Foreword

MULTICULTURALISM IN PRACTICE

This edited volume brings together chapters from nine different countries (four from Iran, three from Turkey and one each from Australia, India, Slovakia, South Africa, Spain and Taiwan). This alone makes the volume stand out from most publications in the field of technology-enhanced language learning. Whereas other collections primarily, and often exclusively, include contributions by authors from a small range of (usually the same) countries, Dara Tafazoli has made an effort to bring together perspectives and voices that are not heard as often. This is important for several reasons. Firstly in a book with the word multiculturalism in the title, it is paramount that multiple cultures are represented. It is also important that the field looks beyond a small number of countries for experiences and research in the use of technology.

Perhaps most importantly, research and emerging practice in the use of technology in language learning and teaching is, despite its decades-long history, in many ways still in its infancy. Although it is easy to talk about the impact of technology on education, the potential of technology to enhance learning, and the influence technology is having on classrooms in a general sense, such statements are often based on reports from a small number of settings, and not based on their implementation in practice. As a result, a great deal of what is known about technology in language education may simply not apply to many contexts around the world. In addition, the disconnect between what is proposed and what is possible and what works ‘at the chalkface’ (or, more appropriately, at the interactive whiteboard screen) can be very large indeed. As Albert Einstein said: ‘in theory practice and theory are the same, however in practice they are different.’ This applies in particular in the area of technology, where we simply do not know enough about how the transition from idea to reality works.

In any area of innovation, whether related to technology or otherwise, what really matters is how this transition is managed. The only way to establish this, is by engaging in the time-consuming and painstaking process of developing, adopting, adapting, and critically rejecting in some cases, what may be available and/or possible, and to document in great detail what works and what does not, and for what reasons. This requires a description of all relevant factors, including in particular the characteristics of the local context, with all of its limitations and affordances. The authors in this book make direct links with classroom pedagogy, even those whose chapters primarily report on research.

Furthermore, the chapters represent the shift in research and practice in computer-assisted language learning, in line with what we have seen in general language education in the last 10 to 15 years, towards greater attention to social and cultural elements in learning and teaching. This is what David Block referred to as ‘the social turn’ (Block, 2003) and it is evident in most of the chapters here, from a focus on intercultural competence to the empowerment of rural women, to a focus on learners’ attitudes towards technology, and the incorporation of social media in language learning, amongst others.
Another characteristic shared by the chapters is a focus on the role of the learner (Benson, 2011). From chapters on dynamic assessment, to the use of personal technologies, such as iPads, to discussions of self-directed learning, the collection represents a greater awareness of the contributions learners make to the language learning process (Reinders & White, 2016).

This collection is important because it gives us insight into the role of context and the importance of setting and culture in technology-enhanced language learning and teaching. It gives us the opportunity to see how new ideas are developed, as well as how existing ideas are integrated in ways that make them relevant for the context in which they are to be applied. As such the chapters in this book give a good overview of developments in our field from across the globe. Each of the chapters contains lessons that may be used by practitioners and researchers elsewhere to inform how the transition towards greater and more effective inclusion of technology in language learning and teaching may take place.

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REFERENCES

