motteram, University of Manchester, UK

Graham Stanley, British Council, Spain

This special issue of IJCALLT offers a number of teacher views of how CALL is currently being used in English Language Teaching (ELT), examining in particular the impact of a greater adoption by practitioners of emerging Web 2.0 technologies. These articles were stimulated by the Pre-Conference Event (PCE) held by the Learning Technologies Special Interest Group (LTSIG--<http://ltsig.org.uk/>) on the occasion of the 44th Annual Conference in Harrogate, UK, by the International Association of Teachers of English as a Foreign Language (IATEFL) in April 2010. This PCE was novel in a number of ways: it was preceded by a series of online discussions and presentations of a variety of topics exploring how Web 2.0 tools can be utilised in ELT. These online events made use of a range of different tools and were centred on a Ning; a customisable social networking tool, which at the time was free to all users. This constituted what we termed a Virtual Pre-Conference Event. On the day of the physical PCE in Harrogate 30 people gathered in a room, but were joined by a group of virtual participants who were included into the ongoing face-to-face seminar. We then ran an Unconference, a form of conference event in which ideas emerge from discussion. We had opted to seed this discussion with three short inputs, which posed a number of questions; groups discussed the topics and then fed back

to each other. Feedback occurred both physically and virtually and equal time was given to the participants in both spaces. The virtual part of the event was held in Second Life, a Multi-User Virtual Environment. This was a cutting edge event and successfully bridged the gap between the physical and virtual worlds allowing a much broader audience to access the debate.

THE CHANGING NATURE OF ELT AND CALL

The Harrogate PCE was concerned with gathering together practitioners and other interested stakeholders to involve them in a discussion of the changing nature of CALL and ELT, asking in particular whether the emergence and adoption by teachers of Web 2.0 technologies had led to a greater "normalisation" of CALL, which Stephen Bax defined in 2003 as being a time when a cultural tool drops into the background and we do not notice it anymore. See Bax's (2011) current article and also Constantinides for further clarification of this issue. However, the question remains as to whether CALL has achieved this in general language learning, is it a core part of people's practice and have recent developments in technology enabled this process?

This reassessment was felt necessary because of the recent social changes that have seen the Internet move from the sidelines to take a central role in some people's lives. What has also changed in the last eight years since Bax's (2003) initial paper is that the Internet for many people seems to have stopped being "a peripheral interest in the language teaching community as a whole" as Levy stated in 1997 (p. 3) and has become "a high-stakes environment that pervades work, education, interpersonal communication, and, not least, intimate relationship building and maintenance" (Thorne & Black, 2008, p. 149).

WHERE ARE WE NOW?

Warschauer (1996) identified three phases of CALL. The first was *Behaviouristic CALL* (1950s-1970s), which he said was followed by *Communicative CALL* (1970s, 1980s). The last phase, *Integrative CALL* was marked by the emergence of multimedia and the Internet. In Bax's (2003) reassessment of CALL, however, three different approaches are described. *Restricted CALL*, *Open CALL* and *Integrated CALL*. According to Bax (2003), we were using the second approach, but the aim should be to move towards the third approach in order to reach a state of 'normalisation', with technology fully integrated into teachers' normal everyday practice. Although greater activity and interest by a greater number of language teachers (not just CALL specialists) is now apparent, the Harrogate PCE was to examine how far teachers felt we were close to Bax's 'normalisation' because of the adoption of Web 2.0 technology. What is interesting to note here is the increasing number of presentations at the IATEFL Conference in which technology features in some form or other and this has been a growing trend. Gone are the days when the Learning Technologies Special Interest Group was the focus of all activity connected with technology and language learning.

HOW FAR DOES WEB 2.0 SIGNIFY A MOVE TOWARDS 'NORMALISATION'?

For the purposes of this publication, 'Web 2.0' is used to describe the emergent technologies on the Internet. It has been noted that the term is difficult to pin down. The name certainly suggests a development or progress of the Web, but the question whether there has really been an innovative change in the Web has been called into doubt by Alexander (2006). To some, rather than a clear-cut change, we are now in a state of "perpetual beta where the very notion of emerging technologies becomes normalised" (Pegrum, 2009, p. 24).

The way that teachers use Web 2.0 technologies is also of interest. Pegrum (2009) mentions that "it's often argued that the newer web 2.0 technology is an ideal vehicle for... social constructivist approaches" to language learning (2009), and this is also highlighted in the recent '*Handbook of Research on Web 2.0 and Second Language Learning*' (Thomas, 2009), which Misham (2010, p. 103) calls "probably the most comprehensive published collection to date in this area."

What comes out of recent research is that technology is not yet 'normalised' in language education (Thomas, 2009), but there are signs of a more fully integrated approach to CALL emerging because of Web 2.0. Dudeney (2007) has noted that "Web 2.0 perceives the transition of the World wide Web from a disparate collection of websites to a fully-fledged computing platform....resulting in a vast collection of websites and services which are more social in nature, inviting people to share what they find, what they do and what they learn in a wide variety of contexts."

Many commentators and researchers are excited about these changes. Pegrum (2009, p. 25) believes that "the affordances of web 2.0...are bringing to fruition the revolutionary, liberalising promise of the internet." Although more research is needed before we will be able

to see if this is true, there exists an “urgent need to examine the role digitally mediated, collaborative tools play, not only as learning tools, but as authentic means of communication and relationship building” in education (Skykes, Oskoz, & Thorne, 2010, p. 528).

THE IATEFL PCE

At the IATEFL Harrogate PCE, the following questions were posed: *Where are we now in the field of learning technologies and language learning? Have we reached a time when learning technologies are a ‘normalised’ part of our practice, or is there still some way to go?* Three key people were asked to present their views of where we are now in order to seed the discussion: **Stephen Bax**, **Scott Thornbury** and **Mark Pegrum**. Stephen and Scott were in Harrogate, Mark was online in *Second Life*.

After each presentation, nominated group leaders worked with conference participants to support the discussion of whatever questions were raised and these groups then reported back to the audience. This procedure was followed in *Second Life* too, with the virtual group listening in to what was going on in Harrogate and taking turns to report back, which was viewed via large screens in the room. The original forty participants in Harrogate were joined by another seventy-five in *Second Life*, with some people coming and going during the day, **the general themes that emerged from the discussions were:**

- The idea of literacy is changing. Teachers need to take this concept of ‘multiliteracy’ (including *visual literacy*, *remix literacy*, among others) into account.
- The *connected classroom* offers teachers more choice than ever before, but many teachers feel overwhelmed by this. Teachers need more training in how to use these new tools before CALL can ever become ‘normalised’.
- Teachers can empower themselves and better learn how to use Web 2.0 tools by building their own *PLN* (*personal/profes-*

sional learning network). A question still remains as to how best teachers can begin to do this.

- Pedagogy must always come before technology. Before a teacher uses a technology, she must evaluate its usefulness to the learning.
- Not all of Web 2.0 technology will become *normalised*. Some tools will become redundant before they are considered for adoption by most teachers.

A number of the PCE/VPCE participants were then approached at the event to follow up on some of these ideas and present case studies for this special edition of this journal.

THE ARTICLES

The opening article is a timely reflection and update of the ideas first explored by Bax in 2003. Here Bax delves into greater detail into a broader supportive theory set for ‘normalisation’ and corrects the belief that ‘normalisation’ is always a ‘good thing’. He argues that we should avoid an explanation of normalisation that is dependent on single events, or single actors, but consider one that is embedded in a broader sociocultural landscape. He further suggests that although using early Vygotsky to look at the normalisation of CALL is not valid, it is valid to consider a neo-Vygotskian perspective which sees older children and adults using technology to scaffold their learning of languages. He later proposes a set of strategies that can be used to judge whether a technology has validity in an environment and if indeed a technology should be adopted at all. This whole discussion acts as a very useful backdrop for the remaining articles in this special edition, which do take a broad view of ‘technological’ implementation and do consider the wider sociocultural domain in their analysis of what they are doing.

Davies (2008) has noted that “Concrete evidence on the effectiveness of CALL is difficult to obtain, with plenty of anecdotal evidence about the positive effects of CALL

by teachers reporting on their students being ‘enthusiastic’, ‘engaged’, ‘motivated’ and even ‘excited’ in classes in which CALL is used, but are sceptical about measuring its effectiveness” (p. 1.1). It is hoped that the other articles go some way towards providing more concrete evidence of the move towards the conceptualisation of normalisation that was felt by the PCE participants to be happening in ELT and which is discussed in the article by Bax (2003).

In addition to Bax this collection contains four studies of the technological use in real classrooms around the world. There is evidence here that the call by Pegrum (2009, p. 24) for teachers to “experiment broadly and confidently with new tools” and at the same time, “reflecting on why and how we are using them” is happening. The collection in addition covers areas of ELT not often reported:

- Young Learners and Web 2.0
- Mobile Assisted Language Learning
- CALL and Teacher Training
- Intercultural communication for social scientists.

YOUNG LEARNERS AND WEB 2.0

Traditionally, learning environments have been associated with a physical location (classroom, library, school, etc), but now a learning environment for children can be more easily created for use at home, using carefully selected web tools and parental support by the teacher and, as Drexler (2010) states, “Such resources... empower networked students to transcend the traditional concept of classroom” and this can lead to greater learner autonomy at an early age as well as greater awareness of and feeling of participation in their children’s learning for parents. This is the premise of the article by Terrell, a practitioner actively involved in promoting out-of-class online activities using a wiki. Based on a study of her own class, Terrell asks if the use of Web 2.0 tools (specifically a wiki) can be used to support parents and help

motivate young English language learners to practise English outside of their usual class time and become actively involved in their own learning process.

Shelly Terrell, a teacher of young learners, outlines her efforts of taking her learners a step towards being what Drexler (2010) calls ‘networked students’, adapted from the concept of ‘networked teacher’ (Couros, 2008), promoted by persuading children to start to take ownership of their learning and encouraged by ensuring the learners are actively involved together in ‘networked’ learning online through blogs, wikis, etc.

MOBILE ASSISTED LANGUAGE LEARNING

Colpaert (2004, p. 262) observed that throughout the history of CALL, periods of professional development have been followed by periods of amateur development, and he wondered whether “the mobile hype will burst out as soon as tools become available allowing teachers and researchers to develop their own mobile applications and tools.” This hype that Colpaert referred to, of the rise of Mobile Assisted Language Learning (MALL), is now fast becoming a reality as these tools end up in the hands of teachers and learners. Many believe it will lead to language learning becoming more informal and personal (Chinnery, 2006; Kukulska-Hulme & Shield, 2008), with some learners studying or practising manageable chunks of information in any place on their own time. Through mobile phones, we now also have the potential to provide a rich learning environment for our learners’ (Stockwell, 2010), and here, a research study by Simon Bibby examines student preferences, comparing the use of cell phones to that of the Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) to deliver homework. VLEs such as Moodle have become the vehicle of choice as far as learning content is concerned, but Bibby asks whether students would prefer using their cell phones rather than accessing a VLE on a PC. A timely study,

now that MALL has reached a stage where it is only just starting to move away from being theoretical and into the real world.

CALL AND TEACHER TRAINING

As we have noted, CALL technology is changing rapidly and the language classroom is becoming an increasingly technology-enhanced environment, which places “more weight on the significance of L2 teachers in order to successfully implement computer technology in the L2 classroom” (Hong, 2010). Levy (1997) wrote that for educators “the rapid and continuing introduction of new technology into education has outpaced the ability of teachers and developers to evaluate it properly.” Since then, it could be argued that the pace has only increased and it is more difficult for teachers. The next study by Marisa Constantinides examines teacher trainer attitudes towards adopting technology and their readiness to use it on teacher training courses, the growing importance of which Hubbard and Levy (2006) have stressed is dependent on teachers having “the necessary pedagogical knowledge and technical competence.” A recent report by EA-CEA (2009) noted that “the application of new technologies in learning implies fundamental changes for the role of the teacher.” and that these “are often not addressed in professional training programmes or in continuing professional development”, despite the need which has been identified by Kassen and Higgins (1997) among others, for teachers to develop the critical skills to evaluate technology and its use. Constantinides here presents the results of a survey taken by tutors on the popular CELTA pre-service English language teachers course, which finds respondents on the whole unwilling or unprepared to integrate technology into input sessions, and reflects on the possible reasons for this shortcoming.

INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION, SOCIAL SCIENTISTS AND EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES

In the final article, Rachel Lindner picks up one of the other core themes that was raised at the PCE, that of multiliteracies. You could easily argue that she and her colleague have accepted that the tools they are using have normalised and the imperative is to allow learners to engage with the curriculum in these novel ways across cultures. In addition, in our increasingly digital world our learners need to take a much more critical stance towards the materials they access from the web and the specific academic skills that they develop as a part of the telecollaborative exchange discussed in this article shows how this might be usefully achieved. These multiliteracies are seen as having real world relevance with learners better able to show an increased skill set to potential employers. Working with a colleague in Slovenia and using a wiki as the core Web 2.0 technology, Rachel set about exploring the following research question: “What are my ESAP students’ perceptions of skills learning in computer-mediated intercultural collaboration?” with her own group of students. Her findings are revealed in the article.

CONCLUSION

The IATEFL Learning Technologies Special Interest Group has been running events in various forms for over 25 years and as a result has kept at the forefront of developments in Computer Assisted Language Learning both in terms of topics and delivery. The PCE that ran in 2010 and the outcomes represented in this journal show that although we now have a different perspective on what might be perceived as “normalisation”, and the debate

will continue, IATEFL teachers are actively engaging in explorations of their practice and are helping the profession to build a more informed picture of the world of CALL in the early part of the 21st century.

Gary Motteram
Graham Stanley
Guest Editors
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