THE END OF CALL AND HOW TO ACHIEVE IT

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The title of this paper intentionally contains a *double entendre*. As in Neil Postman's famous (1995) book, *The End of Education*, the term "end" in the title has two meanings. First, it signifies an ultimate goal or purpose, and second, it indicates the finish or completion of a task. In this paper I connect those two meanings to argue that CALL as a field should and will end if we meet its goal successfully. The purpose of this argument is to stimulate discussion, but more, to encourage those of us in this field to reflect on what we believe and do.

The goal of education

To talk about the goal of CALL we need first to look briefly at the goal of education in general. Defining this goal is a more difficult task than it sounds as the definition varies depending on who is asked. From preparing students to successfully join the workforce to helping form "whole" human beings, different economic, political, and humanistic ends have vied for focus, attention, and funding in education for over a hundred years in the US and for much longer in other places. Although many educational stakeholders share the goal that learners be functional citizens (in the past of their nation, now of the world), disagreement between behaviorist followers, cognitive sympathizers, and constructivist supporters on how to produce such citizens has been in part responsible for a continuous stream of educational paradigm shifts and reform efforts. The current goal of education, as indicated by its outcomes, appears to be to help as many students as possible pass standardized tests. However, the ultimate goal, in order to support all learners and work for all stakeholders, must be a balance between humanistic and more pragmatic ends.

What *is* typically agreed upon is that we must change the way schools work in order to help all students achieve the end of education. The role assigned to technology is to effect this change. However, Sizer's seminal work, *Horace's Compromise* (1992), first published in 1984, and other more recent studies of public schools show that, in spite of changing ideas and tools, schools in the USA have not changed much in 20 years. Traditional teacher-as-sage education is alive and well from preschool through university not only in the USA but around the globe. This is true *despite* incredible growth in the ratio of computers to students in the US and other countries. The notion, espoused by many politicians and educators, that merely putting technology in classrooms would change teaching and learning in some important and dramatic ways, has been thoroughly discredited. We know why – teachers have insufficient training, the technology is not accessible to everyone in the forms and types it should be, and the expectation that use of technology would be a catalyst for new kinds of teaching and learning has not yet been realized.

The goal of CALL

These debates and changes in the wider field of education, along with advances in knowledge and fluctuations in economic and social pressures, have influenced the field of language learning, and so too the area of CALL. We have moved from audio-lingual to communicative methods to many other incarnations of language teaching, and sometimes back again. Despite what we know about how students learn, observation in language classrooms still finds most historical methods in use somewhere, with the majority based on a drill/ behavioral paradigm. Although practice does have its place, in a field predicated on diversity we seem to ignore the fact that individual and cultural differences impact learning. A more important oversight is that the general patterns of how learning occurs within the brain appear to be the same for every human (although, as Prensky [2001] notes, thinking patterns can change as a result of input). Steven Johnson (2005) explains how far we are from integrating this knowledge into teaching and learning. The *authentic, emotionally significant, content-based, differentiated* experiences that will have a lasting impact on learners are all too absent from regular and language classrooms even though the technologies to make them real might be present. With the foci of language education on discrete points of language, passing tests such as the TOEFL and the LAS, and the push to use technology for *anything* as long as it is used for *something*, the bigger picture of the end of education is often ignored.

In *CALL Essentials* (2005), I laid out what many leading educators believe are the skills needed to survive and make one's way in the 21st century (It should be noted that Papert, Kays, and other educational leaders have expressed similar views for many years). Certainly language literacy is one skill, and computer literacy another, but as or more important are the thinking skills that help learners become literate and encourage them to keep learning and striving after their language class is over. Standards for both child and adult language learning indicate that we expect individuals to become more effective thinkers. Without critical and creative thinking, and the ability to produce, to communicate, to inquire, and to solve problems, language learners may have control over aspects of the language but not be able to do anything important with language to *change their lives* and the lives of those around them. This ability to have an impact, for me, is not only the goal of education, but also the goal of CALL.

Reasons

Some language teachers certainly do address these 21st century skills, but a review of program structures from K-adult shows that in spite of more communicative or interactionist intentions, our narrow focus on skills and the traditional set-up that divides curricula by language skill keeps us from truly addressing this goal. There are surely a host of reasons why this might be so. However, that computers are being used to support, in a great number of classrooms, the same old traditions of teaching and learning indicates that we have yet also to figure out how to reach the end of CALL and work on learning and individual needs. It also implies that the powerful potential of the computer as a learning tool is yet to be realized in "CALL" classrooms. It might therefore be more effective to build the expectation that technology will be employed where effective, rather than regard it as a special feature of certain classrooms that only some teachers use.

Some educators claim that by being a discrete entity, the field or area of CALL attracts more focus and garners more awareness than if it were not set apart. However, that focus seems

to be creating the false idea of CALL as a "method" and to give the technology unwarranted emphasis as a crucial component of any language program. It has led to the notion that teachers must master a standard set of skills; this even though effective technology use, like any tool use, is contextual. The focus on teacher skills is underscored by the technology standards currently in development by TESOL *separate from* learner and teacher standards. Another claim for emphasizing CALL as a specialization is that researchers spend time studying it, and therefore it needs a label. However, if that argument were applied consistently, we'd have "fields" or "areas" such as "Learner-Centered Teaching" and "Women's Strategies in Language Learning" and possibly "Pencil Supported Writing." Perhaps it makes sense to look at CALL as something different until we understand more about it. In the long run, it just does not make sense to single out integral parts of teaching, learning, and research as fields or areas rather than address them as integrated, important parts of a whole.

The end

Ironically enough, by using technology to provide language learners with relevant experiences and working toward helping learners change their lives, we will put an end to the notion of CALL as a field in and of itself, and perhaps as well to the field of language learning per se. Instead of our students being recognized as "language learners," which in so many ways limits what is expected of them, we'll be talking about the education of people on a continuum of literacies and, as Johnstone (2003) and others advocate, "computers will disappear" (metaphorically speaking, of course). In the end, every teacher will be a computer teacher, and all teachers will be language teachers (or rather realize that they already are). We won't be investigating the impact of a specific technology on the acquisition of a specific grammar point, but rather the whole learning environment that creates fluent, knowledgeable people that can do something with the language and ideas that are presented to them. Even adults at beginning language proficiency levels need more than language skills; simply reading the newspaper isn't enough – adults need to be able to consider and evaluate what they read. Going to the grocery store and making purchases isn't enough – learners need to be able to understand what they are buying and predict what the impact on their health and pocketbooks will be. If we do not work toward this end, and use technology to help us realize it, we are neither crediting language learners with the intelligence and skills to direct their own learning, to discover on their own, nor to achieve extraordinary accomplishments.

The benefits of marginalization

This is not to suggest that reaching the end of CALL, in both senses, will be easy. In fact, at the moment it helps that language learners are often left outside of formal standards in that curriculum or programs may not be tied to them. Happily, so many of the language programs throughout the world, particularly in US public schools, are so marginalized in these and other ways that teachers and learners can make changes and experiment and no one will notice. In fact, we have opportunities that few other education programs might have for change. As we have before, CALL educators can lead the way.

How will the end of CALL be achieved? In each context the specific steps and the barriers to overcome will be different. Funding, enthusiasm, time, and training will all play a role

in the pace and extent of change. But if we don't get started, there is little hope for change at all. There are things can be done now. For example:

- For teachers who lack training in using technology effectively and/or teaching thinking skills, Sizer suggested long ago that schools could be reorganized so that some time during the school day is spent for teachers to participate in professional development. The remaining school hours will be, at least potentially, much more effective for learners.
- Funding in many countries is available - educators just need to find it. Even $200 buys a lot of computing power these days and makes learning connections possible. Students can call the other side of the world free using Skype and obtain first hand information and raw data to transform into understanding – that alone is worth the price of the hardware.
- Papert and his colleagues have proposed (and shown the benefits) for years that students should program in the *Logo/ LogoWriter* tradition – we have *Dreamweaver*, *Animation Master, Flash*, *Microworlds EX,* html, and a host of other (often free) platforms available. Not only does the act of formatting/ programming contribute to the development of problem-solving skills, but the give and take and community developed by learners accomplishing real tasks with real tools makes language paramount.
- Classes, programs, and schools can work on integrative learning – making sure that the small boxes that we assign subjects and topics flow into one another naturally. We can cut out horizontal divisions between skills and vertical ones between language, technology use, and content. Not only does removing arbitrary boundaries address the need for better thinkers, it addresses content and language in ways that make them memorable for learners. This change can mean more work for teachers, but it also means that teachers can work both more efficiently and effectively and in teams with colleagues who have different skills and knowledge.
- Most important, perhaps, for achieving the end of CALL, is new arrangements of technology. Computers in classrooms need to be truly ubiquitous, not something that some people use at specific times, and virtually invisible, in that they are accessible the moment they are needed and do not hamper the learning process when they are not. This idea seems like a hard sell, but the Australian laptop schools that Johnstone describes present compelling evidence of its necessity.

Getting there

The specific how-tos for getting to the end of CALL are not as important as the *want to*. Until parents and teachers demand it, teachers understand and support it, and other stakeholders see the tremendous advantages of changing the way we think about language, technology, and learning, we will continue to wonder why some students don't learn or learn what we want them to, why students get stuck at certain levels of doing and thinking, and why technology isn't making a difference.

If our goal for our language learners is to help them impact their owns lives and the lives of others in positive ways, we must look at technology as integral to providing learning experiences that focus on authentic and applicable language and content, that are differentiated according to learner needs, and that support learners in developing literacies across situations. In this broad goal, learning can and should happen in contexts both inside and outside of classrooms

with teachers and with facilitators other than teachers. Moving toward this end means that language teaching per se and CALL for certain will be integrated into a larger vision of education in general. Personally, I'm rather excited about talking myself out of a job as a "language teacher" and a "CALL educator," because I know that what follows the end of CALL will be more meaningful and more effective learning and teaching.

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Editor's notes:

This presentation was made as a keynote session at theWebheads in Action Online Convergence on November 18, 2005.

- The 'visual' for the presentation was an earlier version of this paper.
- The session took place in the Elluminate presentation room at Learning Times. A recording was made and can be heard at http://home.learningtimes.net/learningtimes?go=1043435.