Making CALL Research Count: Criteria for Identifying Productive Research Agendas

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Abstract

In their recent book, CALL Research Perspectives, published in 2005, Egbert and Petrie provide an overview of research in CALL: it includes 12 different perspectives. The editors say, “all approaches to [CALL] research have a place” (p. ix), although a little later they also observe that “research seems to be scattered across such a wide area that a specific picture of what CALL is and does has not emerged.” (p. 3) Accepting all approaches as equally valid without critical comparative analysis is problematic when attempting to identify productive CALL research agendas.

This presentation argues for a middle path as far as CALL research is concerned, one that neither advocates a single dominant approach, nor allows all approaches to be regarded as of equal value. The complexity of language learning as represented in current theoretical discussions in second language acquisition clearly indicates that no single theory or approach is dominant (see Mitchell & Myles, 2004). Moreover, regarding all approaches as equally valid, with no critical comparison, overlooks such practical realities as the limited time and resources available for CALL research. Promoting a multiplicity of approaches is neither helpful nor productive. This is exactly why current CALL research might be regarded as “scattered” and lacking coherence. Therefore, a middle path is recommended, one that acknowledges the range of current approaches (paradigms, theories, models), but then looks critically at their success and value to the CALL community as agendas for research (see Levy & Stockwell, 2006).

The presentation will recommend criteria for selecting the most productive directions for CALL research. In each case, it will present an argument in support of the direction chosen, one that focuses on identifying existing CALL research that has proved effective and valuable in the longer term. It reflects upon why these particular CALL research projects and agendas might be considered successful. Examples are given throughout.

References

