

Book Reviews

Social Networking for Language Education

Marie-Noelle Lamy and Katerina Zourou (Editors)

New York: Macmillan, 2013, 237 pages, ISBN 978-1-137-02337 (pbk)

This book seems aptly titled for the series *New Language Learning and Teaching Environments*. In 10 chapters the editors have investigated fresh ideas about social networking (SN) from contributors in Australia, France, Japan, Norway, PRC, Singapore, Taiwan, the UK, and the USA.

The introduction answers questions about the benefits of SN for language learning, which the authors refer to as an “underresearched and controversial” area (p. 2). Many connections are made between online forums, social webs, social media, social interaction, and CALL (computer-assisted language learning). The introduction also previews the book’s content, chapter by chapter. The contents are divided into three parts of three chapters each, plus a final overview. Chapters start with a literature review and then present an original study. All references are merged at the end.

Part 1 considers *The Wider Ecology of Language Learning with SNs*. Six authors report from various disciplines and locations, reinforcing the possibilities of collaborative research across countries. In the first chapter, Reinhardt and Chen show that with even just one student involved in a research project, rich data can follow, as “Sue” from the PRC communicates with friends at a distance. Chapter 2’s participants are architecture teachers and language teachers from two French institutions. A sentence or two cannot do justice to both the complexity of the planning and yet the ease of communication via the SN environment *Second Life*, a synthetic (virtual) world. Steps are made clear via diagrams, screenshots, and tables. Chapter 3 has a different goal: online reading in groups. Our attention is grabbed near the start by a quotation about one purpose for reading:

[W]e are all part of a great living thing and it takes all members to work it. We want to know more about each other, what books are liked the best, where the difficulties lie, how the magazines can be made of more use and touch our lives more and everything that can make us all feel we are workers together. (pp. 56–57)

Although the authors suggest this could be posted at the top of a Facebook page, it turns out to be from an 1893 magazine. In the language of some of the book’s contributors, *plus ça change, plus c’est la même chose*.

Part 2 is titled *Pedagogies and Practitioners*. In Chapter 4, Zourou from Norway and Loiseau from France consider ways of “sustaining peer language learning through social networking” (p. 79). They examine a randomly cho-

sen corpus from one particular community, *Livemocha's Culture*. Social networking sites (SNSs) is the topic of Chapter 5. Here Harrison investigates the relationship between digital social behaviour and language development, the forging of identities via SNSs, and the role of peers. The participants in Chapter 6's study by Fuchs and Snyder are graduate TESOL/TEFL students in the United States and Taiwan. The authors assert that for SN to take place it "must be an explicit part of the instructional design of the course" (p. 132).

This advice leads well to Part 3, *Learning Benefits and Challenges*. The seven authors of Chapter 7 examine the use of SNS for language learning by 21 adult ESL students from one university in the USA and find, as the title of Part 3 suggests, that both benefits and challenges need to be taken into account in reviewing these programs. Chapter 8, *Online and Offsite: Student-Driven Development of the Taiwan-France Telecollaborative Study*, reports the findings of an international study and concludes with a frank summary of both the benefits and the challenges of such a project. Formative assessment is addressed by Gruba and Clark in Chapter 9. In this case, the authors assessed various SNSs and identified practical criteria for those involved in developing successful ones. The final chapter, by Lamy and Mangenot on insights from research and practice, provides a useful starting point for future researchers.

Less than 20 years ago a TESOL publication on *Technology in the Classroom* (Hanson-Smith, 1997) included four pages of technology terms. Not one of these appears in the three-page index of the 2013 book reviewed here, an indication of the rapid advances that have taken place in the field over time.

Social Networking for Language Education is readable and internationally relevant. I highly recommend it to three groups of readers, starting with those already involved in SN who are looking for fresh ideas. Others will realize that this is an area everyone is talking about and that it's time they found out more. A third group are the researchers to whom the editors offer a challenge in their introduction. Although they had hoped to include a section on learner motivation, no contributions were received. The invitation is open.

Marilyn Lewis

The Reviewer

Marilyn Lewis was a senior lecturer at the University of Auckland, New Zealand. In her retirement she enjoys reading, writing, and running workshops for teachers in her own country and in Asia.

References

Hanson-Smith, E. (1997). *Technology in the classroom*. Alexandria, VA: TESOL.