Tips for teaching with CALL: Practical approaches to computer-assisted language learning
Tips for Teaching series. Includes CD-ROM.

Reviewed by Stephanie Claire

Tips for teaching with CALL is the first volume in Pearson Education’s ‘Tips for Teaching’ series. According to the publishers, the series is designed for ‘teachers who appreciate and enjoy professional reference books with practical classroom approaches that are firmly grounded in current pedagogical research’ (p vi).

The intended audience for the series includes both new and established teachers in secondary school and adult education contexts who are looking for guidance in a field that has undergone an unprecedented expansion and development in recent years.

Computer-assisted language learning (CALL) is an area of applied linguistics concerned with the learning of a second language through the use of computers. Although this book primarily addresses the English as a Second Language (ESL) and English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts, its approach is also applicable to the teaching and learning of Languages Other Than English (LOTE).

Authors Carol Chapelle and Joan Jamieson have drawn on their 25 years of teaching experience in CALL to develop a resource that responds to what teachers need to know. As they put it: ‘The teachers with whom we work always want to know not only how, but why. For example, how CALL can be used in teaching vocabulary, and why CALL is useful for learning vocabulary’ (p vii).

The book comprises an introduction (‘What is CALL?’), followed by eight chapters (‘Vocabulary’, ‘Grammar’, ‘Reading’, ‘Writing’, ‘Listening’, ‘Speaking’, ‘Communication skills’ and ‘Content-based language’) and a short conclusion entitled ‘After class’. A visual rationale for the book’s organisation is presented as three consecutive circles in which ‘the most discrete and concrete building blocks (are) at the center and the most holistic, integrated abilities in the outer layer’ (p 4). The discrete elements at the centre of the model are identified as (1) grammar and (2) vocabulary. These are surrounded by the four skills of reading, writing, listening and speaking, while the broadest elements of the model, communication skills and content-based language, appear in the outer circle.

Chapter design is uniform throughout the book, starting with an introductory section in which the particular skill area of the chapter is contextualised within ESL/EFL in general and CALL in particular. This is done in a way that will be readily accessible for teachers and is followed by a series of ‘tips’ or procedural suggestions on teaching the particular skill.

Each tip is expanded on and viewed from three perspectives: ‘What it means for the teacher’ explores ways in which CALL can contribute to the overall learning experience. This is followed by ‘What the research says’, in which key research findings in the skill area are summarised (with meticulous referencing) to raise teachers’ awareness of the theories that inform current approaches to classroom practice, teaching strategies and learning materials. Then comes ‘What teachers can do’, which moves into more specific territory, with references to the actual CALL software that features on subsequent pages. Useful websites relating to the tip being discussed are presented as half-page colour screenshots accompanied by title, learner level, description of scope, web address and additional notes. Each chapter concludes with a section entitled ‘Finding good activities’, which brings together all the principles embodied in the chapter in a set of focus questions to help teachers reflect on their practice and refine it further to meet the needs of specific learner groups.

Central to this resource is the CD-ROM, which, in my view, represents excellent practical value for teachers and learners. Each video presents learners using a number of different websites, then offers a simulation feature, ‘Try CALL yourself’, in which teachers and learners can get to know how to work with CALL in a ‘sheltered’ environment. Teachers would be advised to take some time to fully explore the CD-ROM and to be aware of its great potential for use with learners who are very new to working with computers in any form. Encouraging informal conversational interactions between
learners as they work through the activities would also be a source of authentic material for teachers to progress learners’ listening skills, as well as to help them gain greater familiarity with metalinguistic terms and spoken discourse turn-taking strategies.

Of course, one of the drawbacks to publishing web-based instructional manuals is that some of the sites referred to may not be extant by the time the resource becomes available, and this is the case with certain web addresses provided in *Tips for teaching with CALL*. In the preface, the authors acknowledge this difficulty and suggest that if a recommended site is no longer available then the name of the activity can be used as a search word on the Internet.

Finally, following the somewhat meagre ‘After class’ chapter are the bibliography, name index, subject index and credits. The bibliography is up to date and extensive and will be very valuable for teachers wanting to further explore the theoretical side of CALL and/or undertake further study. It also serves as a way forward from the ‘What the research says’ paragraph in the ‘Explaining the tips’ section within each chapter.

To conclude, *Tips for teaching with CALL* is a resource that contains a wealth of practical information with a sound theoretical basis, and is packaged accessibly and attractively for immediate use by classroom teachers.

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**Case study research in applied linguistics**

*Reviewed by Paul Moore*

Patricia Duff’s goals in writing this book were to provide an overview of the methodological foundations of qualitative case study research, with examples drawn from second-language teaching research, and to provide practical guidance on conducting, evaluating and writing up such research. There are two major parts to this short and accessible book. The first three chapters are dedicated to defining, explaining and defending case study research in applied linguistics. The last three chapters outline the specific processes related to conducting and writing up case studies. Duff carefully and repeatedly draws on a set of case studies from second language acquisition (SLA) and applied linguistics literature (including her own and her former students’ published works) to give concrete examples of the array of theoretical, methodological, ethical and practical choices that can be made in case study research.

Chapter 1 sets the tone of the book, in that there is a sense of Duff writing both to inform and to provide the intended audience (research students, as well as interested scholars) with a model of the reflexive process of investigating and writing up case studies. She does this by presenting and reflecting upon her definitive case study, Jim (or JDB; cf Duff 1993, for example), in the light of relevant literature, both past and present. She also reinterprets her research, based on changes in the dominant SLA paradigms, to provide insights into how her analysis could have been expanded, as well as how her data could be used to explore a range of questions from current perspectives in applied linguistics.

Chapter 2 reviews definitions of *case studies*, as well as their history and features in the social sciences and in applied linguistics, before presenting an overview of advantages and ‘claimed’ disadvantages (p 47) of such research. This section effectively draws on SLA research to discuss tensions between positivist perspectives, with a focus on generalisation and quantitative analysis, and interpretive perspectives, with a focus on an *emic* understanding of particular cases (including research into identity, investment and gender,
which feature strongly in the book). Duff’s even treatment of characteristics such as thick description, triangulation, theory building, and generalisability/transferability and subjectivity, from both perspectives, highlights the fact that decisions made in case study research should be explicitly addressed by the researcher.

Chapter 3 provides a ‘kaleidoscope’ (p 96) of themes and trends in case study research in SLA/applied linguistics since the 1970s. The examples provided show the changing and expanding focus of this research, from earlier performance-focused studies to more recent work into discourse socialisation in various modes of communication, identity and participation, where learners are represented as ‘multidimensional individuals with histories, hopes, and desires’ (p 97).

The second half of the book offers practical advice on conducting case study research, with Chapter 4 focusing on research design, data collection and ethics, Chapter 5 focusing on analysis, interpretation and evaluation, and Chapter 6 focusing on the research report. Duff prefaces her discussion with a diagrammatic representation of the components of a case study (p 100) and how they interact. Throughout the two chapters she clearly lays out, with examples from the literature, choices that case study researchers must make, and the likely (and sometimes unexpected but significant) effects of those choices.

Issues focused on in Chapter 4 include developing research questions, operationalising constructs, the need for ‘chains of evidence’ (records of all forms of evidence that inform the study), case selection (eg multiple or individual cases), contextualisation, researcher subjectivity, triangulation, data collection tools and research ethics. Here, and elsewhere, Duff emphasises the fact that researchers should critically and explicitly evaluate their own interpretations of the data. After noting the sparse mention of ethics in other major texts of case study research, she also provides in-depth insights into ethics-related issues and how researchers have dealt with these.

Chapter 5 begins with a discussion of transcription – another analytical process that is informed by a researcher’s theoretical perspective. The chapter then examines aspects and types of case study analysis, which depend on whether the analysis is data-driven or based on a priori codes, or whether individual or multiple cases are to be analysed. It also provides helpful advice on the range of computer software available for qualitative analysis. It then provides a discussion of the advantages and disadvantages of conducting member checks, before revisiting the positivist/interpretive debate in relation to the evaluation of case study research. The chapter concludes by restating the need to be accurate and truthful, in terms of explicitly and effectively dealing with interpretations and potential biases, but also creative and lateral in terms of being open to the range of possible interpretations of the data. The only omission in this chapter is a discussion of translation, which, like transcription, involves decisions regarding interpretation and representation.

Chapter 6 discusses writing up the case study, which Duff presents as ‘another form of analysis and interpretation, as well as representation’ (p 99). This chapter covers issues such as where to publish, intended audience, structure, rhetorical options and authorial voice. Again, the strength of this chapter is that each major point Duff makes is supported by clear examples from her database of case studies.

This book provides new and experienced case study researchers with a comprehensive ‘to-do’ list, as well as tips on unexpected issues that may arise and how to deal with them ethically and reasonably while still maintaining the integrity of the research. The book also acts as a ‘tester’, in that it provides glimpses of research and scholarship relevant to second-language researchers who may be considering case study methodology. Duff effectively brings together the vast literature on case study research in applied linguistics and adds valuable insights from her own wealth of experience.

Reference