Introduction to the Theme Section

Most of the articles in this technology-themed issue of the journal resulted from a colloquium at the 2002 CATESOL convention held in San Francisco. I was asked to organize that session, "Technology: A New Era in Learning," as a means of exploring what was new, interesting, and exciting about technology-enhanced language learning. The initial call for papers went out to the Technology-Enhanced Language Learning Interest Group (TELL-IG) and included several important questions: How has technology affected our teaching? How has it changed the lives of our students? Do we fear misusing technology? Are we turning our students into "fast-food" learners?

The answers I received to these questions were both intensely personal and of wide-ranging significance to teachers. TELL-IG educators use technology in a variety of ways—both high and low tech—with many different levels of students. They discuss the pedagogical impact of new learning tools on themselves and their students, and they consider frankly both the gains and the possible downsides as we enter a new era in learning.

Interestingly, the colloquium discussing a "new era" in technology itself began with a 6-week-long debate online. Those joining the Yahoo Group I created as a run-up to the colloquium were able to preview the papers, download free tools, such as PureVoice, and chat with the authors as they developed their research and wrote their contributions. This group is still available at: http://groups.yahoo.com/group/Tech_New_Era

My own response to the intial questions raised by the colloquium is the first of the theme articles. I thought an outline of the major pedagogical theories of teaching English to speakers of other languages, and their expression in the realm of technology, would provide an appropriate setting for the other contributions. Technology-enhanced learning, or computer-assisted learning (CALL) as it is often referred to, initially trailed the developments of TESOL pedagogy, but it has now become the leading edge, significant not only as a means to teach and assess language, but also creating new ways for students to interact globally and autonomously.

Two articles in this issue deal with student perceptions of the new technologies, one at the university level (Sokolik), the other in the elementary grades (Cortese). The former finds significant differences between students' and teachers' degrees of familiarity with the tools of the new era. The latter, in

contradiction to many parents' and teachers' assumptions, promotes an optimistic view of children's own selection of software and the value of technology for early learning experiences.

The two other articles take a more hands-on orientation, discussing perhaps the most exciting new tool, the Internet, as it is employed for pronunciation/speech and writing—both via distance learning. While Chan encourages us to use low-tech devices, such as mirrors, rubber bands, and even the audio language lab, she also describes the free tools that are making the Internet a multimedia voice environment. Jewell's paper, though not originally in the colloquium, fit so perfectly into this theme that it had to be included. She describes in detail the use of electronic discussion forums in a high school ESL setting, a technology that is easily transferred to global distance learning.

For those of you who missed the colloquium, Chan recorded all of our speeches in San Francisco and placed them as individual audio files at the group site mentioned above. The reader may find it interesting to hear these papers as well as read them and explore some of the discussion that took place then.