# UCLA
## Issues in Applied Linguistics

**Title**

Brave New Digital Classroom: Technology and Foreign Language Learning

**Permalink**

**Journal**

**ISSN**

**Author**

Kim, Hye Ri

**Publication Date**

2009

**DOI**

**Copyright Information**

Peer reviewed

***Brave New Digital Classroom: Technology and Foreign Language Learning*** by Robert J. Blake. Washington DC: Georgetown University Press, 2008, vii-189 pp.

Reviewed by Hye Ri Stephanie Kim
University of California, Los Angeles

Technology in the 21st century is not an option, but is a vital part of students' lives. In the efforts to keep up with and take advantage of technological advancement, many schools integrate technology into their curriculum. However, one sometimes comes across teaching practices that are technology-driven on one end of the extreme while on the other are teaching practices embodied by teachers' resistance to use technology. *Brave New Digital Classroom: Technology and Foreign Language Learning* by Robert J. Blake aims to address all prevalent issues of instructional technology use and provides an overview of the most successful technologies used in language classrooms. In short, this small but highly resourceful book is the first of its kind to offer a comprehensive summary of technologies developed to assist language learning, with an emphasis on foreign language classrooms. It would serve as an excellent resource for language curriculum developers or instructors considering incorporating technologies into their program or teaching, as well as for graduate students who wish to get an overview on this topic.

In the Preface and Chapter 1, Blake clearly sets the goal of the book and the theoretical basis from which his view on the incorporation of technology originates. The book is not intended to provide instructions on how to use technological tools. Instead, it offers an overview and evaluation of research and successfully used tools, thereby helping the readers to gain a broader understanding of them and encouraging the readers to conduct further research. The asset of the book lies in the fact that incorporation of technology is motivated based on Second Language Acquisition (SLA) theories, in particular the Interactionist Model, which states that social interaction is necessary for and facilitates L2 learning. It is an undeniable fact that living in a country where the target language is spoken provides students with abundant opportunities for input and social interaction. However, this is not a possible option for all learners. By presenting this gap between the ideal and the reality, the book guides the readers to the big question: Can technology then provide more opportunities for social interaction in classrooms? The book mainly focuses on answering this question. In addition, Blake emphasizes that the decision to incorporate technology should be driven by principles of second language acquisition and should only be used in the service of language teaching and learning. By presenting such viewpoints in the beginning, Blake first sets up a rationale for and then justifies the use of technology in language classrooms.

Chapter 1 provides a brief overview of SLA theories as they relate to technology and teaching, and of pertinent technologies that have been used in language classrooms. It also elucidates popular misconceptions about using technology in classrooms, such as "technology will replace teachers". Chapters 2, 4, and 5 further illustrate and evaluate the most popular technologies with detailed explanations of each, while Chapter 3 provides an overview of Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) as a research discipline. Chapter 2 first introduces the Internet and webpages, the most basic and central focus of CALL. Basic knowledge of the Internet and how the tool could be utilized to assist language learning are further provided. Chapter 3 gives an overview of the history of CALL research and reviews it as a field in the context of SLA. Also included in the chapter is an explanation of how CALL tools have been evaluated, presents their evaluative criteria and method, and suggests that the evaluation be context-sensitive. Chapter 4 turns to Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC), the most popular tool in recent years, as more emphasis has now been on developing students' intercultural competence. Various first- and second-generation CMC tools are described with the author's notes on their advantages and what instructors should be aware of if they decide to use them. The author also includes actual discourse that occurred between a student and a teacher using bimodal CMC (an online chat program that enables them to both type and speak) to demonstrate its applicability. Furthermore, while discussing the import of developing students' intercultural communicative competence, Blake showcases the MIT's Cultural project as an ideal model. Chapter 5 describes the current state of distance learning (DL) and one case in which DL is used, and suggests ways in which it can serve as a valuable tool for the FL curriculum, especially that of less commonly taught languages. Chapter 6, as its title *Putting It Together* suggests, summarizes main points discussed in previous chapters, including applicability of previously mentioned instructional technologies.

The book has numerous strengths. First, although it is not intended to be a how-to manual, basic concepts and terminologies are well explained for novices to technology. In addition, important terminologies are italicized and can be found in Glossary. For example, in Chapter 2, when basic, functional information about web pages is described, the readers are also referred to Glossary for definitions and other web sources for more advanced information. Second, the book provides teaching ideas with specific examples and suggestions for language curriculums or classrooms for maximum benefits. Third, Blake, who advocates a learner-centered pedagogy, models this himself by including discussion questions and activities at the end of each chapter. Such discussion points lead the readers to engage in further discussions and apply what they read in the chapter to situations they may encounter as teachers.

Despite a small downside, its unappealing design and lack of visuals or colors, *Brave New Digital Classroom: Technology and Foreign Language Learning* is a comprehensive book on technology use in language classroom that can satisfy the needs of a wide range of audiences interested in the topic. Although the book only

discusses foreign language classrooms, there is no doubt that it will also be useful for teachers of English as a Second Language. It addresses problems that have been raised by opponents of technology, objectively evaluates the current tools' effectiveness, and encourages its readers to develop a rhetorical competence, i.e., an ability to evaluate benefits of the tools and use them accordingly. It would serve as an invaluable source for curriculum developers, language instructors, and students in training to be language teachers.