# STUDENT PERCEPTION OF THE USEFULNESS OF CALL, AND CALL RESOURCES, IN LEARNING ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE IN SELF-ACCESS CENTRES IN THE NEW ZEALAND TERTIARY SYSTEM

Kathryn May Parker

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Language Teaching and Learning,
The University of Auckland, 2007.

# Abstract

This thesis reports on a descriptive survey which investigated students' perceptions of the usefulness of computer-assisted language learning (CALL) for their learning of English as a second language in New Zealand tertiary self-access centres. Sixty-four English second language students using the facilities of 8 New Zealand tertiary self-access centres and 18 staff associated with those centres participated in this study. Data was collected by means of a questionnaire, semi-structured interviews and field notes.

Students were asked to identify, with regard to CALL in self-access centres, those areas of CALL which they perceived to be most useful for learning English. They were then asked to rank more specific CALL language learning activities for usefulness. Participants were also asked to compare the usefulness of CALL materials with other more traditional learning resources available to them in self-access centres. Staff were also asked to complete the surveys and to take part in the interviews and their views are contrasted with student responses.

The results of the study show that most of the participants found CALL very useful for learning English, especially for listening practice. They found CALL useful for writing and reading but not useful for speaking. The specific areas they felt CALL was best was in improving their vocabulary and providing interesting listening material, followed by correcting their errors and improving their grammar. Despite their positive feeling towards CALL, students rated every other resource available in self-access centres, apart from magazines and "other unnamed resources", as equally useful or more useful than CALL. Staff were significantly more positive about the usefulness of CALL than students, and the greater their experience teaching with CALL the more positive they were. Staff rated CALL as more useful than every resource in self-access apart from one-to-one help. These findings suggest that CALL is seen as one of the valuable

resources in self-access but is not ranked above more traditional learning sources by students and may be overvalued by staff. Also discussed is the type of CALL material preferred by the participants. The study concludes by discussing implications of the findings and making recommendations for further research.

# Acknowledgements

Special thanks to my supervisor, Dr Gary Barkhuizen, for his patience and attention to detail, to John Jones-Parry who first encouraged me to look at self-access, to Ute Knoch who guided me through the statistics path, Tanya Van der Laden and Bill Finn, who taught me how to use SPSS, to Hayo Reinders who pointed me in the right direction, Richard Porteous who tried to keep my English pure and Chris Peck and Chris Parker for remaining so positive despite my formatting challenges. Any errors are of course my own, despite their best endeavours.

I am also indebted to the Howick College Board of Trustees, who granted me some financial assistance to help complete this study, the Royal Society of New Zealand, who granted me time to think and explore, and the Ministry of Education who implemented and supported my Teacher Fellowship.

I would like to thank all the participants who enabled this study to take place, the staff of the Student Support Centre at the University of Auckland who provided me with a home base, shared their friendship and knowledge and helped me in so many ways and all the staff of the self-access centres who shared so willingly their expertise and their ideas.

Finally, my heartfelt thanks to my husband Ian, whose comments were at times invaluable, and our sons Chris and Nicholas for their understanding and support over the many years I have studied, whilst also working full-time, and trying to “fit everything in.”

This study is dedicated to my mother and late father who valued the ability to think and learn.

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# Chapter 1

# Introduction

In this chapter the contextual background of the study is outlined. I begin with an outline of where self-access fits in the education system in New Zealand and attitudes towards autonomy and computer-assisted language learning (CALL) in the various educational sectors. This is followed by a closer look at how self-access functions in the New Zealand setting. Then follow sections on the origins of the study and the aims of the research. The rationale behind the choice of this particular topic precedes the specific research questions and finally the outline of the thesis is presented.

## Contextual background

The shift from teacher-centred to student-centred learning in the past two decades has resulted in a greater focus on autonomy which has become one of the catchwords of the self-access community (Cotterall and Crabbe,1999; Gremmo and Riley, 1995).

The increasing accessibility and availability of computers over the past decade, because of lowered price, ease of use, the provision of greater processing power and more useful software, has lead to their widespread use in the New Zealand education system and in self-access centres. In 2003 New Zealand had 41.4 computers for every 100 people and 24% of the population subscribed to the Internet (Statistics New Zealand, 2007). New Zealand consistently sits amongst the highest computer and Internet user countries in the world.

Yet despite this familiarity with the computing environment very little is known about the subject of learner beliefs concerning the use of computer-assisted language learning in New Zealand self-

access centres. My own interest in this area came from my teaching experience with the tentative use of computers in secondary ESOL and English classrooms and in two small self-access programmes I initiated to explore the potential of this type of learning with English second language students in two secondary schools.

## Aims of the study

Zhao (2005b:6) in his discussion of the significant questions still to be researched in using technology to teach and learn language, notes that questions can be either based on practical concerns or derived from theory. In this latter category he records Chapelle's two critical questions for future research. The first is "What kind of language does the learner engage in during a CALL activity?" and the second is "How good is the language experience in CALL for L2 learning?" Although Chapelle is viewing these questions from the Second language researcher's perspective they can equally validly be viewed through the student's eye and the second question can also be viewed from a practical perspective. "What kind of CALL materials do the learners choose to use in self-access?" is one of the questions pursued in this study. The second question is "How good (i.e. useful) does the learner perceive the language experience in CALL to be for second language learning?"

The purpose of this study is to add to the existing body of knowledge about the use of CALL in the specific area of tertiary self-access centres in New Zealand. This study aims to identify if students perceive CALL, and CALL resources, as useful for their learning of English as a second language in New Zealand tertiary self-access centres. Students were asked to identify, with regard to CALL in self-access centres, those areas in which they perceived CALL to be most useful. They were then asked to rank more specific CALL language learning activities for usefulness. It is hoped this information has revealed areas in which better software or websites will need to be developed or found and the areas in which CALL resources perform most closely to student expectation. Participants were also asked to compare the usefulness of CALL materials with other

more traditional learning resources available to them in self-access centres. Empirical data was gathered on whether CALL resources were considered more or less useful than these other types of learning resources. Thus purchasers of resources in the setting up of self-access centres can have some idea of which type of CALL resources students most favour in their learning and to what extent these should replace or give way to more traditional learning resources. To make this information more explicit, students named CALL resources they have found particularly useful. The aim is not to produce a definitive list of resources, as obviously newer or more expensive resources may not yet be available in many centres and older resources, and resources well-known to staff, may tend to be promoted by advisors. The aim instead is to give some indication of which type of resources students perceive as having a positive affect. Staff perceptions of CALL were also investigated to discover whether there are any significant differences between staff perceptions of the usefulness of CALL and those of the students.

## Rationale for the present study

This study aims to fill a "gap" in research on CALL in self-access centres in New Zealand settings. There appears to be a limited amount of research on the use of CALL in New Zealand and even less on the use of CALL in self-access centres. The research previously done on CALL has tended to be based on studies in language classrooms, and research on CALL in self-access situations has often been incidental rather than the main focus of research studies.

The use of student perceptions in such studies is not always popular (Warschauer and Healey, 1998). Student perceptions, however, are important because so much of successful self-access learning depends on student motivation and this can be negatively influenced if materials are perceived to have no learning value. To be "useful" a teaching strategy or teaching materials must "help" the learner in some practical, beneficial way. The word "usefulness" was chosen in this study from a number of other possibilities not only because it was easy to understand but also because it has a suggestion of personal connection to the learning process. Thus a programme

may be perceived by the learner to be very exciting and enjoyable or well-designed but the student may still have doubts that they are learning anything practical or useful. They may be afraid to be critical if the question word used was “effective” and staff have recommended a programme. To the student it may be obvious that staff will not recommend or provide anything that is not effective. Using the word “useful” gives the student a less judgemental option which might, therefore, not be seen as questioning a superior’s judgement. “Usefulness” is related to the particular needs of the learner rather than the value of the learning resource or strategy.

Biggs (cited in Dunn, 2005:6) contends that learning is “what the student does” not “what the teacher does” and Dunn (2005:6) says that this means “putting the student at the centre of the process”. The widely adopted constructivist viewpoint in CALL also emphasizes the “centrality of the learner in the learning process” (Levy and Stockwell, 2006: 123). Students are possibly more aware of what helps them learn than teachers. Despite this, some research in CALL assumes the learning process can only be measured by keystrokes or measurable gains in discrete activities. However, despite Warschauer and Healey’s (1998) suspicion that it is an easy research path, student perception of what actually works for them in self-access learning centres has, apart from studies by Richards (1999), Gremmo (cited in Cotterall and Reinders, 2001) and Reinders(2000), not been widely researched. In fact, there is some suspicion that students are poor judges of their own learning, and others contend many students have a very weak awareness of what independent learning involves (Cotterall and Reinders, 2001). However, Barkhuizen (1998) contends that it is important for teachers to regularly monitor their students’ perceptions of the activities they are engaged in.

Similar studies have been done using CALL classrooms, two of these in the New Zealand environment. Ayres (2000) found students generally had very positive perceptions of CALL. Cartner (2004) found students extremely positive about the improvement in their English after using computers to study. Another study (Stevens, 1991), using a Foundation Science Course in Sultan Qaboos University in Oman, looked at student attitudes to what we would now call a

language laboratory. More recently Mak and Turnball (1998) included CALL in a study of personalised English programmes in the Self-Access Learning Centre at Hong Kong Baptist University. My study complements the knowledge gained in these studies and extends it to the particular environment of New Zealand tertiary self-access centres.

Notwithstanding the useful studies done in classrooms, the use of CALL in self-access centres in New Zealand does not seem to be as well-researched. Richards (1999), studying learners' perceptions of learning gains in the self-access centre at Victoria University, mentions CALL use briefly. Hayo Reinders' thesis (2000) on learners who were using the same centre as part of their English Proficiency Programme mentions CALL as part of a wider review of materials used there. Although he was looking at factors to do with learner autonomy, he found that computers were rated very positively. However, they were also mentioned as one of the areas where students experienced most difficulty. In looking at CALL materials most favoured as useful in self-access, this study also extends some of the work done by Reinders and Richards.

The study done on a Self-Access Learning Centre at the Hong Kong Baptist University by Mak and Turnbull (1998) looked, amongst other things, at the learner preferences for different types of materials used in the centre. It rated six different types of materials for the amount of use and evaluation of usefulness. They also looked at the time students spent in each of the language areas (grammar, listening, vocabulary, reading, writing, pronunciation and speaking) and learner perceptions of which supported achievement the best. Although their study does not completely parallel the present study, it has points of interest that can be compared to the present study.

In some ways this study could be seen as going against the current flow of popular research: computer-mediated communication (CML), integrated or blended learning, online virtual classrooms, and the concept of the computer disappearing as a style of learning and becoming merely an aide (like the whiteboard or overhead projector) are the areas of most intense interest. Revisiting how students perceive the usefulness of tutor CALL (language software with a response mechanism which acts like a teacher) in self-access centres, when so many new and

potentially exciting CML developments are emerging (to be discussed more fully in Chapter 2), is a socially pragmatic attempt (Chapelle, 2005) to look at present day realities. It complements previous research done on CALL in classroom settings in New Zealand tertiary institutions and extends the research done in individual self-access centres by covering a wider range of centres.

## Scope of the study

CALL, as used in this study, refers to computer programmes with an instructional purpose, a teaching presence or a language-learning objective (Hubbard, 2006) and covers a wide multi-disciplinary field, so it is perhaps worthwhile at this point to outline what this study did not intend to cover. It does not cover CALL as used in language laboratories or classroom settings (except when classes are in self-access time), although some research from these areas is worth consulting. It does not look too closely at the many uses of the computer as a tool. Neither does it dwell on the multiple uses of the web for communicative activities (Fisher, Evans and Esch, 2004) although the potential for development in these areas in the future (Warschauer and Kern, 2000), especially social software such as blogs, wikis and pod casts (Dudeney and Hockly, 2007) is acknowledged, and is noted where students mention it. It does not attempt to review the actual software used, although it will note which software students preferred and sometimes why, and will report briefly on some of the important factors in CALL programmes and WELL (Web-Enhanced Language Learning) sites.

This study acknowledges that all self-access centres have different agendas and operate in a style originating in the personality and belief systems of the staff or institution founding or operating them. It assumes, in short, that the needs of different students and institutions will require different materials, different software and different degrees of participation in CALL. These are described as they relate to the institutions participating in the research. The study, therefore, relies on one common factor – students with English language learning needs and how useful they perceive CALL to be in meeting those needs in self-access centres.

## Research questions

The research questions which guided the study are:

1 Are computers perceived as useful in self-access centres for learning English as a second language?

a) What are student perceptions of the usefulness of CALL in self-access?

b) What are staff perceptions of the usefulness of CALL for students in self- access?

c) Is there a difference between student and staff perceptions of the usefulness of CALL in self-access?

d) Is there a relationship between perceptions of CALL usefulness and

i) gender ii) age and iii) previous CALL experience?

2 How does CALL compare to other self-access resources?

3 Which CALL programmes and websites do students and staff recommend?

## Organisation of the thesis

This thesis consists of six chapters. This chapter, the first, presents a brief introduction to establish the contextual background, the aims, rationale and the research questions from the study. Chapter two discusses the literature and studies relevant to self-access. It deals with the New Zealand educational background, self-access centres and their effectiveness and then the effectiveness of CALL. Chapter three describes the methodological context of the study and the methods employed to collect and analyse data. It also defines the specific area of self-access CALL the study covers. Chapter four describes the centres in which the research was undertaken, and four other centres the researcher visited overseas, in order to understand the global context in which self-access centres in New Zealand operate. Chapter five profiles the participants and presents the results of the qualitative and quantitative analyses. It also contains discussion of the

results in relationship to the original questions. Chapter six continues the discussion, draws conclusions, considers the implications of the research, and provides suggestions for further research.

## Summary

In Chapter one I have outlined the contextual background for this study. I have also provided the origin and aims of the study, the rationale for the study, the scope of the inquiry and research questions used. The organisation of the thesis is also explained. In the next chapter I shall review the main frameworks and research relevant to this study by reviewing pertinent literature about New Zealand's educational attitude to autonomous learning, the growth of self-access centres and their perceived effectiveness, and finally the effectiveness of CALL both internationally and in New Zealand settings.

# Chapter 2

# Literature Review

This literature review begins with a short history of the different phases and theories of CALL usage in the teaching of English as a second language. It then looks at the place of self-access usage in New Zealand educational sectors over the past six decades. This is followed by an explanation of the development of self-access centres over the past four decades and their relationship to autonomous learning. The last sections describe relevant research about the effectiveness of CALL and its use in self-access centres. There is also discussion of literature relevant to computer usage and its relationship to gender, age and previous CALL experience and a short review of other self-access resources.

## Introduction

Computer-assisted language learning (CALL) is considered to have three distinct phases of development: Structural or Behaviouristic CALL (1970s or earlier to 1980), Communicative CALL, a feature of the 1980s and 90s which Bax (cited by Jung, 2005) contends was not "communicative at all in any significant way", and Integrative CALL, which became popular in the 1990s (Warschauer and Healey, 1998). The use of computers in all these three phases has differed significantly. All three types of usage continue to co-exist as they fulfil different types of needs. Proponents of a particular usage sometimes contend that users of the other two modes are outdated or missing wonderful opportunities and much of the CALL literature is concerned with advancing the latest theory. In self-access all three modes are sometimes used. However, the earliest, behaviouristic CALL, which saw the computer as a mechanical tutor and lead to the scathing slogan of "drill-and-kill", is possibly used more in self-access than in classroom or language laboratory settings. Its popularity with students and advisors seems to have survived the force of modernisation.

Until the turn of this century most CALL programmes relied on variations of multiple choice questions, gap filling and text reconstruction - the 'classical triumvirate of CALL' (Murray, 2004) - for which unsubstantiated claims of educational supremacy were made. Murray also notes educationists' concerns that technology is being developed without an understanding of educational theory and with the underlying agenda of people learning to adapt to machines rather than vice versa. Although he sees computers as assisting effective memory recall by forming memory link paths, he emphasizes the gap between people and "mindless" machines which explains, he feels, why it has taken so long for CALL and WELL to find their proper place in the education system.

> A machine can only respond, it does not initiate; its responses are either totally rigid or random in an unmistakably machine-like way. Machines are lacking in subtlety, they cannot satisfy social needs; people need people and learners need teachers in ways in which they do not need machines. Obviously we do not wish to support any kind of neo-Luddite, anti-technologist stance, but it needs to be reiterated and understood that it is only possible to use machines to support teachers in a proper pedagogical environment.
>
> (Murray, 2004: 82)

It is such attitudes that have lead to discussions about CALL, by present experts in the field, to increasingly be located within a "social constructivist" framework, emphasising the importance of forming knowledge through social interaction (Simina and Hamel, 2005). This has led to computer-supported collaborative learning (CSCL) (Develotte et al, 2005) with its concept of situated learning. Both constructivism and CSCL support working in groups and negotiation with other learners to create new interpretations of knowledge. They also encourage experience-based activities in authentic environments where learners are exposed to a variety of materials and both see the learner self-monitoring and taking control of what they learn (Simina and Hamel, 2005) as important. Yet, despite widespread acceptance of these learning theories in applied linguistics, the self-access CALL environment, which appears to restrict some of these opportunities, such as working in groups and negotiation with other students, continues to attract learners. This may be

because self-access CALL is able to compensate for this lack of interaction by providing a variety of materials and allowing greater learner control.

Simina and Hamel (2005: 224), in their discussion of what they consider to be the ideal socio-constructivist CALL environment for second language acquisition, contend

> The ideal socio-constructivist CALL environment...is learner-centred...promotes authenticity through context-rich and experience-based activities which enables learners to associate new with prior knowledge. Moreover, social interaction is crucial for the sharing of multiple representations, reflection and monitoring and it provides the opportunity for negotiation. Finally, it embeds scaffolding for the manipulation of the learner's attention to form and meaning and for collaboration to achieve the construction of knowledge.

They believe that learners need to play an active role in their learning but that this needs scaffolding and they point to the use of Web Quests as a way of achieving all these goals.

The new field of connectivism (Siemens, 2006) has also been promoted (along with behaviourism, cognitivism, and constructivism) as a new learning theory, which might better explain the connection of CALL and the learning process. It could, however, usefully be considered an extension of constructivism. Connectivists see the need for a new way to use the opportunities presented by today's digital environment. They emphasise the connections made between disparate resources and the linking of learning to real life – the new digital context. They contend that other learning theories rely on a moderate knowledge flow. However, the present overwhelming speed and volume of knowledge flowing through the Internet (and other sources) requires new ways of learning. Processing and interpreting knowledge is left to trusted people and content sites (nodes), and the learner collects and connects these nodes (Siemens, 2006). Siemens argues that content can lead to learning but learning requires interaction and reflection which first requires the need to create a connection. He believes making connections first is a more direct way into learning because it is more vibrant, social and action-oriented and, therefore, easier to internalize. Connection-forming tools such as listservs, wikis, blogs, online meetings and conferences ensure continued access to new knowledge. The emergence of the term Web 2.0 (Dudney and Hockly, 2007) describes the newly socialized nature of web from an

unrelated collection of sites to an interrelated computing platform with multiple connections. All these connections are, and have been, used by CALL students to assist in “real-life” access to, and motivation for, learning. However, what is unknown is whether or not they are used in self-access centres.

Blended learning, a combination of face-to-face teaching and computer mediated learning, and web-based classes using virtual classrooms, employ some of the same pedagogical methods as self-access CALL but actually have more in common with social constructivism (Harker and Koutsantoni, 2005). Here the computer is used to facilitate a building of knowledge by student interaction in the classroom. Both Ayres (2002) and Reinders (2000) emphasise that CALL is best used as a supplement to the classroom and will be best used if it has ties to the curriculum. In contrast to this, self-access CALL appears to be a solitary pursuit, and the environment is usually highly structured with variable access to authentic materials and environments.

Yet, despite the competition from many other theoretically-driven classroom and laboratory teaching environments, tertiary self-access CALL centres have thrived, students appear to patronise them, and many teachers and institutions believe in them.

## The New Zealand educational environment

Ironically, the secondary area of education in New Zealand, which has used self-access in only the most limited way, has over the past sixty years frequently used group-based, collaborative, authentically-situated learning. Influenced as it was by John Dewey’s ideas (Dewey, 1929) in the 1930s and taking to heart the lessons learnt by Sylvia Ashton Warner (1963), a style of teaching encompassing group work and discovery learning was quickly adopted by both the primary and secondary levels. This flowed into the use of relevant technology as it became available and today it is commonplace to have students planning, researching and writing on computers to collaboratively accomplish group projects. Yet it was not until the late 1990s that universities and tertiary institutions, particularly the business schools, seem to have embraced the potential of

making undergraduate students work in groups on real projects. Perhaps this emphasis on personal rather than group learning at tertiary level goes some way to explaining the ready acceptance of self-access centres (with their very individual focus) in earlier times, in tertiary institutions, and their scarcity at lower levels of the education sector.

With the sudden influx, in the 1990s, of Asian international and permanent resident students with English as a second language, teachers in the New Zealand secondary sector found it difficult to cope with students who wanted a "textbook" and saw many collaborative classroom activities as play rather than serious learning opportunities. It is surprising, given the Asian preference for group harmony (Littlewood, 1996) that the new arrivals appeared not to engage with a constructivist approach as a legitimate way to improve both motivation and community understanding. This may have been because Asian students most often come from highly teacher-directed environments where imitation is seen as the highest form of learning. The use of exercises as crucial to memorisation of new forms for foreign language learning (Gardner and Miller, 1999; McClaren, 1998; Wood, 2005) was also considered important.

However, although tertiary learning environments in New Zealand are challenging for new speakers of English, they are much more closely aligned to the teaching style used in Asian institutions (Wood, 2005). To these students, moving up to the tertiary sector, self-access possibly seems a more logical and familiar environment than other styles of learning they have previously encountered in the secondary system. In tertiary institutions the self-access advisor might possibly give the student more English conversation than they were able to access at any other time of the week. In short, self-access and CALL offers as authentic an environment as students from Asian backgrounds are able to get. It can offer very directive materials and training in a computer environment able to be accessed from home, as well as provide teachers who can direct them to materials catering for their specific areas of need. It provides some English conversation interaction and a sympathetic environment in an often large and unfamiliar arena. Reinders (2000:75) also points out that the safety provided in self-access and the non-threatening

environment can also offer protection from “having to interact with non-native speakers”. It is not difficult to see why self-access centres and CALL have found a place in tertiary language centres.

## Self-access centres

Self-access centres, usually operating as a department attached to a university or tertiary centre where English Second Language (ESL) is taught, have been active for over thirty-five years. They have developed their own systems according to the needs of the students within their institution (Gardner and Miller, 1999; Lamb, 2003 Pemberton et al. 1996; Mozzen-McPherson and Vismans, 2001; Toogood and Pemberton, 2002). Their present form is, in some measure, a response to the debate about encouraging autonomous learning, and how this can benefit students (Holec, 1980) – a debate, starting with the Council of Europe’s Modern Language Project in 1971 (Mozzen-McPherson and Vismans, 2001) which is ongoing in this field (Dam, 1994; Nunan, 1997). Sheerin (cited in Chambers, Conacher and Littlemore, 2004) suggests that the main aim of a language resource centre is:

> to enable learning to take place independently of teaching. Students are able to choose and use self-access materials on their own and the material gives them the ability to correct or assess their own performance. By using a self-access facility, students are able to direct their own learning.
>
> (Sheerin, 1989: 3)

This is of course, an aim and not always the reality, as the pedagogical thinking of each centre will be influenced by the ethos of the departments to which it is affiliated (Conacher and Murphy, 2004)

Whether a centre is part of a language school, both physically and possibly financially, or is purpose-built, financially operating as an independent unit, and stands alone, removed from the students who will use it, can influence the way it needs to operate. A purpose-built centre can provide better facilities and will possibly have more freedom to be innovative and, if it is

considered as a department, it may have a larger budget. However, the closer both physically and financially the SAC is to the language school that uses it, the more responsive it will tend to be to student need and teacher influence. It will allow more integration with class work and student access will possibly be not only easier (Conacher and Murphy, 2004) but more frequent.

Students usually attend centres voluntarily, although in some institutions attendance is a timetabled part of a language course and students are directed to certain materials for at least part of their time in the centre. Most centres, however, are open outside of class time and students have a free choice as to which materials they wish to utilise.

Most centres also have skilled staff who will advise students. The provision of adequately trained advisors is seen by a number of researchers (Chambers and Murphy, 2004; Gremmo and Riley, 1995; Benson and Voller, 1997) as crucial to success. They may help to identify needs and point students in the direction of resources which will meet those needs (Gardner and Miller, 1997; Mozzon-McPherson, 1999; O'Dell, 1992; Voller, 1998). Avoiding telling students what to do can sometimes be difficult as students tend to see advisors as teachers. Advisors can also find students' personal problems intruding on their learning potential and, feeling untrained for the role of counsellor, may try to distance themselves by limiting their responses to strategic training. Yet both these roles may be required at times. Mozzon-McPherson (2001) sees the central task of the advisor as a bridge for the student from class work to independent learning with duties that are both practical and technical. Cotterall and Reinders (2001), however, contend that less proficient learners can find the protection of the learning centre acting more as a fortress than a bridge. Helping these students to interact with real-life learning situations and use authentic material is another role that advisors need to consider.

Centres will vary in size, budget, and finances available. See Davies (2007) ICT4LT Module 3.1 for a variety of different self-access case studies. Gardner and Miller (1999) outline numerous options for establishing self-access centres that can be adapted to different circumstances. However, there is a perceived ideal for self-access centres in tertiary institutions (Conacher and

Murphy, 2004). The physical layout of a SAC should ideally be attractive to learners and allow flexible spaces to be used for different purposes. A raised floor allows cabling to be hidden and a security system at the door should provide easy security to stop the removal of resources. There should be provision for a variety of media such as textbooks, tapes, videos, CDs, newspapers, CD-ROMs, and suitable spaces to use computers and audio equipment, watch videos or television, record spoken texts or video practice interviews, or workstations for individuals or groups. There should also be room for advisors to speak to students privately, offices for centre staff and a reception area to distribute resources. There may also be separate language laboratories attached to the centre and rooms available for group work and noisier activities. An example of such a centre at Hong Kong University can been seen at http://ec.hku.hk/vec/tour/map.htm . A video view of La Trobe University's self-access centre and a number of other centres can be found at http://www.independentlearning.org/

The provision of a catalogue that enables quick and easy access to all resources has provided on-going challenges for centres. PC-based catalogues are becoming more common but their development is often only possible in larger institutions with the budgets and time available to create the platforms needed and to catalogue the numerous materials available to learners (Toogood, 2005; Toogood, 2006). Not only do books, tapes, videos, websites and CD-ROMS have to be catalogued but they also need to be divided into the relevant learning sections contained within each resource, and the appropriate levels. Thus one CD-ROM may contain five different learner levels, a large number of language lessons and a wide variety of topics and learning modes. If a learner is an intermediate level student who wants to do a listening exercise, involving greetings, all this information will need to be available in the catalogue. The impossibility of creating such a catalogue in a small institution, unless resources are very restricted, creates a need for staff who are very familiar with where resources can be found. However, some institutions have tackled this problem; with leaders in the field found in Hong

Kong University, The Hong Kong University of Science and Technology and ELSAC at the University of Auckland. (See examples at http://www.independentlearning.org/ )

## Effectiveness of self-access centres

The effectiveness and efficiency of self-access continues to be debated (Chapelle, 2001), with most research done by practitioners within their own centres and thus possibly more optimistic than a more detached survey might be. There has not, however, been much experimental work done on effectiveness (Cotterall and Reinders, 2001; Gardner, 1999). Some research has identified areas that centres would like to improve (Reinders, 2000; Reinders and Lewis, 2005). However, centres' continued popularity with students indicates a measure of confidence that, while it might be difficult to quantify, appears to justify the investment institutions make when they decide to establish a centre. Gardner and Miller's (1997) survey supports the notion that self-access is an effective learning method at least for Chinese learners.

Students with various needs, learning styles, motivations and preferences choose to come and study in the self-access centres. Although some language courses have a compulsory self-access time allocation for enrolled students, the students can still usually choose to ignore this learning opportunity. It is interesting to note that Reinders (2000) came to the conclusion that self-access language learning (SALL) needs to be integrated with a curriculum to increase its importance to students. This fits well with modern learning theories.

To choose to participate or not ironically requires either a degree of autonomy or a lack of autonomy, and that choice can sometimes reflect a degree of desperation, or by contrast, a deliberate choice to gain extra experience. Reinders (2000) found that the self-access centre was used more frequently by less proficient students, and Cotterall and Reinders (2001:29) contend that "more proficient learners perceived working in the LLC as a less useful way of learning than did less proficient learners."

Self-access centres (also sometimes called language resource centres) are theoretically a place where students can be, or learn to be, autonomous learners. What Little (1996: 204) calls "the paradox of autonomy" in language learning is the need to take independent control of one's own learning while at the same time recognizing the need for interaction and dependence on others in a social community. Learning needs interaction. Each learner has individual needs in language learning but they must apply what is learned to communicative situations beyond the learning environment. Applying what is only able to be learned autonomously needs a dependence on the community in which communicative proficiency is required. In first language acquisition children appear to rely not only on interaction with people around them but also on their ability to control the learning environment – to be autonomous. Their behaviour elicits responses and ends interactions. They develop a metalinguistic capacity which allows reflection on, analysis and synthesis of the new linguistic structures. Yet the self-access learning mode is largely (although not exclusively) a solitary pursuit. In some SACs collaborative work is encouraged but in most, students work alone. The only possibility of self-access learners, in such centres, encountering a communicative situation is online or with an advisor.

Little (1996) also calls attention to the disjuncture between where a learner may be developmentally and the learning that is offered to them in the classroom. The classroom offers narrow discourse roles compared to domestic conversation and tends to be dominated by the teacher's perception of meaning rather than the learner's internal model. In the SAC the student has the possibility of working at the level and pace that suits them, in the learning style they prefer.

Conacher and Murphy (2004: 61) point out, however, that "the assumption that the provision of a well-equipped and well-resourced language resource centre creates autonomous learners is misplaced." They consider the relationship "between learner, teacher, resources, and language-learning support systems" as crucial to the growth of autonomy. One of the factors they identify as important to successful development in the centres is "the use of various media (particularly

newer technologies)". Also crucial, they maintain, is the expertise of staff, their ability to contribute to policy decisions and their access to training. An interested teacher who works well with centre staff and understands the importance of the SAC also has a positive impact (Benson and Voller, 1997) as does the provision of a technician/IT specialist.

> Major ICT advances, from e-mail and chat-rooms to video conferencing and electronic learning environments, can be successfully harnessed *[in the language resource centre]* for the promotion of language learning and language use….However, the other pressures on language teachers may mean that they are reluctant to integrate such opportunities into their regular teaching and may not recommend these to their students if there is no support from qualified IT/technical professionals available at all times.
>
> (Conacher and Murphy, 2004: 62)

They also contend that the learners are the most important stakeholders in the resource centre because the success of the Learner Resource Centre "will largely depend on the extent to which learners … believe that this facility helps their language learning." (ibid: 63) and they believe that an efficiently run centre leads students to not only "take their own learning seriously" but also to respect staff and other learners.

## The effectiveness of CALL

The debate over the effectiveness of CALL has in the past decade moved on from whether it has a beneficial effect on students learning a second language (Levy, 1997). It is now generally accepted by CALL researchers that, particularly in certain areas and for a number of pedagogical reasons, the use of computers can be very beneficial (Pennington, 2004; Chapelle, 2001). Zhao's (2005c) meta-analysis (a statistical technique that aggregates results from a number of studies) of nine studies, conducted on college students and adult learners, showed the overwhelmingly positive effect of technology applications on the learning of language with a confidence level of 0.05. This study covered most aspects of language learning such as listening, reading, writing, speaking, vocabulary, grammar and culture. Zhao (2005c: 31) contends that this evidence suggests that "technology-based language instruction can be as effective as teacher-based instruction" and in looking at another study carried out by Green and Youngs (2001) he contends

it can be more effective (2005c: 29). However, he warns us to be cautious of the results as not only are the number of studies limited, with small sample sizes, but the college and adult student participants may have been more motivated and better learners than younger students. He notes also the tendency of journals to publish reports with positive effects and the concern that the researchers were often also the instructors, who tended to design their own instruments rather than use independent standardized instruments. Despite these concerns the effectiveness of technology in teaching language seems to be accepted.

Computers also give students greater access to the chosen language as well as practice of repetitive tasks. Warschauer (1996) also contends that technology has empowered students to feel less isolated because they feel able to contact others. Furthermore the computer gives them more control over their learning – increasing the speed of learning and the ability to work independently and write creatively. Cartner (2004: 68), summing up several researchers, notes other benefits;

> motivation, improvement in self-concept and mastery of basic skills, enhanced achievement and individualization… Not only can computers handle a range of activities and carry out programmed functions very quickly, they can check exercises after they have been completed or attempted, move students gradually from easier to more difficult exercises according to their levels and abilities and when students fail to answer questions correctly the computer can prompt, simulate, drill and explain.

However, this confidence in the effectiveness of CALL is not always accepted or acknowledged in all applied linguistics circles (Gremmo and Riley, 1995) and dissenting voices point to the difficulty of generalising outside specific contexts or finding concrete evidence of effectiveness given the large number of variables in CALL experiences (Levy, 1997).

The interdisciplinary nature of CALL, straddling as it does a large number of fields such as computing, language teaching and learning, artificial intelligence, instructional technology and design, leads to some confusion as to where it should sit for research purposes (Gremmo and

Riley, 1995). Levy (1997) identifies 24 disciplines, theories and fields relevant to CALL. Despite its 50 year history it is only recently that some major universities in this country have introduced CALL studies. In one of the most highly regarded works on second language acquisition in recent years (Ellis, 1994) neither computers nor CALL is considered. And although Gardner and Miller (1999) in their seminal work on establishing self-access mention computers, neither computers nor CALL find any mention in the comprehensive index. This absence of CALL in current SLA literature may well be explained by the widely accepted attitude that computers are merely a tool, much like the whiteboard or books (Warschauer and Meskill, 2000), neither of which we would expect to find listed in an index. Bax (2003: 23) argues that no one talks about PALL (pen-assisted) or BALL (book assisted) language learning as such technology is now "invisible". Bax suggests that CALL practitioners may in fact become extinct through their own efforts.

There is confusion over where CALL fits for research purposes. Chapelle (2005) discusses the diverse perspectives used in CALL research, and Zhao (2005c) discusses the need for better research methods and its invisibility in the literature as there are few studies of the effectiveness of CALL in classroom contexts. Stevens (1991) was one of the first researchers to look at student attitudes to CALL in what was then called self-access but might today be called a language laboratory. Students, in a Foundation Science Course in Sultan Qaboos University in Oman, 83% of whom had no computing experience, were given guided exercises closely related to their language course work. The centre used authentic materials taken from the course and created cloze, cryptograms, sentence and paragraph jumblers, reconstruction programmes and some games. They also used a concordance and some chemistry materials from CALIS. All but 5% found the computer lessons enjoyable and 76% rated them either "a little" or "highly interesting". 23% reported that the computer had helped them "very much" improve their English and 49% said they had gained "some help". 95% thought that the use of the computer was important in the centre but only 49% of those thought this was because it helped them with their English. The others thought using modern technology or enjoying themselves was the important factor. This

may reflect the time the survey was done. Technology was not widely available in the late 1980s so it still had a novelty value that seems to have influenced student judgements.

However, these results are corroborated by Stepp-Greany (2002), who tried technology-enhanced language learning (TELL) with Spanish classes. Along with research on the role of the instructor, Stepp-Greany (2002) also looked at the effects of the technology on high school students' Spanish language learning experiences. Two-thirds of the students in the study felt technology in the lab made the course more interesting, although half still preferred face-to-face teaching. They enjoyed the CD-ROM used in the course (64%) and possibly because of this decided it had more learning value than other technology used. They enjoyed online writing far less.

In the New Zealand setting most CALL research is very recent. Ayres (2000), in a study most similar to the present one, reported on the attitudes of 157 undergraduate students using regular CALL computer laboratory sessions integrated into their English or Japanese language classes and found that students generally had very positive perceptions of CALL. 80% found CALL relevant to their needs although in a comparison with classrooms (of students' preferred modes of learning) students seem to favour the classroom over computer use. 64% of students felt computers were motivating and 67% felt they improved English skills. 77% said that "the computer tasks provide information that is useful to them" (Ayres, 2002: 248). Far ahead of other skills chosen as a preferred mode of learning with computers (compared to the classroom) were speaking and then listening, followed by vocabulary development. Ayres (2002:248) contends that "the use of CALL especially seems to assist students in the areas of spelling, writing and grammar practice." Stepp-Greany (2002) found 65.9% of her students agreed that lab activities had improved their listening skills (and 63.4% felt it had improved their reading skills) although interestingly enough the only major listening they did came from a CD-ROM,which allowed students to read an audio text as they listened. Ayers (2000: 248) concludes that "CALL has high face validity with learners. While they do not see it as a worthwhile *replacement* for classroom-

based learning – it is something they certainly see as an important and extremely useful *aspect* of their studies."

Cartner (2004) also examined the extent to which students at Auckland University of Technology valued the use of computers in English classes and found that the overwhelming majority of students were interested in learning this way and 81% of students believed their English was improved when they used computers to study. As with Ayres' study, the classroom was favoured for speaking practice but unlike Ayres' study, where only 34% favoured the classroom for writing, at AUT 53% preferred the classroom over the computer for writing. Listening, which scored only 9% for learning on the computer at Unitec scores 38% favouring CALL at AUT . When scores were added to those who felt both the computer and the classroom were equally good the students at UNITEC scored listening at 38% while the students at AUT scored 69%. This significant difference between the students rating of the usefulness of CALL to improve their listening at the two institutions could reflect the materials available to students on the computers and the three years difference between the research. Podcasting and sound bites are much improved in CML since 2000. Access to authentic listening was much simpler and easier to find on the computer by 2005.

It is essentially the use to which a computer is put that determines its "usefulness". The new enthusiasm for task-based learning and integration with class work (blended learning) has also lead to wider acceptance of the computer as a tool rather than just as a tutor. A tool is manipulated to achieve a number of purposes. Thus the computer can be seen as a glorified typewriter (a tool), or an improvement on the need to use a whiteout pen when making a typing error. The spellchecker can be seen as equivalent to a dictionary. Or, alternatively, the computer can be seen as a teacher (a tutor), actively leading the student in the writing process by highlighting errors and providing easy ways to improve syntax and correct grammar errors and spelling. Stevens (2000) promotes the use of computers as a tool when he speaks about integrating computers "seamlessly" into the language centre.

Students are now very comfortable with computer technology and Warschauer (2000) points out that 95% of university students in the United States use computers regularly. A comparable figure for New Zealand students has not been found but observation would suggest it is as least as high and this could possibly be supported by the country's Internet usage. New Zealand, at 74.9%, has the second highest Internet population penetration rates in the world (Internet World Stats, 2007), second only to Iceland at 86.3% and well ahead of the United States in 6th place at 69.6%. CALL is now also commonly used in English Second Language (ESL) classrooms and language laboratories, although it would be fair to say that many teachers are still not entirely comfortable with their own technological capabilities. Hubbard (2006) says that teachers can be novices at using computers for teaching and that they have limited experience with using CALL software, particularly from the perspective of a learner. However, Stevens (2000:3) contends that:

> ESL professionals tend to be in the forefront of communicative uses of computers, pushing the envelope of adapting Internet to teaching and making use of multimedia and synchronous communications, and often all three combined.

Despite this innovative progress in computer use for language learning, CALL in self-access centres remains largely detached from communicative uses. The use of computers as a tutor, however, appears to be commonplace. There is also considerable debate over the use of the computer as a magister (master teacher) or alternatively as a pedagogue (or helpful slave) and how this affects learner control (Fotos and Browne, 2004).

## Use of CALL in self-access

Previous research in self-access centre CALL appears to be minimal. A few researchers mention CALL in passing while researching other aspects of independent learning or usage of particular centres (Gremmo and Riley, 1995; Mak and Turnball, 1998; Reinders, 2000; Richards, 1999). Warschauer and Healey (1998) refer to software-based research on student attitudes towards drills and this could be considered relevant to self-access. However, they also point out that

results are mixed because of the diversity of factors and that research varies widely in both measures and design with the field having no obvious research agenda.

This lack of research, in how useful CALL is for self-access students, may be a result of the difficulty of researching a field with far too many random factors (Stevens, 1996), students with a multitude of different needs, varied lengths of student exposure to their target language, and with differing student motivational levels. Warschauer and Healey (1998: 62) also say that it is not surprising "given the number of variables associated with language learning and the difficulty in controlling those variables, particularly in a second language setting" that researchers design studies using student attitude (as opposed to using factors such as measurable gains in language ability). The often voluntary nature of use and the effects of different levels of autonomous functioning of students (Hoven, 1999) adds another layer of complexity. If research on CALL in the classroom and language laboratory is difficult it is doubly so in self-access where even the programmes used differ from student to student.

However, despite these difficulties some research has been reported on self-access CALL in New Zealand. Cotterall and Reinders (2001: 30) reporting on research done on the usefulness of materials at the English Language Institute at Victoria University in the Language Learning Centre, discovered that 73% of 153 students thought CALL programmes were either "quite" or "very" useful. They also discovered that listening materials proved the most popular. 80% of the respondents rated the listening resources as "quite" or "very" useful.

Self-access materials, other than CALL materials, are fairly consistent from centre to centre. With a few exceptions most centres have: adapted reading materials, worksheets, reference books, magazines and newspapers, videos and DVDs, language exercise books, audiotapes (both commercial and in-house) and more recently, mp3 files, and (to the very blessed) satellite television. Some centres focus most of their energy on developing these materials and relegate CALL to a lesser role. Other centres spend a great deal of energy organising their CALL materials for easy access, attempting to make them user friendly. The Internet sites used in

different centres pose their own difficulties in this regard, as students need specific direction or they tend to wander in the unstructured environment either in “a stand-alone hypertext stack or over the whole of the World Wide Web”, which, pleasant as it can be, Davies (2005) warns, wastes precious time students can ill afford. As Laurillard (1996:2) explains:

> A default route is the route through the material that the author believes to be optimal. Completely open-ended program structure can make students anxious - they like to know what they are supposed to do. It must always be possible to deviate from the default route, but it should be clear what it is, so that they can just follow it through. This saves students having to make decisions at every turn, and may also encourage them to consolidate, rather than keep moving on.

To stop students wandering and provide them with default route through the web some particularly well-organized self-access centres have managed not only to isolate the best web-sites for learning but also to connect these to a type of interactive catalogue which allows learners to assess their learning needs and then connect to the index of the material which will best meet those needs. VELA at the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology is probably the most ambitious project of this type, although ELSAC at The University of Auckland and some other places have similar systems.

The use of the web for learning requires not only technical skills but also a visual literacy to understand the use of signs, symbols, pictures, and movies in combination with text. Students must interact with a nonlinear and nonsequential medium and try to search for meaning in an information rich environment (Murphy and McPherson, 2004). Students must understand the structure of a website to use it effectively, including the use of functions such as hypertext links, drag-and-drop buttons, drop-down lists and browser functions such as back, forward arrows and stop buttons. They need to know how to manipulate a mouse and to understand the language of computers such as “Click on” and “select”. The use of audio and video files on language learning sites has now become commonplace with the rapid advances in web technology. This enables students to access a wide range of authentic spoken English often accompanied by a script.

However, manipulating such files and using them to best advantage again requires technical skills which may require some form of tuition (Murphy and McPherson, 2004).

Tutorial CALL, where the computer becomes a teacher substitute, evaluating and controlling the student's learning, is well-used in self-access centres yet it has been dismissed as part of the outdated learning theory of behaviourism which was largely supplanted in language learning by communicative and later integrative CALL. Indeed, Wolff (1999) sees no place for the computer as tutor for autonomous language learning. Warschauer (1996) did concede that skill building is helpful, where the student had control and choice was acceptable, and some researchers (Lightbown and Spada, 1999) acknowledge its place in acquisition of idioms, grammatical morphemes, vocabulary and phonological development. Notwithstanding these minor concessions, Hubbard and Siskin (2004) argue that there is a strong case for placing tutorial CALL back into the mainstream of the field as one of multiple paths for language learning. They maintain there is a strong and continuing interest in tutorial CALL by CALL practitioners, researchers and developers, and that its marginalisation is the result of a number of myths. The myths are, they contend, that tutorial CALL is: behaviourist, all drill and practice, not useful because it is not communicative, depriving the teacher of a significant role, taking control from the learner, and not communicative because it is not on the web.

Hubbard and Siskin (2004) also argue that behaviourism sometimes has a place in some language learning and they also claim that current tutorial software has a cognitive/ constructivist perspective in which students are required to manipulate language forms according to abstract rules. Thus reading and listening comprehension are often used and glossaries allow for some meaning negotiation. None of these activities fit in the dismissive "drill and kill" category. Practice rather than drill is what helps increase fluency and accuracy and this requires "the conscious, reflective manipulation of language rules and forms" (Hubbard and Siskin, 2004). They also point out that criticism that tutorial CALL is not communicative can easily be overcome by using tutorial software in pairs or groups with various exercises designed to make

students communicate with each other although opportunities to use this in self-access would of course normally be limited. The exclusion of the teacher in self-access situations is acknowledged but teacher input in choosing software, assigning it, monitoring progress and being present to assist are seen as desirable. Hubbard and Siskin (2004) also mention the large numbers of teacher-created resources which enhances the effectiveness of the CALL experience for students. Learner control is important (Hoven, 1999) but most CALL materials now give that control to learners in multiple ways: they are given a choice of activities themes and sequencing, use of tools such as dictionaries, help facilities, hints and feedback, and opportunities to redo work or progress. Thus experienced CALL users manipulate the software more and more like a tool, even creating their own revision material in authoring programmes –becoming as autonomous users-their own tutors. Non-tutorial software, such as concordance programmes, spreadsheets and word processors are also used in CALL and while these are not usually on the web, they can all be used communicatively.

Although these myths about tutorial CALL can largely be dismissed, Hubbard and Siskin believe the field to be marginalised academically, not only because teachers still believe the myths but also because CALL; has not met expectations, is not fashionable, does not fit with "the latest theoretical bandwagon" (2004: 454), is expensive, was sometimes of low quality in the past, and limits the teacher-programmer's role. It seems that tutorial CALL, a major part of self-access CALL usage, has been judged as limited in usefulness by the academic community for a number of historical and technical reasons that may or may not still be relevant.

Overall CALL materials used in self-access, whether tutorial or communicative, have been found in at least one study to be appreciated by their target audience. Cotterall and Reinders (2001) reporting on research done on the usefulness of materials at the English Language Institute at Victoria University in the Language learning Centre, discovered that 73% of students thought CALL programmes were either "quite" or "very" useful. They also discovered that listening materials "proved the most popular. 80% of the respondents rated the listening resources as

"quite" or "very" useful..." They later followed this study with a survey of self-access CD-ROMs at another self-access centre, creating a very useful evaluation form (2005).

Evaluating CALL materials is not the intention of this study but good design will inevitably influence learner judgement of usefulness. Hubbard (2006) says that the key elements of evaluation are teacher fit, learner fit and operational fit. Underwood in 1984 outlined thirteen points of good communicative CALL which became a model for an evaluation rubric followed by Egbert and Hansen-Smith who outlined "eight generalizations for optimal language learning, again providing content for a research-based evaluation scheme" (Hubbard, 2006: 317). Chapelle outlined five principles for evaluation; that it is situation specific, should be evaluated both judgmentally and empirically, criteria should come from SLA theory and research, should be applied to the purpose of the task, and most importantly should be judged on language learning potential (Hubbard, 2006: 318). Murray (2004: 83) says the computer should "enhance the learning experience of the user", not be too simple or too complex, provide a challenge and have "different levels of sophistication". Although he sees the computer as both useful and versatile, particularly for individualised instruction, he feels evaluation of software is sometimes based on incorrect assumptions rather than on the most important question of whether or not it teaches.

> Much evaluation of software – both educational and otherwise – has tended to be based on the intuition of the evaluator/s. Whilst this is acceptable [and] inevitable, there are certain limitations to restricting oneself to this basis alone. For example, teachers with greater experience of teaching may possibly have a different intuition than those of lesser experience. Of course, the intuition may be no better or worse than that of others, only different.
>
> (Murray, 2004:84)

Stevens (1996: 281) had previously made the same point, saying that "developers of CALL often work on intuition alone and have little real idea what students actually do with their programs". Pointing out the difficulty of researching self-access CALL non-intrusively, he also discusses the effects of giving students control and how this affects their learning.

Murray (2004) maintains that to facilitate learning processes the syntactic information (i.e. the keystrokes needed to perform certain operations) should be as intuitive and user-friendly as possible to enable the user to free up their memory. He also says screen prompts and generic keystrokes help ease the use of programmes. Murray cites Smith and Mosier (1984: 194) who in listing a large number of guidelines for screen display to help usability ranked highly three that Murray felt were very important to CALL and WELL: these were a consistent display, uncluttered screens and grouping items by their functions. Using middle-frequency colours (such as yellow and green) to reduce eye fatigue was also helpful. They note that not only is reading from a screen more tiring and more prone to errors but it is also 30% slower than paper-based reading. Students also seemed to react negatively to disturbing audio effects used to denote right or wrong answers. Striking visuals seem to keep students interested and Murray reiterates the obvious, that students who are interested will learn better. As to the thorny question of whether a computer package fulfils 'its stated objectives', Murray sees a role for user opinion and also thinks the question whether there is a need for the programme must be asked. He lists five factors that a package could be judged on: ease of use; presentation of information; degree and nature of interaction; efficacy as a CALL/WELL package; contents (accuracy, appositeness and priorities). He also lists four factors which relate to usability: effectiveness, learnability, flexibility and attitude (Murray, 2004: 90).

'Usefulness' is a measurement that encompasses all of the above, and student instinct as to the usefulness of a programme or site to them will inevitably be influenced by the relative importance they ascribe to each factor.

Hughes, McAvina and King (2004), in a study of the web design preferences of 687 secondary school students, discovered similar results to Murray. They wanted to design a web site to entice students to study foreign languages, and, using an initial questionnaire, focus groups and a feedback form, on the developing site called ATLAS, asked students about any websites they liked and why they liked them. They sorted comments into the divisions of visual attributes,

usability, interactivity, support for schoolwork, content and functionality and were tempted to add cultural and heritage associations but combined this into content. Once sites were identified and categorised they analysed why students liked them and applied the information to the development of their own site where practical. The most popular sites were search engines, music and sports sites (particularly fan sites), magazines, games, shopping and heritage sites were also mentioned often. Communication sites were also used a great deal. The most common reason given by 58% of the participants for liking a site was "function" or "content". 16% said "Ease of use" was the next most important item followed by appearance (including colour and layout, then graphics and pictures) at 10% and fun (humour, activity and interactivity) at 7%. The researchers note that "fast or efficient performance" only scored 1% while interaction and feedback were "particularly valued".

The vital importance of feedback and its role in learning is discussed by many researchers including Zhang (2004) and Hoven (1999). Zhao (2005c: 27) discusses the computer's capacity "to provide instant and individualized feedback" and points out that recent feedback, in contrast to the behaviorist tradition where work was simply marked as right or wrong, is now more "contextualised and pedagogically sound." He also says that despite the inaccuracies of grammar and spell checkers, because they cannot "perform semantic analysis and process deep-level structures", a study done by Burston (2001) showed advanced students of French using a French grammar checker gained greatly improved essay writing scores of 70% compared to a control group who scored 20%, and in a second essay they scored 85% compared to the control group at 54%. This is where the tool and the tutor functions of such programmes begin to merge.

Zhao (2005a) also discusses automatic speech recognition technology which can provide useful visual feedback which is far more effective than a teacher could possibly provide. It is also possible for students to now have "near natural conversations with a computer program around pre-selected and programmed topics" (Zhao, 2005c: 26) or to interact with virtual characters which Harless, Zier and Duncan (cited in Zhao, 2005c: 26) discovered in 1999 improved Arabic

language learners reading and speaking skills “significantly” and their listening skills “convincingly.” CMC (computer-mediated communication) such as e-mails and chatrooms, says Zhao (2005c), discussing the results of a number of studies, not only allowed more negotiation but encouraged better and more equal participation by language students and enhanced and improved their writing and oral proficiency. Pegrum (2007) argues that the social web such as the increasingly popular *Second life* benefits language students, although the level of expertise required could be a significant barrier to educators and students alike.

Visual attributes, particularly colour, were often mentioned (Hughes, McAvina and King, 2004) by students who liked subtle colours that were “eye-catching” but not overwhelming or too bright, as this implied the site was for children. They preferred pictures (particularly of people) to cartoons, again seen as child-like, but the cartoons they liked were the ones that were funny. They wanted a simple, uncluttered layout with most of the space used (although strangely they liked Google’s front page). Clear navigation and clarity of function without “gimmicks”, like animations, scrolling text and pop-ups, and short, scanable pieces of text were also popular. They liked unusual subject matter and communication links. They also wanted to know where links would take them so explanations of links were popular. All these points reflect Nielsen’s (2000) opinions on good web-site design.

What students did not like was small text and large areas of unbroken text. They did not mind dense texts as long as it was separated by headlines into smaller blocks. This facilitates scanning - one of the positive skills computer reading facilitates. Hughes, McAvina and King (2004) also mention students’ sensitivity to any form of condescension and their sensitivity to visual messages (see also Honeywill, 1999), an attribute they felt was less likely to be found in adult users who had not used computers all their life. This highly developed skill is a reminder that this area is changing rapidly as each generation experiences a different kind of exposure to technology. The researchers mention the “snapshot nature of any research in this rapidly changing area”(2004: 101) and the “need to keep adjusting to the changing audience.”

### The effect of gender, age and previous CALL experience

Gender is a variable whose influence on language learning using computers seems to have been scantily researched, particularly in self-access. Poststructuralist research looks at a wider influence than gender alone –considering also age, class, ethnicity, race and immigration status – looking at the individual learner in a more holistic way. The choices individuals make can be influenced by social relationships and gender roles within those relationships. Feminist and critical pedagogies rather than following set curriculum want to see learning taking account of the specific needs of the students, and organised around the experiences of learners' daily lives, while incorporating the complex realities those lives encompass (Pavenko, 2004).

One of the points addressed in critical feminist pedagogies in language learning (particularly where possession of a majority language gives access to social or economic benefits) is that

> older immigrant and minority women from lower socio-economic backgrounds may face a number of gate keeping practices that restrict their mobility and access to linguistic resources and learning opportunities.
>
> (Pavlenko, 2004:56)

Access difficulties for this group can partially be addressed by self-access centres being available outside of normal study hours. Mothers may, for instance, find weekends or evenings the only time they are free to leave the house and find a quiet place to study by themselves. Computers may also not be accessible in their homes, or alternatively they may be last in the queue for such resources.

Research has also looked at the nature of linguistic exchanges in the classroom and its relationship to gender (Sunderland, 2004). Female students who find classroom interaction patterns lacking sympathy with their own cultural or gender practices may find it difficult to learn in the classroom setting. Pavlenko (2004:59) contends that for such students "teachers need to provide the learners both with the safe space and the adequate linguistic resources for the development of voices which can be heard." Pavlenko was not talking about self-access centres

but they could be seen as a variety of “safe space” where the disempowered are able to find their voice.

Teachers, however, often believe gender is not a problem in language learning as

> women and girls are widely perceived as being good at languages and language learning, performing better than men and boys in public and school examinations in many countries (Arnot, David & Weiner, 1996; Arnot et al.,1998), and, in addition, are often more likely to elect to continue with language when they have a choice (Wikeley &Stables, 1999).
>
> (Sunderland, 2004:223)

Despite this belief teachers do spend more time interacting with males (Sunderland, 2004); asking them more challenging questions, giving them more praise and telling them off more. Although there have been fewer studies of these gender interactions in language learning, Sunderland cites Batters (1986) as finding males dominant in “oral and participatory activities”. Yet Sunderland remarks that male dominance and females having “superior achievements” in language learning seems counter-intuitive. She suggests that males are more disruptive in class but develop their confidence and public speaking skills by participating more. Sunderland also suggests that learning languages is not perceived as a masculine activity and neither is working hard. It is possible, she says, that the embarrassment of producing “unfamiliar sounds” could prevent boys from learning. It follows therefore, that males may be more disadvantaged in the language learning classroom.

In CALL there is less embarrassment, as students often work individually facing into their own computer without an audience. Speaking programmes often involve a personal challenge against a spiked line on a machine – possibly considered a more masculine-orientated experience. Additionally, while females may have a greater verbal ability males have the added advantage in CALL of having greater spatial ability (Swann, 1992). This is related to stronger male lateralization (where one hemisphere of the brain is able to specialize in one activity rather than working in both sides of the brain simultaneously as females tend to do). Spatial ability tends to favour the manipulation of objects on a screen, although how important this is in influencing

language learning is uncertain. Swann also points out that females tend to do best in assessment if the response required is in a written form while males achieve better response rates with multiple choice. She also notes a concern about

> gender inequalities in areas of the curriculum in which girls traditionally do less well or in which they have less confidence. Computing is one such area. Educationalists have been concerned at the 'male image' of computing: boys have more positive attitudes towards computing, they make greater use of computers out of school; and they dominate what resources there are in school.
>
> (Swann ,1992; 53)

In England in the 1980's, more girls tended to take languages and gained higher passes than boys while the opposite was the case for sciences and computer studies. Although this was written 15 years ago, and computing may now be perceived as more female friendly with increased use of colour, easier manipulation of menus and more visual elements, computing is still largely seen as a male domain. Female access is more likely to do with people orientated activities such as e-mail and sites offering access to groups or as a replacement for the typewriter, while programming, mathematical pursuits and the creation of CALL material still seem to be largely dominated by males. Johnson (2006), summing up previous research literature, discovered that it supported the idea that:

> Males view the computer as something to be mastered (Morritt,1997; Turkle, 1988) whereas females predominately use the computer as a tool, for a purpose, or to complete a task, and wish to view the computer as something they are comfortable with (Moritt, 1997; Turkle, 1988; Turkle & Papert, 1992; Wylie, 1995).

She also notes research that contends that boys not only gain greater access to computers, both at home and school, but are also more positive about that experience than their female counterparts, who given their socialisation towards feminine attractiveness have no desire to be labelled as "geeks". In her own research in two New Zealand primary schools she discovered very little gender difference in the time students used computers but discovered teachers tended to favour boys as "experts" and boys tended to take over from those who were less confident. However, she also discovered both sexes were equally comfortable using computers and equally effective in their usage. These younger students are growing up in a world where computer use is normalised

and a comparison with the age group studied in this research must, however, be treated with caution.

## Other self-access resources

Mak and Turnball, in their 1998 study which was focused on tutor support in planning individual English programmes for students in an EAP language course at Hong Kong Baptist University, did look at a student rating of the usefulness of learning materials, although these materials were partially selected by the tutors. They rated worksheets and learning packages as most useful, followed closely by books and then CALL software third. Movies and learning videos were next and Audio tape-based materials were rated as least useful. Students had spent the most time using worksheets and learning packages and CALL came a close second. The areas they felt they had made the most improvement (using all resources) were grammar and vocabulary closely followed by listening.

Video may be more important than this study suggests as Zhao (2005c) notes the ability of video to provide natural and context-rich linguistic and cultural materials to the learner and cites both Weyer's work (1999) to show how it increased communicative competence and Herron's work (2000) to show how video increased students' understanding of other cultures. Zhao (2005c:25) also cites Al-Seghayer's (2001) study which showed that a variety of modality cues such as a video clip and an accompanying text is more effective than a picture and text to teach unknown vocabulary.

## Summary

In this chapter the theoretical foundations of the use of CALL in self-access centres have been discussed with reference to previous studies of CALL usage and theories of how computers can best be utilised in the teaching of English as a second language. The self-access context has been described and their effectiveness in promoting autonomy discussed. Studies done in the New Zealand educational environment on the use of CALL have been surveyed although none exactly

parallel the current study, and factors that may affect CALL proficiency such as gender, age and previous computer experience have been reviewed. Consideration of other self-access resources has been mentioned. This chapter has presented the theoretical framework for the discussion of results of the present study in chapter four and five. However, the next chapter will first present the research design and methodology of this study.

# Chapter 3

# Methodology

This chapter describes the methodology used in this study and the methods employed in undertaking the research. The methodological basis for the research is presented, and then instruments used for the data collection are described with an explanation of why they were selected. Finally the methods of analysis are discussed and the limitations of the scope of study are outlined.

## Establishing the methodological context of the study

Chapter one has described the contextual background of the study and chapter two dealt with the theoretical basis of the study. In this chapter the methodological context will be outlined.

This study of student perceptions of the usefulness of CALL and CALL resources in learning English as a second language in self-access centres in the New Zealand tertiary system is descriptive and uses both quantitative and qualitative research methods. Zhao (2005b:8) contends that research in the field of technology and language has been searching for an appropriate "research paradigm for decades" and choosing which field of research is most appropriate can be problematic. Gremmo and Riley (1995) and Levy (1997) were all saying much the same a decade earlier. Basena and Jamieson (1996) cited in Warschauer and Healey (1998:62) also mention the lack of a clear research agenda and the "wide variations in designs and measures" which have made generalisability and reproduction difficult. Nunan (2005), discussing second language classroom research, suggests that with the rapid development of information technology, "virtual

classrooms", and the fact that language learning can now often take place in spaces that are very unlike traditional classrooms, a redefinition of such research is needed. He also notes the trend of

> a broadening of the range of research tools and techniques. Classroom researchers appear to be increasingly reluctant to restrict themselves to a single data collection technique, or even a single research paradigm.
>
> (2005:236)

The limited number of researchers in this relatively new field of language learning and technology have, because of these difficulties of establishing which research paradigm is appropriate, therefore, tended to choose a related field on which to model their methodological design. One of these is the human sciences field. Hammersley (1996:160) says that research in the human sciences field can be seen as ranging across a spectrum of belief, at one end of which quantitative and qualitative methods are seen as discrete research paradigms, and at the other end of which both methods are seen as complementary and "should be used as and when appropriate, depending upon the focus, purpose and circumstances of the research." Brown (2001) refers to this latter belief as typical of survey research. He characterises it as drawing on both quantitative and qualitative techniques, using both questionnaires and interviews. Brown (2005:31) contends that such research must still follow sound practice with good quantitative research being

> judged in terms of its reliability, validity, replicability, and generalizability, while sound qualitative research (at the other end of the continuum) will be judged in term of its dependability, credibility, confirmability, and transferability.

Brown also cautions the researcher that

> triangulation is a key concept in qualitative research. Variants of triangulation are used to enhance both the dependability (i.e., methodological and time triangulation) and credibility (i.e., source, investigator, and location triangulation) of such research. …However the issue of triangulation is not that simple: as Fielding and Fielding (1986) point out, "the important feature of triangulation is not the simple combination of different kinds of data, but the attempt to relate them so as to counteract the threats to validity identified in each.
>
> (Brown 2005: 31)

Hoepfl (1997: 2) claims that that qualitative and quantitative research result in different types of knowledge with quantitative researchers looking for "causal determination, prediction, and generalization of findings," while the qualitative researcher looks for "illumination, understanding, and extrapolation to similar situations." Together they can reveal what neither can do alone. Ellis (2005) also argues for a "hybrid approach" to "provide a much richer and more personalized account of the factors responsible for learner difference."

I have chosen to use the descriptive survey research approach as using both qualitative and quantitative methods offers the potential of some methodological triangulation (Brown and Rodgers, 2002) (Miles and Huberman, 1994) where several different methods of collecting data such as observations, interviews and questionnaires, can be used to cross-validate results and increase dependability. Miles and Huberman (1994: 267) warn that with triangulation we sometimes "may only be getting 'reliability' rather than validity information" but they also believe it can push us into "more complex, context-respecting" explanations when different sources conflict and it stops 'inappropriate certainty'. Nunan (2005:237) points out triangulation is used by some researchers "to capture the complexities of classroom events by looking at them from different angles." He contends this allows researchers to look at the similarities and differences between learner, teacher and researcher accounts of events. To try and capture some of this complexity in this study student perceptions are compared to teacher perceptions and my own observations are also noted where relevant.

In research in the educational field related to technology applications it is exceptionally difficult to recreate similar conditions to replicate studies (Zhao, 2005b). This is not only because students are so different but also because software and student experiences with technology are changing so rapidly. However, Zhao(2005b: 12) warns that "replication and generalization are still important principles scientific research should follow." Location triangulation, where the researcher uses multiple sites for data collection, provides a broad description of the research topic and allows for transferability of findings to other sites. Location Triangulation is used to

"minimize and understand any differences/biases that might be introduced by the participants in each of the institutions" (Brown, 2005:31). For this reason this study extends over eight self-access centres for the research and another four centres to help provide contextual material (Davies and Elder, 2004).

Zhao (2005b 8) also says research in this area has focused too much on technology but not taken into consideration that the "effectiveness of technology is largely mediated by how teachers use it." He says "teachers play a decisive role in the process" and we need to take a perspective that includes teachers. Thus while this study actually investigates student perceptions, as noted above teacher opinion has also been included to provide further verification of student responses. Zhao also says that constructs (or variables) in this field are difficult to specify and measure. This point is made by many research specialists in the field including Brown and Rodgers (2002), as measuring language proficiency and human behaviour has serious difficulties. For this reason student perception of *usefulness* has been the chosen construct, as controlling other variables (Warschauer and Healey, 1998), particularly in the self-access context, is for practical purposes almost impossible. There is also perhaps the caution that students may judge *usefulness* by comparison with their previous use of computer learning rather than what is actually most effective. Warschauer and Meskill (2000:309) note that:

> the natural tendency is to use new technologies in ways consistent with previous methods of organization and practice. This can often result in inefficient or even demotivating uses of computers, in which workers or students see their interpersonal connections and personal power reduced (e.g. through highly automated uses of technology such as computer-based drills) rather than increased.

Despite this concern that student perception may be affected by previous computer experience, usefulness remains a valuable construct as it combines the idea of something being valuable in a very personal way that can only be measured by the recipient. Cotterall and Reinders (2001) in their study of "Learner's perceptions and practice in self-access language learning" chose this word when questioning learners about the usefulness of different categories of materials in self-access centres. Cartner (2004) also uses it for one category of questions in reporting students'

preferred modes of learning in her study on "Student attitudes towards computer-assisted language learning" in their English classes – a study based on Ayres' (2000) work on the same topic.

## Participants

New Zealand tertiary self-access centres were asked to volunteer participation through a group e-mail to the Independent Learning Association. Self-Access centres willing to participate were then selected after consultation with experienced leaders in the self-access field. All centres which volunteered were considered to be held in good regard and thought to be well run, providing a sound service for students. Two other centres were asked if they would also participate. Chosen centres were:

Centre A - a large university's SAC attached to the library

Centre B - a large university's SAC attached to the library

Centre C - a large university's language academy's SAC

Centre D - a technical institute's SAC

Centre E - a technical institute's SAC with a physically separated SA CALL area

Centre F - a large private language school's SAC

Centre G - a medium-sized university's language academy's SAC

Centre H - a large university's language academy's SAC

Participants are students who had chosen to study in the self-access centre on the day the researcher visited. They had a sufficient level of English to understand the questionnaire without translation. The advice of the advisors was sought or the researcher evaluated the student's oral responses to ensure the participant's comprehension level was adequate. Participants were asked

if they wished to fill in the questionnaire after the project had been explained, and they had been given the opportunity to refuse (see Appendix A for information sheets and consent forms). Participants were reassured that participation or non-participation would not affect their standing in the centre. No participant was under 16 years of age.

The number chosen from each centre depended on how many students were available, and whether students had deadlines to either complete work or attend another class. Students were only interviewed if they had some experience of CALL, even though that experience might have been limited. At least two students from each centre were included in the research and a range of nationalities (largely Asian) and both genders were represented (although males predominated). Advisors, teachers, and administrators were also invited to participate in filling in questionnaires and lead teachers were interviewed. Again this was a random selection, depending on who was available on the day but teachers with particular expertise were sought out to try and establish which software they perceived students to prefer. This hopefully widened the perspective of the study.

### Frequency tables for student participants

Of the 64 students taking part the largest group of 32 came from centre G. This was partly due to the co-operation of the administrator of the centre who helped with the collection of data with several classes but it was also a result of the way the centre operated. Although classes were timetabled in to the centre, and often had a task that had to be completed, they also had free time to follow their own self-selected path. Thus the research was able to be carried out without significantly disrupting a tight schedule and students were more willing to participate. The same could be said about centre E where all the students came from one class that was timetabled in to the self-access CALL centre. The teacher actually provided class time for the questionnaire to be completed. Thus 70% of the respondents came from these two centres. However, this did limit

the amount of time spent with students gathering comments and students tended to spend less time on the open-ended questions than students in other centres who had more personal attention.

**Table 3.1 Students participating in each centre**

| Centre | Frequency | Percent |
|---|---|---|
| A | 5 | 7.8 |
| B | 4 | 6.3 |
| C | 2 | 3.1 |
| D | 2 | 3.1 |
| E | 13 | 20.3 |
| F | 2 | 3.1 |
| G | 32 | 50.0 |
| H | 4 | 6.3 |
| Total | 64 | 100.0 |

## Frequency tables for staff participants

Centre C had the largest number of staff respondents as all classes used the self-access centre and were accompanied by their teachers. Two staff were involved in running the centre and one administrator of the school was also willing to complete the survey. All centres had at least one staff member complete the questionnaire.

**Table 3.2 Staff participating in each centre**

| Centre | Frequency | Percent |
|---|---|---|
| A | 1 | 5.6 |
| B | 2 | 11.1 |
| C | 5 | 27.8 |
| D | 2 | 11.1 |
| E | 2 | 11.1 |
| F | 1 | 5.6 |
| G | 3 | 16.7 |
| H | 2 | 11.1 |
| Total | 18 | 100.0 |

## Instruments

### Questionnaires

The main instrument for data collection was a survey questionnaire administered individually or in small groups in eight New Zealand tertiary self-access centres to both staff and students. Survey questionnaires are an accepted method of data collection in second-language research (Van Lier, 1988) and several other fields which might also lay claim to some of the territory covered in this study (Levy, 1997). Allison (1992) remarks that such qualitative data "can offer important insights". Fasold (1984) as reported in Al-Sahafi (2005), in a study of language shift and maintenance with Wellington teenagers of Indo-Fijian backgrounds, claims that self-report questionnaires had a high positive correlation with a performance test she administered to participants.

The questionnaire used in this study was piloted and modified (see Appendix B for final version). The pilot questionnaire was trialled on three English second language speakers to ensure questions were clear and elicited the information they were supposed to elicit. Based on this pilot study it was decided to clarify the instructions for Question 11 and to give students verbal instructions to reinforce the written instructions. Smiley faces were added to Likert scales to speed up the process of answering and clarify which end of the scale reflected negative perceptions and which positive. Some English expressions were further simplified to ensure the survey was as accessible to as wide a range of participants as possible. Translation of the questionnaire was considered but as the languages of participants would be varied and unpredictable this was considered to be impractical.

Hannan (2006:1) warns of the type of problems that can arise if a questionnaire is not well constructed.

> Problems arise, however, when the facts themselves are difficult to establish, when the question posed contains ambiguity or bias or when the range of

> available questions or answers does not allow the respondent the opportunity to state what he or she wishes. The agenda is normally set by the researcher with the respondent being somewhat constrained so as to follow planned pathways; there is little room for the unexpected. The picture presented is often static, with facts and views given as more concrete and fixed than they may be in the dynamic flow of personal formation and social interaction.

To overcome these problems it was decided to follow several closed questions with open questions where participants could expand or add information as they felt necessary.

There are three versions of the same questionnaire:

1. The administrator questionnaire

2. The teacher questionnaire

3. The (student) participant questionnaire

The administrator and teacher questionnaires (See Appendix C) are the same with only the title changed. This was to enable a separation of data should there prove to be a marked difference in their experience or perceptions of the use of CALL. This did not prove to be the case and both categories were combined into one called "staff" for statistical purposes. Therefore, from this point on both these documents will be described as staff.

All three versions of the questionnaire consisted of four topics (question numbering refers to student questionnaire):

1. Respondent details and CALL experience – Questions 1 to 9

2. Which areas of self-access CALL respondents perceived to be useful - Questions 10 to 12

3. CALL sites/ software respondents used and found useful - Question 13 and 14

4. Respondent perceptions of the usefulness of CALL compared to other self-access resources – Question 15 and 16

The first section of the student participant questionnaire (Questions 1 to 9) tried to establish the following using multiple choice answers: nationality, gender, age (measured in two age groups), English learning experience, length of time the computer has been used, frequency of computer use to learn English both at the present centre and previously, and, using a four point Likert-scale item, belief in the usefulness of CALL. Likert-scale items are considered useful "for gathering respondents' feelings, opinions, attitudes, etc. on any language-related topics" (Brown, 2000). Zhao (2005b:11) warns that investigators must take previous computing experiences into consideration for a study to "draw conclusions with confidence". Students were asked for their years of experience with a computer and, separately, previous and present experience with CALL. These last two answers were used to calculate a new variable of CALL skill level. It was felt this would be more accurate than asking students to self-evaluate their skill level.

Questions in the second part of the questionnaire (Questions 10 to 12) then become specific as to how the student believed CALL was useful. Students were asked to make a decision about the usefulness of CALL in the four learning skills of writing, reading, speaking and listening. Question 10 utilised four Likert-scale items each using two positive statements and two more negative statements of four categories rated 1 to 4 (1: *Not useful* to 4: *Very useful)* which were later summed to enable interpretation using empirically established norms. Davies et al. (1999:109) maintain Likert-scale items are commonly used in language programme evaluation because of the greater difficulties associated with the Thurstone Scale and the Guttman Scale. It was decided to use a four point scale so students could not "sit on the fence" by choosing a neutral answer (Brown, 2000). Participants were then asked in Question 11 to rank 16 different types of assistance which computer programmes or websites provide. Provision was made for respondents to add anything they believed was missing from the selection in Question 10.

In the third part of the survey (Questions 13 and 14) respondents were also asked to name any websites or computer programmes they thought had been useful in helping them to learn English. Students were asked in Question 13 to tick from a selection of six answers the reasons they felt

the named sites or programmes were useful. The sixth option was *other reasons* and participants could expand this answer in Question 14.

Finally, in the last section of the questionnaire (Question 15 and 16), Question 15 provided a list of other resources used in self- access centres and participants were required to rank them as more useful, the same usefulness or less useful than CALL. Provision was then made in Question 16 for students to add comments about any other aspects of CALL.

The staff questionnaire, as mentioned previously, essentially asked the same questions as the student questionnaire although the information requested differed slightly. For example where students were asked "I have been learning English for…" Staff were asked "I have been teaching English for…" Wording changed from "most useful to learn English" to "most useful for teaching English" where this was appropriate. Question 14, however, asked if the investment in CALL had extra benefits other than pedagogic to the institution and question 15 asked if CALL was better used in class situations or self-access. Question 16 was completely open-ended asking staff to add any opinions they had about CALL and their usefulness in self-access situations. Unlike student questionnaires staff were not asked their ethnic origins or their first language. Neither were they asked their level of English. These questions were removed in the early stage of questionnaire construction. This means that questions in the staff surveys were numbered differently to student surveys. From this point onwards where questions are mentioned the question number of the staff questionnaire will follow in brackets the student number i.e. Question 9 (7). However, in most aspects the student and staff questionnaires were essentially the same.

As mentioned previously in this chapter, most questions were closed questions, which are more easily able to be quantified, but five staff questions (see Appendix C): Questions 10, 12, 14, 15, and 16, were open-ended as were three student questions (see Appendix B) Questions 12, 14, and 16, which Nunan (1992) argues allows for more meaningful information. In a very comprehensive study of the conceptual frameworks of 104 key practitioners in CALL, done in

1991, Levy (1997:246) used a combination of open-ended questions, multiple choice questions and Likert scales (a combination imitated by this present survey). He, having possibly the same concerns as Nunan, mentions that including both closed and open questions "acts as a cross-check, it guards against the registering of an item simply because it is supplied as an answer, and it gives an opportunity to provide more detail." Levy (1997:246)

Dornyei (2003) also points out that such open-ended questions provide a greater richness in second language research. Staff were more forthcoming in these open-ended questions than students, although given their experience and better grasp of English this is not surprising, but valuable information was collected from both groups.

### Interviews

Although questionnaires were crucial in establishing student responses, two formal student interviews, numerous shorter more informal interviews (points noted on student response forms) and 15 staff interviews, which took place after questionnaires were completed, and a number of open-ended questions, provided deeper insights than statistical measures alone.

Interviews with staff were semi-structured (Appendix D has the list of questions asked of staff). The two formal interviews with students, while following the same basic questions as for staff, pursued any answers, from the questionnaire and during the interview itself, that appeared to offer interesting insights into student perceptions. It had originally been intended in the planning stages of the research to have more formal interviews with students. However, it was discovered after these first two interviews that responses seemed stilted and students appeared to be uncomfortable with this more formal approach. A number of students approached declined the opportunity to take part in interviews because of time constraints. Organising interviews in a more formal manner would have biased the selection as staff were more likely to know committed students who attended regularly and those who may have had a more negative perception of CALL would therefore, probably not have featured in staff selections. Students

appeared to respond better and give more insightful answers to the more informal interviews that followed the filling in of the questionnaire. So it was decided that shorter more informal interviews would provide more useful data. I tried during these interviews to be sensitive to the students' desire or need to study and the fact that students had already spent some time filling in the questionnaire, so I would review the students' responses and follow points of interest rather than ask all the interview questions. Responses were noted on the survey questionnaires.

### Field notes

Studying a variety of institutions allowed for a broader understanding of overall results. The lack of collegial connection of the researcher to the centres might have encouraged participants to give honest assessments rather than only trying to justify their personal time investment in self-access, although without a sensitivity to the social context valuable insights might also have been overlooked. A critical perspective must include the physical context in which learning interactions take place and the ideologies which may be affecting that learning. For this reason the centres in which the research was undertaken are also described. Field notes were kept where appropriate. Swann (1992) points out that field notes, while allowing points of interest to be noted, are necessarily selective in that not everything can be noted and bias can be a problem if observations are selected to support a particular preconception. Thus it was important to also look for counter-evidence to any pre-conceived ideas.

My observations, recorded in field-notes and photos, of how the self-access centres are used and organised, and the importance of CALL in each centre, provided very useful secondary data about the contexts of the centres and about the data collection procedures.

## Data collection procedures

I made contact with each centre to find a mutually convenient time to visit. The centre was observed and if possible the way the centre functioned was described by available staff. Gardner

and Miller (1997) warn that in-depth studies over a broad area can cause an unacceptable level of disruption which may cause students to be hostile or withdraw. For this reason intervention to survey and interview students was as quick and positive as could be managed. This does, however, preclude the gathering of information in depth and tends to limit the time students have to reflect and revisit answers.

I looked at the CALL materials available and added CALL programmes and web-sites to the list that would be offered to the student to assist with the completion of Question 13 (11). The research questions were explained to teachers and any queries answered. Then, depending on the opportunity offered, I either addressed a class, explaining the study and the questionnaire, or talked to individual students. Students had to be over 16, have a high enough English language proficiency to understand the questions, and they had to have used the CALL facilities (even if briefly).

Permission was sought from each participant and the optional withdrawal process explained (See Appendix A for information sheets and consent forms). The researcher, or teacher where this was necessary, was available to explain the questionnaire and answer questions. It was emphasized to students that the questions related to CALL in self-access centres. As previously mentioned for question 13(11), asking students to name resources, a list of possible CALL resources (including web-sites) was offered to the student to help them remember what sites were available in that particular centre. Some students also mentioned web-sites they knew of and used although they might not have actually been listed in their centre's catalogue. If students could not remember the correct name of a programme, or website, they were prompted to give as much identifying information as possible and the researcher or teacher named possible programmes - titles which students could confirm or reject. If students named sites they used to learn English outside of self-access centres this was noted on the survey.

If no students were available (in this case because it was exam time), then a teacher in the centre was asked to administer the questionnaire to suitable students at another date. This happened in

Centre H. In one centre a staff member administered questionnaires to a group without the researcher being present to provide a greater number of responses (Centre G).

Question 11 (9) which required students to rank 16 specific things "that the computer does best" proved problematic for students because of the large number of items. Rather than dilute the significance of the question, a method was devised during the pilot study to assist students choosing items. Students were asked to do rough ranking first, using ticks, and then go back and rank within each subset. Students also found it difficult to number the items correctly so an illustration of how to do this was given before this question was reached. Despite this some students still numbered incorrectly and if possible were asked to renumber on the spot. Three questionnaires, supervised by another teacher, were sent back to one centre where students had chosen to put their names on the answer sheets and they redid this particular question.

If the opportunity was available the researcher sat with students and asked them to expand some of the open-ended questions orally. These answers were noted on the student papers.

There were also a small number of in-depth interviews with students and several with staff. These were taped if consent was given although this was not a popular option. Commercial sensitivities are possibly a factor here as at the time of the interviews a number of centres were downsizing. Choices were being made as to which staff would lose their jobs and two staff members at one centre mentioned they were unwilling to have interviews taped for this reason. All interviewees were given the interview questions to review before the interviews took place. This was to give second language speakers time to prepare their answers, lessen stress, and allow for more thoughtful answers. Interviews took from 5 to 40 minutes depending on the interviewee's experience and willingness to engage. Staff interviews tended to be longer and more complex while student interviews were shorter and compact.

## Data analysis

The goal of analysing the data produced during the study was to answer the research questions and contribute to the understanding of the usefulness of CALL in tertiary self-access centres in New Zealand.

Information collected from open-ended questions and interviews was analysed qualitatively following methods suggested by Ellis and Barkhuizen (2005). Scripts and transcripts were coded and categorized into relevant themes which complemented, and was used to comment on, the data collected quantitatively. As interviews took place or comments were recorded from the open-ended questions a preliminary analysis of themes was conceived – a practice endorsed by Coffey and Atkinson (1996) and Davis (1995) cited in Al-Sahafi (2005). Baptiste (2001), who calls himself a social constructivist, believes that creativity demands human subjectivity in quantitative data analysis – that researchers become constructors of knowledge and therefore, take part in transforming the world. He believes that even with qualitative data it is not possible to attain objective truth but that as:

> we tag, label and categorize data (phase 2). And toward the end of the process, as we gain more knowledge and confidence about our data, our working hypotheses become full-fledged stories or theories. A word of caution: It is advisable that analysts do not get too wedded to their initial hunches and working hypotheses. Such premature commitment often leads the analyst to ignore important new insights and relationships that may greatly enrich her developing story or theory.
>
> (http://www.qualitative-research.net/fqs-texte/3-01/3-01baptiste-e.htm)

Barkhuizen (2006) also outlines the process of constructing stories from data. However, important as it is to allow ourselves as researchers to be present in the moment and to follow the threads offered and construct reality as we perceive it, as Baptiste warns, it is also important not to allow our preconceptions to blind us to unexpected information or beliefs. This point became important in my research when several ideas emerged from student comments on videos that were unexpected.

Data from quantitative questions was analysed in the first instance using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Questionnaires that were incorrectly filled in were removed or in three cases where students could be identified, sent back to students to redo. Data from the questionnaires was then entered on a spreadsheet in numerical form and student and staff results were separated to be analysed separately. Descriptive statistics i.e. frequencies, percentages, mean and standard deviation values, were then calculated. `

Independent Sample t-tests were carried out to see if there were any relationships between *perceptions of CALL usefulness* Question 9(7) and *gender* Question 1(1) *age* Question 2 (2) or *previous CALL experience*. A comparison was also made with a new factor created by combining the results of Question 7(5*) experience with CALL this year* and Question 8(6) *experience with CALL previously*. For the calculation of the t-tests regarding gender and previous CALL experience staff and student results were calculated to see if there was a statistically significant difference between the two groups. Results were also calculated on the combined group to see if any statistically significant pattern was obvious. It was not possible to do this with the age question as all staff were over 25.

Frequency calculations found the mean and standard deviations of Questions 9(7) and 10 (8). These two questions, as mentioned previously in the instruments section, utilised Likert Scales (using two positive statements and two more negative statements) of four categories rated 1 to 4 (1: *Not useful* to 4: *Very useful).* The results were then transferred to Excel and made into tables and bar graphs. For Question 11 (9) participants ranked the specific features of English language teaching they felt computers did best from 10 down to 1 from a choice of 16 suggestions. They did not have to use all 10 numbers and they could add other suggestions (although the few that added an idea did not rank any of their suggestions). The numerical scores were added in SPSS and the mean and standard deviation of each score noted. Descriptive statistics comparing all categories were then compiled and means graphed using Excel. Question 13(11), which required participants to list *programmes and websites they thought were most useful for learning English*,

was analysed manually as the variations of programmes used made comparisons between centres problematic. In Question 15 (13), *comparing other resources used in self-access* to CALL, rankings of *more useful* were rated as 3, *the same usefulness* as 2 and *less useful* as 1. These scores were then used to calculate means and standard deviations for a comparison chart. Pie graphs of individual results for each resource were made in SPSS and results were graphed in Excel.

The quantitative analysis of the survey data identified a number of significant results and some very interesting findings which are identified and discussed in Chapter Five.

## Summary

In chapter three I have presented the methodology employed in this study and the methods used to collect data from 64 students and 18 staff on their perceptions of the usefulness of CALL in self-access centres. I then discussed the procedures used to analyse the data. In the following chapter I will discuss the results of the observations of the centres involved in the research plus four centres outside New Zealand that assisted in the process of establishing a context for the study.

# Chapter 4

# Results and discussion: Self-access centres

No discussion of research on CALL in self-access centres could be complete without an understanding of the context in which the study takes place. Student attitude will inevitably be coloured by the pedagogical beliefs of the staff administering and advising in the centres they attend. Staff will be influenced not only by institutional needs but also by the beliefs and practices of their colleagues, their attitude towards students' need for autonomy and scaffolding of their learning experiences, the resources they have available to them, and their belief about the effectiveness of those resources. I was fortunate, in 2005, to be able to visit a wide range of self-access centres in France, Hong Kong, the USA and New Zealand. The surveys this study used involved the New Zealand centres but four overseas centres (with details in Appendix E) provide a context to understand the field of self-access language learning (SALL).

In 1995 Gremmo and Riley (1995: 160), both working in CRAPEL at Nancy II – one of the first and biggest self-access centres, stated that

> some applications of educational technology are a real threat to both the understanding and practice of self-directed learning. It is perfectly possible to use highly sophisticated technology in a most directive, pedagogically retrograde way. CALL applications…are at best a useful but not essential tool, at worst thoroughly counter-productive. It is vital, in self-directed learning systems, that technology be at the service of the learners and not vice versa… 'hi-tech' facilities are not a priority in setting up self-access systems…no technology has ever in itself helped anyone learn anything. The crucial elements in these systems are the learner-training and counselling services they offer. When learners in 'high-tech' resource centres are not trained to become competent autonomous learners, the centres risk the same fate as language laboratories suffered decades ago.

In the decade that has passed since they wrote this, despite the new opportunities technology now offers, Gremmo has not felt a need to change her position. Her position on the use of CALL is that it is only useful to the student if adequate counselling can help the student notice the gap

between their own language and the authentic language material they meet in CALL situations. She also believes that helping students to find that authentic material and giving them strategies, such as how to use corpora, is an important part of moving students into autonomous learning. Finding the right match between methodology and the student's learning styles is also important and CALL may or may not find a place in this process depending on the individual student's needs.

The Hong Kong University of Science and Technology self-access staff have taken up the idea of the importance of advising and, finding themselves pressed for advisory hours, have explored the idea of creating the Virtual English Language Advisor (VELA) to provide individual advice to learners who follow its interactive pathways. However, despite its emphasis on technology they have also retained all of the traditional self-access resources.

Like HKUST, The University of Hong Kong's self-access centre is extremely well-resourced, stresses the importance of a sound advisory service, is using computers to give students easy access to suitable resources for their learning needs and has integrated CALL into the list of available materials, but offers a wide variety of other resources as well. Both centres are frustrated by a lack of advisory hours and both are striving for more integration with English language programmes.

The City University of Hong Kong also shares a web-site of advisory materials (Student Online Learning Opportunities – SOLO) with their English Language School and they tend to emphasize integration with student subject area requirements.

The following centres, all in New Zealand, took part in the research and are not named to preserve anonymity.

## Self-access centres

In the following sections I have outlined my major observations and impressions of the centres in New Zealand visited during this study. Not all field information gathered has been included but an attempt is made to find the heart of the centre. What is the main impression gained of the centre? What does it value and how has it adapted to the needs of its students, particularly in the CALL area? Where important points were recorded in interviews, I have let the staff speak for themselves. As Gardner and Miller (1999) point out "Self-access is very flexible." It takes place in different physical settings with different clienteles working at different levels with varied levels of independence. It can take place individually or in groups and it is not culture or age specific. All of these centres are in their own way pioneers – searching for the appropriate path for their students.

### Centre A

This centre in a large technical institute in the middle of a city, open from Monday to Friday from 9am to 11pm, is possibly unique amongst the centres in this study. It was more integrated into the library, where it sits in a semi-open space in one corner, than other centres attached to library departments. In fact, the far end of the centre is fully open to the study area occupied by students using the general library facilities and it is difficult to know just where the centre begins and ends. The centre is included in an administrative structure where the other half of the centre, positioned next door, is a Maori language self-access and student learning area. Together they are labelled a development centre and individually they are known as learning labs. Other than this the centre shows a remarkable resemblance to most other self-access centres of its size.

It is not large, so shelf room is at a premium, but there are eight computers and eight Calfon tape recorders permanently set into the desks. The centre was full when I visited with students at virtually every station. A number of students were gathered in groups watching DVDs although none had worksheets. The supervisor estimated half of the students watching the videos were

using them to study English but she pointed out the “videos are good for stress and intonation. Some people have used them extensively. It depends on the learner and their learner style.”

There were many textbooks and listening materials available and several students were using the tape recorders. The manager of the centre commented that the pronunciation books did not get a lot of use. If she was able to improve the centre, she felt a separate lab where students could practise their speech would be desirable. There were also graded readers and course books that paralleled the class books used in the school of languages. Resources were separated into three levels; elementary, intermediate and advanced, which was indicated by a colour coding system. There was also a book club. There was a large number of self-access work sheets, photocopied or developed in-house, and these were divided into different skill areas such as reading or grammar. What made these so memorable were the many resources in mathematics, science and statistics. These worksheets contained explanations of concepts students would come across in their courses with simplified exercises to build student confidence. They appeared to be developed within the institute presumably by the departments concerned. Students were using these while I visited. This was the only centre in which I saw a large number of resources from so many different departments. This indicated a desire to integrate the centre into the subject needs of the institute. The centre had a small number of CD-ROMS that were used extensively. The supervisor only ordered software if the school of languages utilized it as she had observed the students only used the software the lecturers had told them to use. She noted that students liked working with technology.

Students had to pay $30 a month to join the centre, or $70 a semester which is not usual in self-access centres. However, the umbrella department which acts like a student learning centre runs student training courses and this fee structure is possibly related to the cost of other courses. It also allows people in the community to access the resources in the centre even if they are not students. The entire department has 14 staff but the self-access centre had a full-time supervisor/advisor and a person who issued resources – a position covered by a series of people

working full or part-time. The supervisor was also in charge of another similar centre at a second campus on the other side of the city. From 9am until 11pm every day students could drop in to get help from the advisor for a 10 to 20 minute appointment. If the advisor was busy then the person staffing the desk would point students to appropriate resources in the centre while they waited for an appointment. Assessment profiles were filled out online in English language classes and this was used to assist students in the selection of materials. The supervisor was keen to get a virtual advisory system and would have liked some system of online tracking. She was looking at the possibility of getting the centre's resources on to the library data base.

This centre works slightly differently to other stand-alone centres but it appeared to be popular and function smoothly. The prominent place of the centre in the library means students can move in and out of the centre easily and it feels very much part of the normal library resources.

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### Centre B

This self-access centre at a large university is physically separate from, but administered by, the library, but it is also affiliated with a department in the university with whom it collaborates in academic research. The centre, in a modern, light-filled, central location, is open seven days a week most of the year.

The centre specialises in CALL and sees its primary role as the support of the thousands of students in the university with English as an additional language, who may feel a need to improve their language proficiency. Students are able to use an electronic learning environment developed by the centre not only to work out their learning needs but also to set goals, work out which resources to use, track and monitor their progress and access digitalized textbooks, computer programmes and websites, carefully chosen to meet learning needs at specified levels. The programme also prioritises skills to be learnt and prompts students when it sees a mismatch in the work students are doing and what they need to do. It also encourages students and allows them to

give staff feedback and ask them questions. Students are able to access the electronic site from anywhere with a web connection, although some material is only available from the centre itself. Large amounts of funding have been utilised not only to develop this virtual self-access site but also to support a state-of-the-art centre that would be difficult for a smaller institution to contemplate.

As well as a large bank of computers set along one wall and in three other locations in the centre (16 computers in total), there is also a collection of textbooks and tapes, movie DVDs, computer programmes, reference books, a satellite television, internally compiled worksheets and advice sheets, newspapers and magazines and a reading corner. The latest innovation is a computer students can use to download mp3 listening files on to their iPods or test their reading speed. One part of the large room used by the students and advisors is separated by movable dividers to allow advisors to work with students in semi-privacy. There is also an office for the director of the centre.

The centre also offers a number of workshops and clubs to registered students. These include Kiwi English, Understanding Lectures, Writing Club, Speed Reading Club, The Movie Club, Planning Your Writing, and Speaking Skills. These are taken in another room outside of the centre.

The atmosphere in the centre is quiet and calm. Student numbers vary according to the time of year. The advisors are friendly and welcoming and a number are bi-lingual. The emphasis is firmly on CALL because of the advanced nature of the virtual learning environment but students are also encouraged to use the textbooks and novels, which can be issued. The director of the centre was heavily involved in research and has a clear view of the complexities of the self-access experience

### Centre C

Centre C was a language academy, belonging to a large university, with a self-access centre that emphasized CALL and was linked to two language labs. This centre was one of only two taking part in the research that employed a specialist independent workshop supervisor, with technical skills in CALL, to run their self-access centre, plus they also employed a CALL co-ordinator who had extensive IT experience. She helped students not only in the centre but also assisted language teachers with their class lessons in the language labs next door. Her expertise had enabled the centre to digitalise most of its tapes accompanying texts, and reading books, long before this had become common practice, and the digitally catalogued list of websites she had assembled was truly impressive. All this was kept on a website installed in the centre, called ELAB, which students required a password to access. The computers could either work in self-access mode or as a class computer lab. Part of the ELAB programme helped students decide what kind of learner they were, fill in a needs analysis, receive messages from the staff and kept a record of which resources students had used in relationship to their needs and goals. The programme also gave advice about different learning strategies, found resources for particular skills or difficulty level, giving a small review of each, and enabled the student to play any audio files. Students were also able to watch DVDs on the computer although these had to be loaded separately, and were not stored on the server. Online newspapers, magazines, dictionaries, and encyclopaedias were also available.

Despite the advanced nature of the technical environment the centre was also a neatly organised self-access environment. Sixteen computers ran down the middle and sides of the modern, brightly painted room while the far side of the lab had a number of shelves holding graded readers and text resources. There were worksheets nicely presented to accompany the DVDs and pamphlets to give students assistance with planning which resources to use.

The centre had free access for students at lunchtimes and after class from 3.30 to 6pm every week day except Friday. From Friday until Sunday it was open from 12 to 6pm, yet students obviously

wanted more access. In an in-house survey the CALL co-ordinator in the centre asked for comments on how the centre could be better. Out of 33 students nine students were keen for the lab to open for longer hours. All replies said the lab had been helpful and six students mentioned listening as one skill the lab had been particularly helpful with.

One of the senior administrators of the school was realistically enthusiastic about the potential of CALL. She explained that students had two to three hours of their 26 hour programme as independent study in the controlled environment of the workshop. The students are given a project devised by the teacher administrator of the centre which always requires the use of CALL. This is to introduce the students to self-access and have them doing something more interesting than just sitting in a classroom. There were from 200 to 400 students in the school (with most students timetabled into the labs for two or three hours a week) which put pressure on the size of the lab and the administrator of the school felt it would be nice to double the size of the centre, including a writing room (with someone to help students) plus to increase the number of available books. She felt students gained from self-access because they were able to work at their own pace rather than be dictated to by the needs of the group. She felt the mature students were able to work out what to spend their time on and CALL provided variety for the students, keeping the students interested because of its immediacy. The only disadvantage she could think of was that they had to be careful that introverted students did not use CALL too much.

One of the teachers who brought her class into the self-access centre (as teachers were able to do when they wished) commented that students who understood their own style of learning seemed to benefit most from self-access. She found it useful to use the centre for follow-up with extra enriching activities. She would do some reading in class, discuss it, and then do the workbook activity in the lab. Students were then able to look topics up on the Internet to get extra information. She felt set-ups like the centre were a “unique selling point” for language schools. She thought self-access mostly encouraged autonomy.

The independent workshop supervisor felt different students had different needs that the classroom teacher could not satisfy and that classroom teaching was "not enough." In the weekends many students came in to watch DVDs for entertainment and she had noticed the lower level students all used subtitles a lot but the students above intermediate level were told not to use subtitles and she felt this was challenging for their listening. She felt this was a fun way of learning because out-of-class students do not want to be too serious, and they say DVDs are quite useful as well as computer programmes. However, she felt DVDs and IELTS and other exam books were actually more popular than computing programmes. She felt the whole system (of self-access) was quite good as they had been improving it by modifying and tailoring it over the last two years for their students. They designed it for them and tried their best to meet their needs by buying many new resources. She felt the students were quite happy. She saw CALL as having advantages over other types of self-access provision because

> It's good for the students - easy to use. There are some very smart programmes which give feedback straight away and an explanation of the answers…. [But] a lot of students are not bothered about finding out how to use a programme efficiently or properly – particularly at the lower level. They need help. They get frustrated – 'how can I use it?' They have technical problems, particularly at the lower level… can't read the instructions. They can't be bothered when they have problems. They'll go to the books and the movies.

Some of her students came regularly to use the same programme again and again – they didn't flick from programme to programme but when they completed one level they would go to the next until it became too hard. The only skill she felt students did not like to use CALL for was writing.

The CALL Co-ordinator said that in the previous week there had been 479 student users of the ELAB mode of the computers in the centre, with 40 of them coming in during the weekend. This put pressure on space. Given more space she would like more traditional study spaces for students to do their homework and a place for radios. She was very positive, however, about what students gained from CALL, saying it gave them self-confidence and a sense of taking charge of their own learning as they make choices they do not get in class. They needed ,however, to be

guided by somebody helping them learn to learn. She was concerned that the staff in the centre often let students down because although they had brilliant ideas they were not able to be carried through, due to time and financial constraints. She felt listening programmes were the most useful programmes and popular for students, preferably with a visual component. CALL was limiting because of lack of interaction with other people, so watching interactions between speakers on the computer was more motivating. DVDs, particularly romantic comedies and easy to use computer programmes and IELTS materials, were also popular as were books which they could read anywhere and take home. Seven students in the centre's internal survey requested more books be bought. The students have a compulsory reading requirement which possibly influences this attitude.

The co-ordinator saw the Internet as a limitless resource that could be tailored to the needs of individual students but students needed guidance. There was also the concern with the lack of interaction and conversation and although webcams gave some sense of friendship "nothing beats getting out there and talking to people." She mentioned that some students had short attention spans and would flick on to something else rather than work through programmes methodically, but serious students were different. They would constantly ask for the same programme and the older they were the more motivated they tended to be. She felt there was a lot of good material available for free on the Internet but there was also some "dodgy stuff" for sale. There was not much on writing and some of the material was too complex. Despite the good material available she felt teachers knew their students best and were the most suitable people to choose what materials would benefit students as long as they were familiar with all the resources available.

> The computer will never replace interaction - pedagogically, emotionally or psychologically. Students need interaction as human beings. CALL is great for providing practice at routine things – i.e. grammar practice - and also giving students control over what they do, how fast they do it, as well as how many times they do it. I think there does definitely need to be a balance. But I think generally CALL has advantages especially for the self-paced and self-determination aspects.

This centre was a superb example of what can be achieved when the administration supports the appointment of specialists and people who understand the pedagogical implications of using CALL and other resources effectively.

### Centre D

This self-access centre at a technical institute has been absorbed into the student learning centre since this study commenced. It was open to all students at the institution and was originally meant to enhance the chances of mainstream students in their Certificate, Diploma and Degree courses. However, the centre had been overwhelmed by large numbers of students attending English language classes not only needing to increase their expertise in English but also needing to develop independent learning skills. About 50 to 70 students attended the centre daily on their own although when classes started numbers could increase to 120 a day. Some classes from one particular department were scheduled in regularly while other classes came only for orientation.

The centre was in a well-lit, cheerful room – two sides were windows - attached to the library, and was staffed by three full-time staff, one part-timer, and occasionally another advisor was employed for short periods. All staff were qualified English language teachers. The whole atmosphere was inviting with resources well spaced around the room and computer tables in a circle centrally and near the windows. On the computers were goal setting guides (which were also available in paper format), advice sheets, 16 computer programmes with information on their purpose and level, information on conversation groups, advice on the Language Advisory Service and what to do in the centre, a learning contract, video and DVD lists and links to other sites. The site was clear and well-presented although not comprehensive and would be easily understood by an ESL student. There were a large number of textbooks, reference books, graded readers and book/tape sets hanging accessibly on one wall and on freestanding shelves. There were also DVDs and videos and advice sheets graded into levels suggesting ways to use the centre to practise different skills and worksheets outlining different tasks. All instructions were kept short and simple. Resources were well-maintained, clearly catalogued into levels from beginner to

advanced, and appeared to span a much wider range at the beginner levels than was the case in all other centres apart from centre E. There was an office for the centre director and an interview room also used for videoing.

On the three occasions I visited this centre, once during the holidays, there was always a number of students quietly engaged either with individual work or sitting with advisors. The atmosphere was friendly and calm with staff very accessible to students and responsive to needs and staff were well-informed about the theory of autonomy and self-access, and appeared to have very positive respectful relationships with students using the centre. Some of the students were obviously very new to study and there were Pasifika and Asian adult immigrant students.

Both the director and the main advisor were interviewed and both were passionate about the importance of advising. The director said:

> You can't just dump students in and expect them to learn. I don't believe a traditional self-access centre is good enough anymore. We have moved on and need to provide guidance. The traditional self-access centre is a palliative so that institutions can feel they are being seen to provide support for an important section [of the students]. The danger is students also think they're getting support. Here's somewhere they can come after lectures. Our fear is that the time can be wasted if not guided properly. They are on a cline from directed learning to independent learning to autonomy. We have to teach them how to become independent and it's not a magic process. Some institutions see it as a money saver and we are trying to fight this. Good independent, best practice centres are not cheap to set up or run.

In an effort to help students plan their learning they had originally approached individual students to offer help but found students did not often return. Now they ask students who they have noticed using the centre several times if they want to make an appointment with an advisor. Students make an appointment for a half-hour advisory session and they are entitled to ten advisory sessions a year, although most only need four to six sessions. The first half hour is used to negotiate a learning plan. Although the whole inventory of materials in the centre is available to advisors, on the library catalogue, the administrator said this was not used because the staff knew the resources so well and students tended to use advice sheets in which resources were numbered to enable quick access. Most Pacific Island students, attending a session because an

assignment is due, or a teacher has advised they come because of problems such as difficulty understanding their lecturers, talk about their families when they first come to an advisory session. The administrator noted that

> Older Pacific Island women and men spend time establishing relationships otherwise [we go] straight into the introductory learning plan format…talk about it and try to unearth needs…one per session [although] the student might identify two or three.

Then an action plan is completed.

The centre was exploring the use of a virtual advisor system developed by another institution (VELA) but this was not yet implemented. Despite this they felt a human advisor was better, asking "Does [another university's virtual advisor] remind students about their goals if they do the wrong thing?" However, a shortage of staff meant they accepted the need for virtual advising. All copies of learning plans are given to the students with no records kept in the centre. This is an attempt to give students power and to encourage them to take charge of their own learning. Many students who came from very directive education systems, where it was difficult to get into tertiary study but easy to pass, found the opposite in the New Zealand system and needed to learn how to direct their own study.

One staff member emphasized the importance of treating students as equals in the advisory process. They felt students should not only gain different ways of learning to be independent, but should also learn how to react "one-to-one on an equal basis with a lecturer." This same staff member thought CALL was the most useful material in helping students acquire English but emphasized that it needed to be "used properly through advisory and backed up by a huge amount of other material."

Students sometimes spent too long on programmes with the average time about one and a half hours, sometimes switching between programmes. She felt this was too long. This advisor felt the second best materials for learning were specialist texts on particular skills. The other main

advisor in this centre felt CALL was best in the lower intermediate levels but that students at a higher level needed

> a range of materials. If they just use one sort of material they are not picking up what they need. For some, books and tapes are best as they may have eyesight or technical problems, for some, because of their learning styles a book works best for them.

Despite this, the advisor preferred the flexibility of CALL programmes as not only were they more interactive than books or tapes but they could "do more" and "students [were] often comfortable in that environment…[so students became] hooked. Learning becomes an extra."

However, the director of the centre saw no particular advantages of CALL and felt that although it could bring positive things, students could become beguiled by the attractiveness of a programme and, as if they were using a play station, go through the programme in either a methodical or haphazard way, and this applied particularly to older people who were not "savvy with computers." Despite this, the director pointed out that many of the young students liked the interactivity of computers and the immediate answers given in the better programmes.

Asked what materials were most popular with students one advisor said that the previous year they would have said IELTS books and tapes, but that the clientele had changed with fewer international students coming and now they were "not used at all." One of the other advisors thought CALL and specialist texts were most popular with students but also noted that DVDs using sub-titles were used in students' "downtime." Staff recommended working with a summary or generic questionnaire when students watched these.

This centre emphasized good personal relationships with students and this was reflected in the friendly atmosphere and the willingness of students to engage with staff when they needed assistance. I was left with the impression that the centre was catering to the needs of its student population in a very professional and emotionally satisfying way. A balance had been found that suited the situation.

## Centre E

Centre E is the only self-access centre in the study that consists of two distinct parts. The venue is a large technical institute which offers a wide range of qualifications and has a large number of English second language students who want to achieve qualifications leading to employment. A language school on-site has a computer lab which works as a self-access centre for classes and as a drop-in centre for students who choose to use it individually. A large number of language learning programmes are available for students and teachers go with their classes and assist students who need help. A short walk away in the back of the library there is a compact but extremely well-used self-access centre, which has a large number of resources. On the day I visited the four computers were not working and this was not considered overly important. Both the classroom teacher I observed using the CALL room, and the teacher running the self-access centre, were specialists in their field and both knew a great deal about the pedagogy of the area they were working in. The problem with using the students in this study was whether students using the CALL room were also familiar with the resources in the self-access area. No students in the self-access area were able to be surveyed. Students from the CALL class were asked to note on top of their survey papers if they had never used the self-access centre. Only one student had never used the centre- although he knew about it. There was some debate about whether to include this centre in the study but it was decided that in fact both parts were acting as self-access centres if with slightly different resources.

The classroom teacher had long experience with CALL and thought affective factors were important. It depended on the student and how they liked to learn. Students who liked computers were happy to use it. She felt lack of computer literacy was a deterrent as students would become frustrated.

> I think students need to see a clear purpose for using the computer…in a particular context or skill, for example a student with poor listening. I sit with them and show them what to do and how to do it. They go "ahh, now I know what this programme can do." They're more enthusiastic. So just directing them to use a website or software can just not be useful because why would they

> follow-up unless they have a reason? Digital natives expect to use a computer so they want to know web-sites. It's not useful giving them a sheaf of websites. I try to give very specific websites.

Students were able to use the drop-in lab for whatever they wanted including e-mail, software, word processing or writing on their blogs. Intermediate students and higher level classes whose teachers knew how to blog had taught students how to create and use a blog and these were linked into a class blog. After that, students used it on a self-access basis. At lower levels the teacher felt the students did not have the language to use blogs properly. Also, if class teachers were not able to show students what to do they did not persist. This teacher felt CALL was best suited to self-access rather than class situations but she felt classroom teachers could make sure learners had the appropriate tools to launch students on their way. This is a remark that resonates with comments made by the centre co-ordinator in centre A.

What was particularly memorable about the other part of the self-access centre attached to the library, apart from the absence of CALL, was the wonderful colour catalogue system divided into six levels, which made access to the materials extremely simple for students without the need to go through any type of electronic system. Materials were grouped according to skills or material. For example, texts were divided into grammar, reading, listening, and films were divided into romance, documentaries etc. The provision of worksheets produced in-house, with the words of popular songs which students could listen to, was another interesting use of authentic material.

There were two administration staff in the centre who between them covered the opening hours of 8am to 9pm Mon to Thurs and 8am to 6pm on Friday. On the weekends the centre opened from 9am until 4 or 4.30pm. During the week students could get advice and have conversation practice from two advisors (one of whom specialised in German) who had some part-time hours, or from the centre director. Students could fill in a needs analysis and goal setting sheet and were given literature with suggestions as to which resources to use. However, the director emphasized that listening to the students, finding out what courses they were doing, who their teachers were and gauging their levels was an important part of the process. The students in this centre enjoyed

the readers with tapes and the daily news and weather which the centre taped and prepared transcripts and summaries for. They also liked the listening and speaking books and tapes as they have a lot of trouble with those skills. If they had more room the director would have liked to have added some listening booths so students had privacy to practise pronunciation and record themselves speaking.

The director was unconcerned about CALL provision, although they did have a limited number of programmes available when the computers were functioning, because students had the option of using the drop-in lab or accessing the Internet from home, and she felt there was very little personal contact involved in using a computer, which she felt was important for students to have – particularly contact with native speakers. She also thought there were very few good pronunciation or speaking programmes. However, she acknowledged that some young people respond well to material on screen. Another teacher also mentioned that students who are more confident with computers

> can feel empowered through understanding the technology and have a sense of achievement even if language output isn't accurate. Computers can provide an audience (other than the teacher) for writing on the net either through chat rooms, blogs, discussion forums etc.

This centre was based in a technical college where a lot of research was focussed on emergent CALL, concerned with new ways in which technology might be used to push the language field forward (Levy and Stockwell, 2006). It was trialling more communicative means of student interaction than many of the other centres. This might have been a factor of separating off the CALL resources from the other self-access materials so that specialist knowledge was more readily available. It might also have been the greater integration with classroom work which enabled the teacher to spend time setting the blogs up and helping students with technical difficulties, which made the difference.

## Centre F

Centre F was a private language school in a large city centre. They took students in for general English courses and foundation courses to prepare them for university entrance. There were new intakes every week. The self-access centre was intended to provide students with more of an individual focus, as, although there were only 12 students in a class, each student had individual needs. The first day students did a study plan and had an orientation session. They would talk to the teacher for the first week or two and the teacher would give them advice. These students did 20 hours in the classroom and three hours in the learning centre per week. Students could also access the centre at lunchtimes and after class Monday to Friday until 5pm. According to staff many students had no idea how to learn in an individualized setting like the learning centre. This was a very busy, well-organised centre, where sometimes three classes would come into the centre at the same time. The 35 staff were each timetabled into the centre for one and a half hours. The two or three teachers in the centre at any one time acted as advisors and the centre also had a permanent administrator.

The centre was quite large, comprising the whole top floor of the building, with three main rooms. The largest room had 32 computers in the centre of the room, an area with 14 Sharp XL-30 Tape labs and computers with CD players. There were pamphlets with study suggestions broken into six different levels; e.g. pre-intermediate, lower intermediate on one wall. Magazines and general reading material was also found on shelves around the outsides of the room. Another large room was devoted to a comprehensive library which also had professional books for staff as well as reading material students could be issued. A large room at the back of the centre was devoted to more computers with dedicated CALL software and CD-ROM players. Students were keen to use CALL resources and despite a large number of computers there was competition to use them. As classes changed over, there was literally a charge of students up the stairs in an effort to get to the computers. Students settled quickly and worked constantly during the

observation. They were able to use a number of computer programmes or the centre's own learning website, which also connected to the Internet. Many students watched DVDs on the computer but this sometimes caused the computers to have technical difficulties, which the staff felt was frustrating.

The administrator of the centre felt fairly positively about CALL because it gave

> students a chance to go back and repeat something as often as they like – this is also a general characteristic of self-access learning so [its] not specific to computers…It provides a context for language - authentic texts are used, not isolated sentences…Self-access shouldn't mean 'without a teacher'. I think learners need support with their self-access learning and as part of this, support with CALL… Students can seem busy and interested but may not necessarily be learning anything…. I think there is a gap in the market for some 'good' software. Ones that provide language in context, give feedback and do more than textbooks; i.e. are truly interactive… A lot of stuff is done by computer people, not people who know how language is learned.

This centre had originally spent time developing their own material for their web site and since this survey was completed has undertaken advisor training courses for their staff.

### Centre G

This bright, medium-sized, very efficiently run, independent learning centre was attached to the language school of a large university. Students came for 10-week courses in preparation for entering the university. There was a lot of project-based learning in the centre which required students to make movies and do interviews or use PowerPoint. The centre had a large main room which contained most of the usual features of a self-access centre, including ten computers with DVD players, and a small room with audio facilities off to one side. It contained six computers with Soloist (listening, recording and authoring software), a television (Win Fast PVR was used to convert some programmes to digital files) and four Sony 8020 Educational cassette players. These were used for students to compare recordings of their own voice with a practice tape. One interesting feature of this room was the use made of modern songs (which students were unable

to copy as they were stored on the central server) with worksheets devised in the centre. Music and CDs were being converted into wav format (although MP3 files were smaller, Soloist uses wav files). The room made use of wireless headphones which eliminated cords. There was another room with 15 computers that could be separated from the main self-access room by a divider to enable class lessons in the centre to be taken by classroom teachers, or divided in two more rooms for smaller groups. There was also an office for the technicians and the administrator. The centre was adjacent to several language labs using Soloist as part of the language school programme.

The self-access centre was also used as part of the language class lessons, with special classes about how to maximise usage of the centre taken at the start of each session. Students sometimes had an assignment to complete but were then free to pursue their own interests in the centre. Teachers stayed with their classes while they were using the centre and assisted as necessary. Classes used the centre for 8 sessions, then it was free for open access for 5 sessions and not used for 5 sessions, when staff undertook maintenance. Each student had a simple but well-thought out goal-planning booklet where they kept a record of their work each session. These plans were kept in a class box which was accessed by the teacher at the beginning of each session. CD-ROMS and DVDs were available and some programmes were on the computers but most students sitting at computers were using them to complete assignments which required research. The director of the centre noted that the CD-ROMS were expensive and "highly underused," as students liked books and worksheets because the CDs could be hard to use and were not always dependable. Some students worked in small groups around a computer and all students seemed to be productively engaged in their work. A number of students were reading magazines or newspapers, far more than I saw in other centres, several were using the exam workbooks or worksheets which were clearly labelled, and attractively displayed, on shelves around the room and others were in the audio room listening to tapes and practising their speech. Another student was exploring the grammar and reading materials held in upright boxes, with levels clearly

marked, at the end of the room near the administrative work station. The assistant was constantly busy dealing with resources such as CD-ROMs, audiotapes, or books students were returning or borrowing.

The whole atmosphere of this centre was purposeful and interactive. Staff were available to students, who seemed to have a clear idea about what they were doing and why. They were able to use a catalogue of internal resources, created by staff on Dreamweaver, to access resources. The centre also has an Internet site linking to other sites, with online news organised by country, and the normal selection of sites such as online dictionaries, thesaurus, search engines, and an internal intranet user connection with a discussion board that had a different topic every week. Students had to use this and it was accessed in their free time. Although they were not allowed to access e-mail in class times in the centre they could do so in their free time, if there was no pressure on the computers. A teacher in the centre commented that "students need guidance in manipulating software to best accommodate their needs. It is easy to follow a thread that doesn't directly benefit the individual students' learning objectives".

The same teacher mentioned students' use of PowerPoint for practising summarising and oral skills, using the online discussion board for informal writing fluency practice, the regular updating of student website links for reading and writing skills practice and using the Internet for research for project-based learning. Although some of these uses originate in class sessions it is difficult to separate them from the work students were doing in the self-access centre, as they were able to use their self-access time for these tasks if they wished.

In a way this centre sits squarely between Centre E with teachers prompting students in class, and Centre C, where the technical expertise of the self-access co-ordinator was used to hold class sessions in the language labs. In the language school associated with this centre, students also took part in lab sessions next door, but these were not taken by the centre staff. Having computer

classrooms as part of the self-access centre was not a model used by other centres apart from Nancy (see Appendix E) and Centre H where it was used for specialist language classes. However, anecdotal information suggests other centres did benefit from staff teaching students how to use self-access in class time but it was difficult to verify the effect of this due to the varied expertise of teachers and the different attitudes to the worth of self-access time. Because in this centre classes were together for part of the time before moving into their individual work it was easier for staff to distribute the survey form for this study. Also the administrator was very supportive of the survey, and thus 31 of the questionnaires collected for this study came from this centre.

### Centre H

Centre H was part of a large university near the city centre. The centre has close connections to the Linguistics department and the post-graduate programme for Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages; however, it is actually administered by the library. Other students and staff, and the public (for a small fee) are also encouraged to use the centre to learn a language independently, or improve their English. The centre has resources for around 50 different languages, including English as a Second Language, and New Zealand Sign Language. It is open from Monday to Thursday until 7pm, and on Friday until 4pm. There are at present four staff in the centre; an administrator who organises support for courses, an administrative assistant who helps with students and resources and gives tours of the centre, a technician and a Language Technology Specialist. All are experienced and very pro-active.

It is a large centre divided into a number of different rooms. There is a multimedia room with video, audio and computer resources and satellite television which can access seven different languages. Three computers are kept running with foreign language programmes so students are attracted to them. During the week the BBC is videoed and at the end of the week the tapes are wiped. The computers have an extensive number of CD-ROMS, and software programs for

language learning, and can be used to access the Internet or email in a number of languages. They also access the main campus computing software. CD-ROM players are also available and there is a tape copier. Any tapes made within the university are able to be copied for students to take away. There is a study room/library with a comprehensive supply of dictionaries, grammar books, foreign language books and magazines and audio materials. There was also a selection of self-access guides on A4 sheets prepared by the Language Institute on subjects such as "How to select appropriate reading strategies" "How to Make Contact with New Zealanders."

There are also two audio-visual classrooms one of which had eight video cameras for teaching students learning sign language and was being updated to run Sony Soloist and Virtuoso to enable teachers to monitor students. There is also a room with Tandberg Educational Cassette Players. The centre records the news on to every machine automatically and students can work on it individually. There were plans to update all hardware and software over the following year. There was a bookable seminar room for group work, sometimes used by small language classes or language advisory sessions or for one-on-one counselling, where advisors would talk about strategies. Sometimes the Head of the Learning Centre would take some sessions but advisors said they did not get asked for sessions very often.

There is also a room with some audio production facilities where a Language Technical Specialist has her office. She has been trying to encourage teachers to create their own audio files for students, and was converting course-related material into digital files (including class tapes and videos). She had also assembled a diverse and comprehensive list of websites for students to access anywhere with a web connection. An online catalogue of resources in the centre can also be found on this site and can be searched according to ability levels, desired activities and language. Previous to this the catalogue was only available in the centre, but students could type their course code in to search for teacher recommendations for their course. They can listen again to audio files used in their course or repeat written course material. The catalogue was also available in a print copy. During my visits to this centre the computers and

the satellite television were all busy, and, despite it being exam time, there was a large number of students in the library section of the centre.

Language school teachers use the centre as part of their classes, and staff were trying to encourage this, but some teachers did not take advantage of the opportunity. Some teachers set listening tasks for students which needed to be completed in the centre. Some teachers recommended some of the computer programmes to their students but centre staff felt students would use them more if they were also used as part of classroom work. The centre did consult the language staff about whether software was suitable for their classes. However, there are no compulsory independent learning programmes in the centre so centre staff have to be diplomatic about suggesting what teachers (there are 50 course co-ordinators) might do. Some teachers offer comprehensive orientation to their students while others have the centre take orientation and others do not come at all unless they want something. However, centre staff always want to keep the invitation open because they want to:

> fit in around their needs. We're looking to be open and flexible because our very existence is to support the teacher and the language teachers programmes. We've got other roles for students taking academic courses and casual people but they're unpredictable. They've fallen off a lot.

This administrative assistant felt excited by the professional development training, in authoring software, that the CALL specialist in the department was offering to teachers.

The Language Technical Specialist was in the process of setting up new labs for the centre. She was trying to teach small groups of teachers to write their own CALL material using Hot Potatoes (a simple authoring programme allowing teachers to write interactive tests) and Audacity (a programme allowing teachers to put sound files on line and edit them). She felt the audio recordings online would simplify life for teachers because they would have instant access to their files without having to carry around tapes. They could also get students to tape their voices and insert comments then send the file back. She commented: "I think the students manage better than us because they're a visual generation – they're used to screens."

How the students managed to learn with CALL, she felt, had to do with their motivation, and if they had no experience with CALL it was difficult. She felt having a connection with the classroom would provide some motivation as well as having credits for work done in the centre. She was also enthusiastic about the potentials of Moos (interactive gaming in virtual worlds which require the student to use English).

## Summary

The theme this chapter started with was the call from Nancy for advisors to be given a more important role in the self-access centre and for CALL to find its place as a repository of authentic language resources. A number of centres have adopted this model, emphasizing the importance of students establishing their needs and then finding suitable materials to help with those areas. HKUST has experimented with a virtual advisor to do this job as has centre B and C but most centres still use the expertise of staff to help students work out a personal study plan.

But effective factors are important and the 'people' basis of self-access is at present an attraction to many students who possibly might not otherwise ever encounter CALL. A common theme that arises from the centres is that a connection with their courses increases student motivation and participation. A number of centres mention that students tend to use the software they encounter in class, and teachers feel students use software more effectively when they have been given lessons in how to use it.

All centres, apart from one in which CALL was in a separate location, have computers with CALL programmes available. Centres with specialist teachers appear to have far more extensive website choices and more accessible catalogues. Almost all centres now have some form of online catalogue, to help students find resources, but the sophistication of these varies greatly. In some centres the catalogue system is tied in to a virtual advisory system, and students can access

material according to their language level and the particular topic they wish to pursue. In other centres the knowledge of the advisor compensates for a catalogue that is not so comprehensive.

This chapter has attempted to give the study a physical context and clarify not only the availability of CALL resources but also the attitudes of staff towards CALL and self-access and their view of how students use CALL. The use of CALL varies widely in all these centres but the programmes they were using were, in many cases, virtually the same. This will be discussed at the end of the next chapter which contains the results of the survey given to students and staff about their perceptions of the usefulness of CALL.

# Chapter 5

# Results and discussion: Questionnaire and Interviews

The questionnaires and interviews of students and staff in the self-access centres were intended to answer several questions. The first was whether computer programmes and websites were perceived by both staff and students as useful in the centres for students learning English as a second language. What CALL was perceived as doing best was an extension of this idea. The relationship of answers to participants' gender, age and previous CALL experience was also explored as was any difference between the perceptions of staff and students.

The second major area surveyed was student and staff perceptions of how CALL compared to other self-access resources. Students were then asked to name programmes they had found particularly useful and staff were asked to name programmes they had observed to be well used or which seemed to be most useful for students.

Additional comments about the use of CALL in self-access and any related problems or issues were also elicited from staff and students in the interviews and extension questions in the survey.

Responses will follow the general order in which they occurred in the questionnaire with staff responses following each student section to allow immediate comparisons.

## The participants

### Student participants

The gender balance (see Table 5.1) did not necessarily reflect the makeup of the centres' clients. More female students (8) turned down the opportunity to participate in the study than male students (1). This appeared to be a factor of time with female students more anxious than male students to keep working or saying they wanted to finish their work before their next class. It may also reflect a greater male confidence to communicate in English, with a few female students saying they did not want to participate after viewing the questions.

**Table 5.1 Gender of participating students**

| Gender | Frequency | Percent |
|---|---|---|
| female | 27 | 42.2 |
| male | 37 | 57.8 |
| Total | 64 | 100.0 |

Most students in the classes were younger than 25 (see Table 5.2), which is what would be expected in most tertiary language school situations, but the surprise is the 37.5 % who were over 25. It was not immediately apparent that students in the centres studying on their own were older on average than the students in classes, but of the five centres where students were surveyed outside a class situation 12 out of 17 students were over 25. Although numbers are too small for generalising there exists the distinct possibility that students who attend the centres outside class time might, more often, be older students. This could also be a factor of having more English experience, as younger learners, or their advisors, may have felt their English was inadequate for completing the questionnaire.

**Table 5.2 Age of participating students**

| Age | Frequency | Percent |
|---|---|---|
| 16 to 25 | 40 | 62.5 |
| over 25 | 24 | 37.5 |
| Total | 64 | 100.0 |

Although students represented most continents of the world (see Table 5.3) they were predominately Asian, which reflects the normal makeup of most English second language learners studying at tertiary level in New Zealand.

**Table 5.3 Nationality of students**

| Nationality | Frequency | Percent |
|---|---|---|
| Chinese | 18 | 28.1 |
| Korean | 13 | 20.3 |
| Vietnamese | 5 | 7.8 |
| Japanese | 10 | 15.6 |
| Other | 18 | 28.2 |
| Total | 64 | 100.0 |

The small number of beginners (see Table 5.4) is because only those who could understand the questions were able to participate in the survey. The four beginners were modest about their language achievement and could possibly have been assessed by a teacher as lower intermediate.

**Table 5.4 English language level of students (self-assessed)**

| Language Level | Frequency | Percent |
|---|---|---|
| beginner | 4 | 6.3 |
| intermediate | 42 | 65.6 |
| advanced | 17 | 26.6 |
| Total | 63 | 98.4 |
| Missing | 1 | 1.6 |
| Total | 64 | 100.0 |

The length of time students have learnt English (see Table 5.5) is probably a reflection of the fact that these are tertiary students, many of whom have come to study in an English-speaking country

after a number of years of English study either at secondary school or at university in their own country.

**Table 5.5 Years students have learnt English**

| Learnt English | Frequency | Percent |
|---|---|---|
| less than 2 years | 7 | 10.9 |
| more than 2 | 13 | 20.3 |
| more than 5 | 33 | 51.6 |
| more than 10 | 11 | 17.2 |
| Total | 64 | 100.0 |

Most tertiary students could be expected to be computer literate. The surprise here (see Table 5.6) is the ten students who have used a computer for less than two years.

**Table 5.6 Length of time students have used a computer**

| Used a computer | Frequency | Percent |
|---|---|---|
| less than 2 years | 10 | 15.6 |
| more than 2 | 10 | 15.6 |
| more than 5 | 31 | 48.4 |
| more than 10 | 13 | 20.3 |
| Total | 64 | 100.0 |

It was a requirement that participants had used the computer to learn English to enable them to complete the questionnaires. However, this does mean there is a slight imbalance at the *rarely used* end of the scale (see Table 5.7).

**Table 5.7 How often students have used a computer to learn English**

| Used CALL | Frequency | Percent |
|---|---|---|
| rarely | 11 | 17.2 |
| sometimes | 28 | 43.8 |
| often | 24 | 37.5 |
| missing | 1 | 1.6 |
| Total | 64 | 100.0 |

## Staff participants

All of the 18 staff were over 25 years of age and only one was male. Most of the staff were mature women. This might reflect the fact that all staff running centres, apart from the one exception, were female, and all staff visiting centres with their classes were female. Language schools did, however, have a number of male staff, so it may be that male staff chose not to use the centres as frequently as women, or it may just have been that they were not using the centres on the days I was visiting. Fifteen of the eighteen staff had taught more than five years (see Table 5.8).

**Table 5.8 Years staff have taught English**

| Taught English | Frequency | Percent |
|---|---|---|
| less than 2 years | 1 | 5.6 |
| more than two years | 3 | 16.7 |
| more than 5 years | 9 | 50.0 |
| more than 10 years | 5 | 27.8 |
| Total | 18 | 100.0 |

All the staff had many years of computer use (Table 5.9). This is not surprising as both teaching and the administrative work required in an SAC need some computer literacy. It may also reflect the type of person attracted to this type of teaching venue.

**Table 5.9 Length of time staff have used a computer**

| Used a computer | Frequency | Percent |
|---|---|---|
| more than 5 years | 2 | 11.1 |
| more than 10 years | 16 | 88.9 |
| Total | 18 | 100.0 |

Table 5.10 indicates that although seven of the staff chose to bring their students to the SAC or worked there, they did not often teach English using the computer in the year the study was undertaken.

**Table 5.10 How often staff have used a computer to teach English this year**

| Used a computer to teach | Frequency | Percent |
|---|---|---|
| rarely | 4 | 22.2 |
| sometimes | 3 | 16.7 |
| often | 11 | 61.1 |
| Total | 18 | 100.0 |

Despite five staff not having used a computer to teach English in the past very often (Table 5.11), they all indicated in their survey answers that computers were either "useful" or "sometimes useful" for learning English and one of these teachers felt they were "very useful". Four of these five teachers had been using the computer for "more than 10 years" which suggests it is not lack of familiarity which prevents them using the computers to teach.

**Table 5.11 How often staff have used a computer to teach English before this year.**

| Used a computer to teach English previously | Frequency | Percent |
|---|---|---|
| rarely | 1 | 5.6 |
| sometimes | 4 | 22.2 |
| often | 13 | 72.2 |
| Total | 18 | 100.0 |

## Are computers perceived as useful in self-access centres for learning English as a second language?

The first questions asked of participants in the survey, after establishing their English and CALL experience, were intended to establish how useful CALL was perceived to be in centres, and in exactly which areas students and staff found it to be most effective. Results from staff and students were then compared to see if there were major differences in perceptions of usefulness between the two groups. Results were further analysed to establish whether perceptions of usefulness were affected in any way by the differing genders, age, or previous CALL experience of the participants.

## What are student perceptions of the usefulness of CALL?

Question 9 in the student survey asked participants: *Are computers useful for learning English?* Responses were rated using a Likert Scale of 4 choices to assess the comparative magnitude of participants' perceptions.

Not useful☹ ☐ Sometimes useful ☐ Useful ☐ Very useful☺ ☐

1 2 3 4

The smiley faces were used to ensure that students did not mistake the intention of the question. The results were convincingly positive in favour of the usefulness of CALL, with a mean of 2.95.

*Figure 5.1. Student perceptions of the usefulness of CALL.*

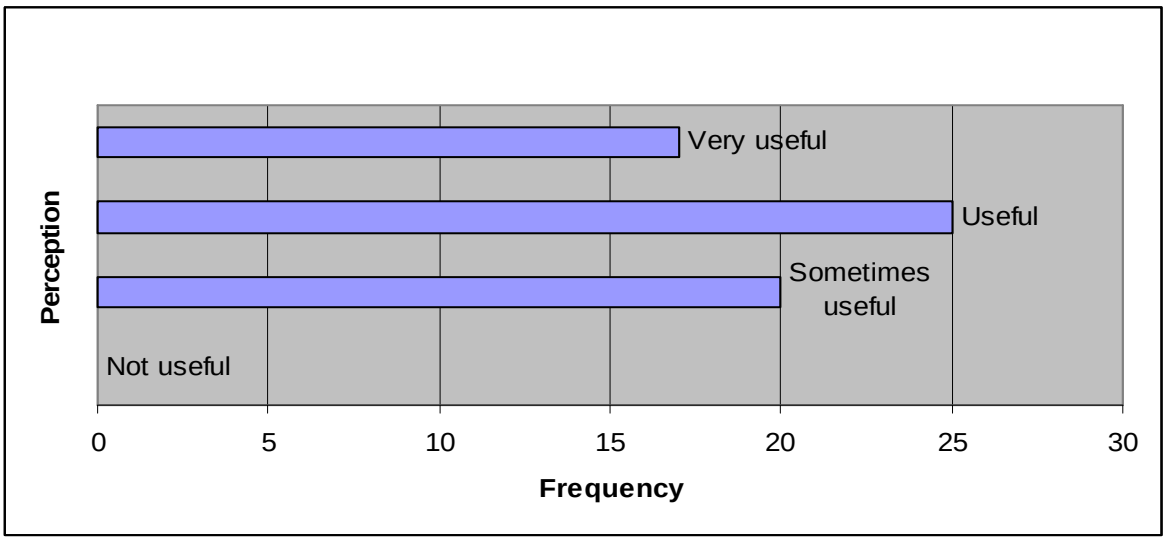



**Table 5.12 Student perceptions of the usefulness of CALL**

| Student perceptions of the usefulness of CALL | Frequency |
|---|---|
| Not useful | 0 |
| Sometimes useful | 20 |
| Useful | 25 |
| Very useful | 17 |

| | |
|---|---|
| Mean | 2.95 |
| Median | 3 |
| Standard Deviation | 0.78 |
| Count | 62 |

There appear to be no Luddites amongst the students in the self-access centres. This is not entirely surprising given that participants in the survey were required to have used CALL

(however briefly.) One third of students only found CALL *sometimes useful* which suggests they were also attracted by the self-access centres' other resources. They were outnumbered convincingly by students who did find CALL *useful* and *very useful.* The mean score of 2.95 shows a solid confidence in the usefulness of CALL. No students thought CALL was *not useful*. Again the caution is that this is largely a self-selected group although the inclusion of classes (the majority of responses came from these students) who had timetabled lessons in the self-access area would inevitably bring a selection of learners into the centres who did not necessarily want to use CALL resources, nor feel comfortable with them.

### *What students perceive CALL does best; the four basic skills*

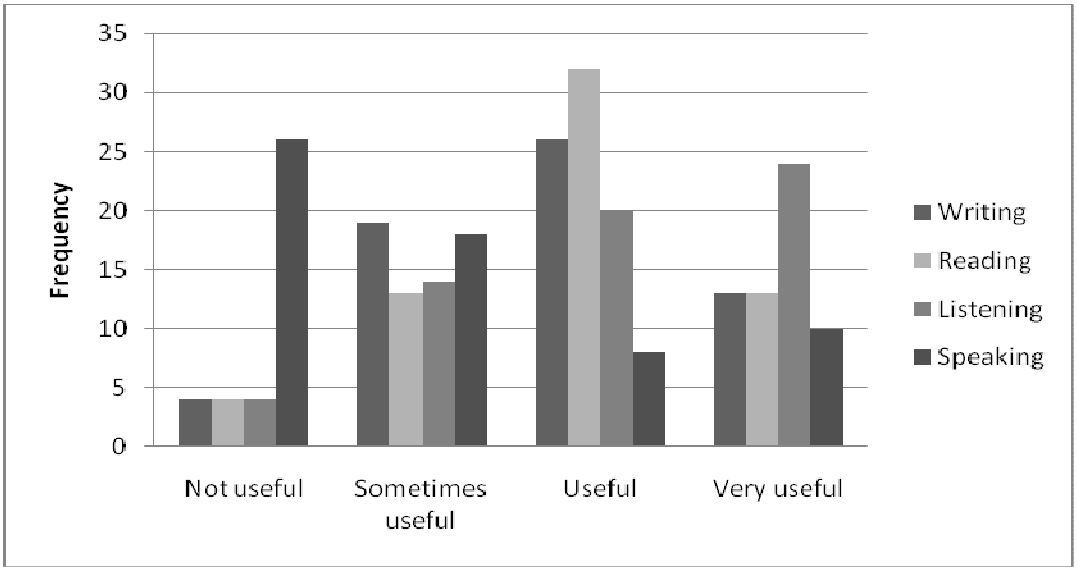
Question 10, again using a Likert scale of four, was intended to take a broad sweep of the students' perceptions of the usefulness of CALL in the four skill areas of writing, reading, listening and speaking. There were significant differences in student perceptions of CALL usefulness in these four areas as seen in Table 5.13. Listening is considered the most useful skill area with 24 students claiming it to be *very useful*. However, reading has 32 students claiming it to be *useful* and 13 *very useful*, a total of 45, compared to a total of 44 claiming listening to be either *useful* or *very useful*. So these two areas are both thought to be one of CALL's strengths. By contrast speaking only has 18 students who consider it either *useful* or *very useful*.

**Table 5.13 Student perceptions of the usefulness of CALL for the four basic skills**

| | Not useful | Sometimes useful | Useful | Very useful | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Writing** | 4 | 19 | 26 | 13 | 62 |
| **Reading** | 4 | 13 | 32 | 13 | 62 |
| **Listening** | 4 | 14 | 20 | 24 | 62 |
| **Speaking** | 26 | 18 | 8 | 10 | 62 |
| **Total** | **44** | **64** | **86** | **60** | |

Figure 5.2 shows even more vividly students' perceptions that CALL speaking is not usually useful while the three other skill areas are considered more favourably.

*Figure 5.2. Student perceptions of usefulness of CALL for the four basic skills*




Writing appears to be perceived as one area in which CALL is very useful (see Figure 5.3 and Table 5.14) although a later question (11) (see Figure 5.8. and Table 5.18),indicates that by this students may mean grammar and error correction rather than help in composition. It may be that, despite an explanation that it was the use of CALL programmes as a tutor, not as a tool, students perceived the use of the grammar and spellchecker as assisting their writing skills. How greatly this has influenced results is uncertain. However, 39 of the students rated CALL as *useful* or *very useful* for learning how to write, almost double the 23 who felt it is *sometimes* or *not* useful.

Results for reading (see Figure 5.4 and Table 5.15.) were very similar with a slightly higher mean of 2.87. Forty-five students perceive the computer as *useful* or *very useful* while well under half that number, 17, perceive it as only *sometimes* or *not* useful.

*Figure 5.3. Writing- Student perceptions of the usefulness of CALL*

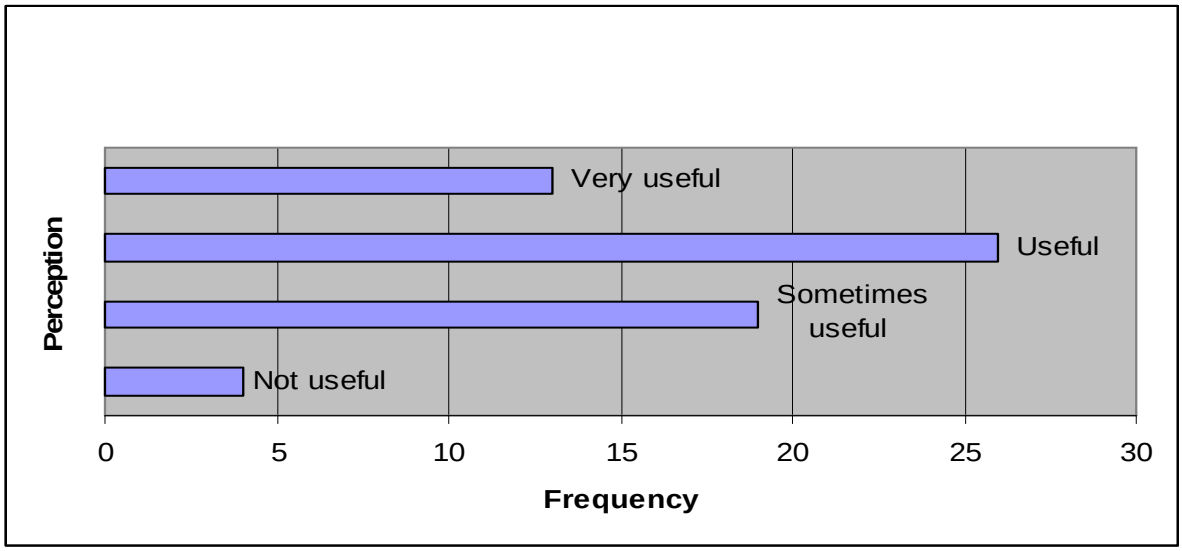



**Table 5.14 Writing - Student perceptions of the usefulness of CALL**

| Writing - Student perceptions of the usefulness of CALL | Frequency |
|---|---|
| Not useful | 4 |
| Sometimes useful | 19 |
| Useful | 26 |
| Very useful | 13 |

| | |
|---|---|
| Mean | 2.77 |
| Median | 3 |
| Standard Deviation | 0.86 |
| Count | 62 |

A Korean computer engineer from Centre A, an experienced CALL user who liked many CALL programmes and websites, stated that "Koreans are famous at using the computer. Some [Engineering] companies organise many books on-line." He read novels on-line and felt the computer was *very useful* for reading but what he felt it was *most useful* for was providing listening material. He also used his listening as a source of material for dictation practice. His opinion was shared by many others as listening was the area in which students perceived CALL as *most useful* (see Figure 5.5 and Table 5.16.). With a mean of 3.03 in favour of listening usefulness, and 44 of the 62 students rating it favourably, this is also the only skill area in which the *very useful* category is predominant.

*Figure 5.4. Reading- Student perceptions of the usefulness of CALL*

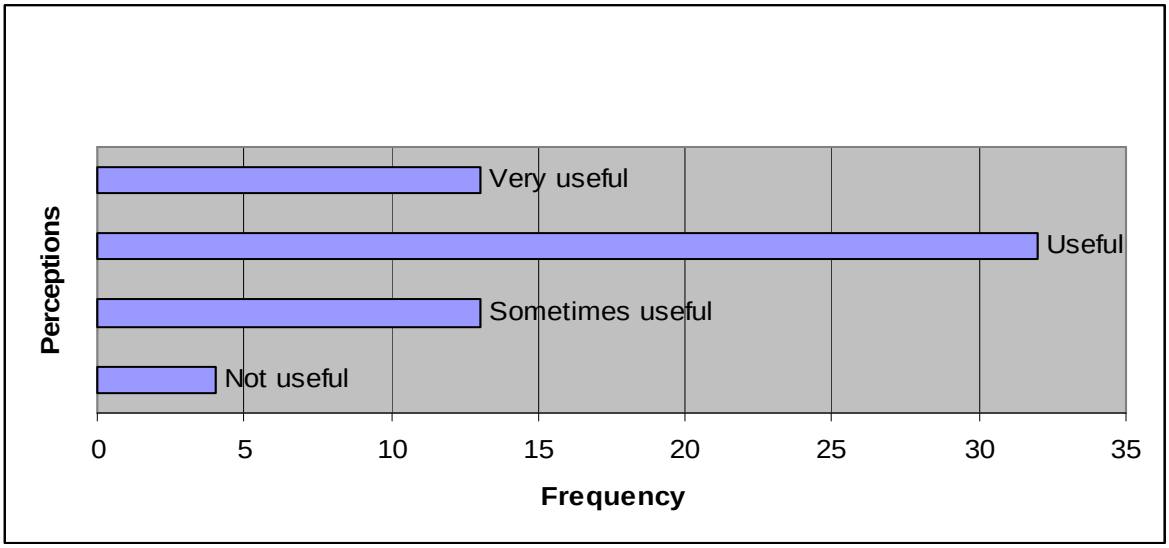



**Table 5.15 Reading - Student perceptions of the usefulness of CALL**

| Reading - Student Perceptions of the Usefulness of CALL | Frequency |
|---|---|
| Not useful | 4 |
| Sometimes useful | 13 |
| Useful | 32 |
| Very useful | 13 |

| | |
|---|---|
| Mean | 2.87 |
| Median | 3 |
| Standard Deviation | 0.82 |
| Count | 62 |

Listening is difficult to teach, and learners' listening in the classroom is often not related to the teaching of listening (e.g. when listening to classroom instructions for other tasks). Cauldwell (2004) sees listening as the skill that lags behind speaking, reading and writing because in day-to-day interactions the learner has the least control over listening – unable to control accent, volume, speed, repetition opportunities and vocabulary. CALL can now help the learner control all of these factors to a greater or lesser extent. Self-access CALL provides even greater control than the more interactive environments of the language lab, where the teacher may require self-generated answers to spoken material or to collaborative work in chat rooms or video conferencing. Self-access provides a safe, largely undisturbed, arena for the student to choose the level of difficulty, topic and possibly even the vocabulary level of a piece of listening text. Depending on the programme or the centre's material resources the student may well have a written transcription in front of them or on the screen as they listen. Students can stop and repeat

material as they need to and identify speech units. The “acoustic blur” of spontaneous speech that Cauldwell (ibid) mentions can be tamed. This can be done using tape recorders and tapes or audio players rather than computers but for a generation used to manipulating their mp3 files on the computer the computer screen offers an easy environment to work in. The blessing of video on the screen is an additional learning tool that reinforces the appropriate register and stimulates memory. Zhao (2005a) in research with 15 non-native English speakers at the University of Illinois found that students who were able to slow the speed of speech to a rate comfortable for them found it improved their listening comprehension. Zhao looked forward to students being able to change the speed of any speech they encountered. King (2006) has already identified simple, readily-available programmes that can do this for students.

Surprisingly, speaking (see Figure 5.6 and Table 5.17) is the least valued of the CALL skills. In the other three skill areas only four students said that CALL was *not useful*. However, the use of the computer to improve the skill of speaking is considered *not useful* by 26 students and only *sometimes useful* by 18 – a total of 44 students, therefore, perceiving this as a skill area not served so well by CALL learning.

*Figure 5.5. Listening- Student perceptions of the usefulness of CALL*

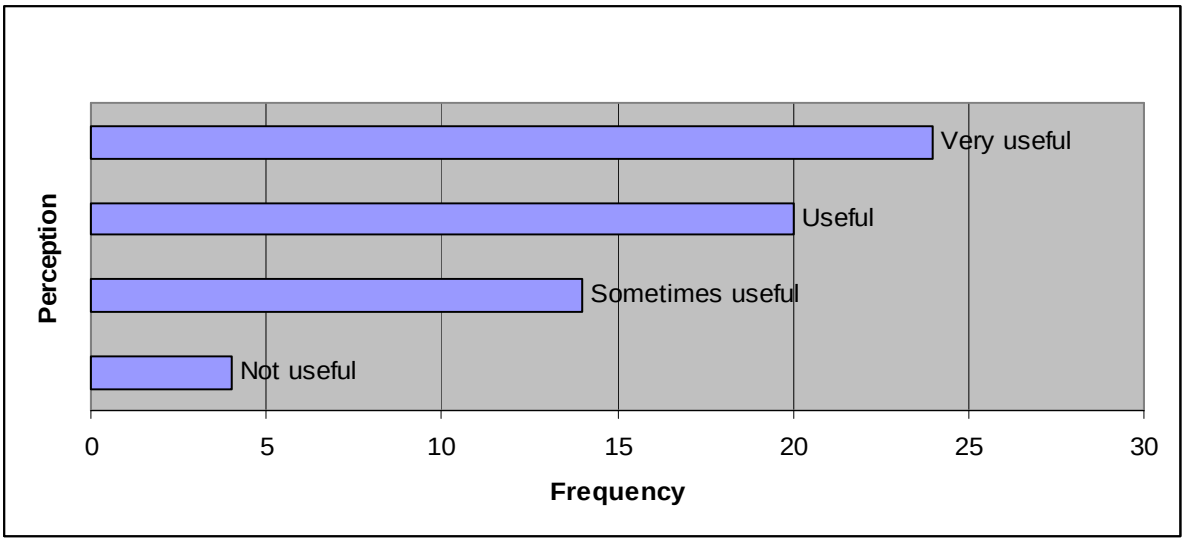



**Table 5.16 Listening - Student perceptions of the usefulness of CALL**

| Listening - Student perceptions of the usefulness of CALL | Frequency |
|---|---|
| Not useful | 4 |
| Sometimes useful | 14 |
| Useful | 20 |
| Very useful | 24 |

| | |
|---|---|
| Mean | 3.03 |
| Median | 3 |
| Standard Deviation | 0.94 |
| Count | 62 |

This may be because of the restricted software most centres have, and their dependence on a non-New Zealand accent. Although *Pronunciation Power 1* and *2* and *Connected Speech* were mentioned by students as useful software and some centres had *Speakeasy* or language lab programmes, this was the extent of the speaking software. Current software depends largely on comparative graphs or diagrams of a speaker's mouth with suggested movement. It is not easy for students to find the right sounds or rhythms by themselves. Feedback is often frustrating with an English accent required to trigger the correct response from the computer (although a newer programme *Eyespeak* does offer the choice of a New Zealand accent). This remains an area where one-to-one work probably has an advantage.

*Figure 5.6 Speaking- Student perceptions of the usefulness of CALL*

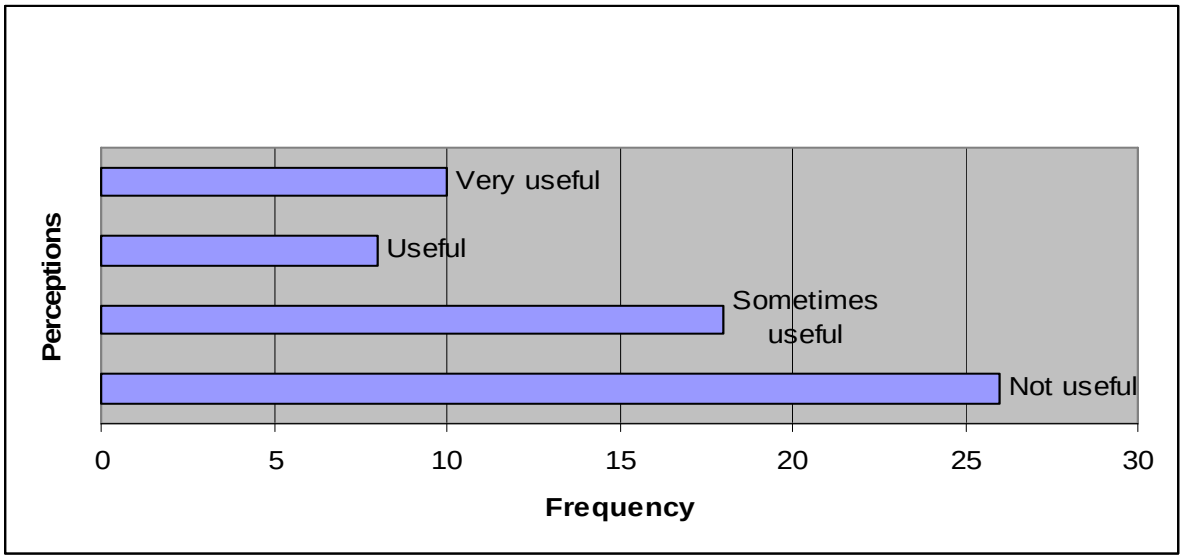



**Table 5.17 Speaking - Student perceptions of the usefulness of CALL**

| Speaking - Student perceptions of the usefulness of CALL | Frequency |
|---|---|
| Not useful | 26 |
| Sometimes useful | 18 |
| Useful | 8 |
| Very useful | 10 |

| | |
|---|---|
| Mean | 2.03 |
| Median | 2 |
| Standard Deviation | 0.94 |
| Count | 62 |

### *The specific areas in which CALL is seen by students to be most useful*

Question 11 (See Figure 5.7) and Question 12 (See Appendix B) attempted to narrow down from the broad skills to the specific areas where students found CALL most useful. This required students to rank 16 items which were ordered under the four main skills headings. Provision was made (in Question 12) for students to add any other areas they felt should have been included. Not all students ranked 10 items and a few answers were not included as students ranked incorrectly (e.g. gave three nines) but did not have time to redo their answers.

This was a problematic question as learners found it difficult to rank – wanting to give several 10s for instance. However, the results made the effort worthwhile. Results can be seen in Figure 5.8 and Table 5.18.

Listening again scored well with two of the top results. *Providing interesting listening material* comes second highest with a mean of 4.867 and *helping me understand what I listen to* comes

fifth. This reinforces the results obtained in question 10 (student survey) where listening was chosen as the *most useful* of the CALL skills.

Rated as the *most useful* assistance computers give in self-access is *Improving vocabulary* which was listed under reading but crosses all the skill areas. It is uncertain if this is the result of exposure to a wider cross-section of reading and listening material, or if it is because students are able to work at their own pace and have an online dictionary available ( not only in English but also in their own language). It could possibly be that they find the programmes have better scaffolding and they can repeat material until they understand all the words. No mention was made by any students or staff of a concordancer so it must be assumed that this valuable tool does not contribute towards this score. However, this is an assumption that is as yet untested.

Question 11.(student survey) Put numbers in the boxes below to show which are the things computers programmes or websites which teach English do best. Put 10 for the best thing they do, 9 for the next best on down to 1. You do not have to use all the numbers if you do not think they do 10 things well.

*Figure 5.7. Student survey Question 11.*

| writing | reading | listening | speaking |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Correcting errors** | **Providing interesting reading** | **Providing interesting listening material** | **Giving me people to talk to in English** |
| **Writing fast** | **Teaching me to find main ideas** | **Helping me to understand what I listen to.** | **Pronunciation practice** |
| **Ordering my writing** | **Helping me understand what I read** | **Helping me understand different accents** | **Teaching me to say new words** |
| **Giving me ideas to write about** | **Improving my vocabulary** | | **Helping me to speak without being shy** |
| **Improving my grammar** | | | |

*Improving my grammar* is the fourth highest mean at 4.42. Again, although listed under writing, this crosses all four skill areas. It is possible students perceive this as an area of gain because so many CD-ROM programmes have a specific grammar focus (e.g. *Tensebuster* or *The Grammar Rom*) as do many websites devoted to English Language teaching (e.g. BBC and the British Council sites). Students are able to find materials on specific grammar problems they have encountered previously and concentrate on areas of grammatical weakness without the embarrassment of holding up the class or diverting the teacher from another activity. Despite a tendency to often be wrong, grammar checkers do alert learners to the possibility of error, and students may, therefore, perceive computers as helpful for improving their grammar. An older Chinese woman from Centre A, who was working at quite an advanced level, thought CALL was *not useful* for listening and speaking but *useful* for writing and reading. She thought the best thing CALL programmes did was correct errors and improve her grammar. For this reason she only used *Tensebuster Intermediate* from all the programmes offered.

Given the low credibility that CALL speaking appears to have, it is no surprise that *helping me speak without being shy* (mean = 1.64) came in as the *least useful* thing students thought CALL did. Students do not appear to be using self-access computers for speaking to other computer users, although this may not be the case in the language labs attached to some self-access centres.

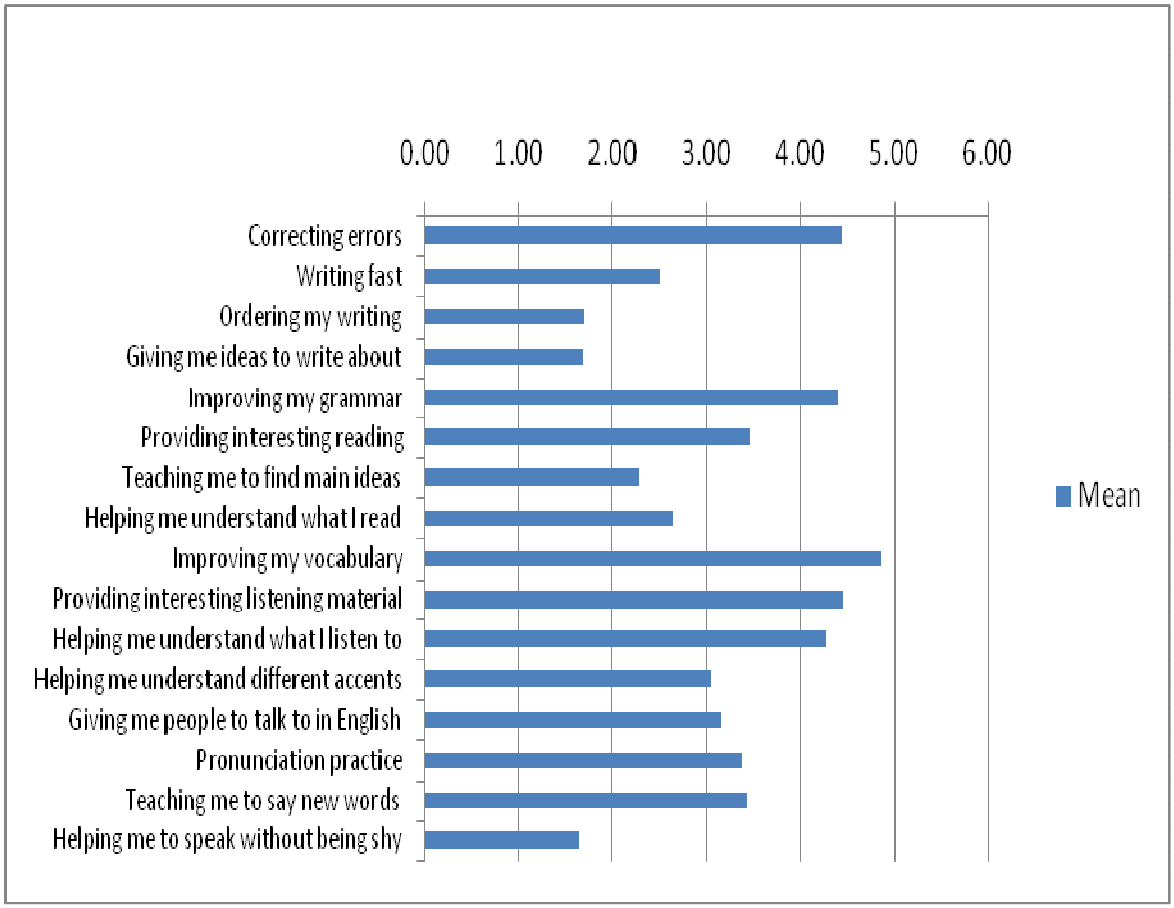
*Giving me ideas to write about* (mean =1.69*)* and *Ordering my writing* (mean = 1.71) are the other two least popular options. As most student writing will be teacher directed, students are unlikely to use CALL facilities to practise anything other than short passages required by CALL programmes. Feedback is also problematic with very few sites offering any kind of marking facility. There are materials available in popular programmes about how to organise writing but it is possible that students see this as a "needed once" lesson rather than an on-going skill. It seems the positive feedback given to CALL writing in question 10 relates more to students' perception that computers helped them with grammar than with structuring their writing and giving

them inspiration to write. As mentioned previously this may be because of confusion with the tool function of the computer rather than the tutor function the question was intended to measure.

**Table 5.18 Areas students perceive CALL as being most useful: Student means**

| CALL Assistance | Mean | Standard Deviation |
|---|---|---|
| Correcting errors | 4.45 | 4.12 |
| Writing fast | 2.51 | 3.30 |
| Ordering my writing | 1.71 | 2.54 |
| Giving me ideas to write about | 1.69 | 2.72 |
| Improving my grammar | 4.42 | 3.68 |
| Providing interesting reading | 3.47 | 3.47 |
| Teaching me to find main ideas | 2.28 | 3.25 |
| Helping me understand what I read | 2.64 | 2.82 |
| Improving my vocabulary | 4.87 | 3.61 |
| Providing interesting listening material | 4.47 | 4.02 |
| Helping me understand what I listen to | 4.28 | 3.79 |
| Helping me understand different accents | 3.06 | 3.44 |
| Giving me people to talk to in English | 3.15 | 3.58 |
| Pronunciation practice | 3.38 | 3.66 |
| Teaching me to say new words | 3.43 | 3.19 |
| Helping me to speak without being shy | 1.64 | 2.96 |

*Figure 5.8. Areas students perceive CALL as most useful: Student means*




## What are staff perceptions of the usefulness of CALL?

Staff were asked to complete the same questions as students to see if their perception of what was useful to student learning aligned with student responses. On the general usefulness of CALL (see Figure 5.9 and Table 5.19), staff were much more optimistic about CALL than students. Whereas the student mean was 2.95 in favour of CALL being *useful*, the staff mean was 3.39. Fifteen of the eighteen responses from staff were positive and only three staff thought computers were only *sometimes useful*.

*Figure 5.9. Staff perceptions of the usefulness of CALL*

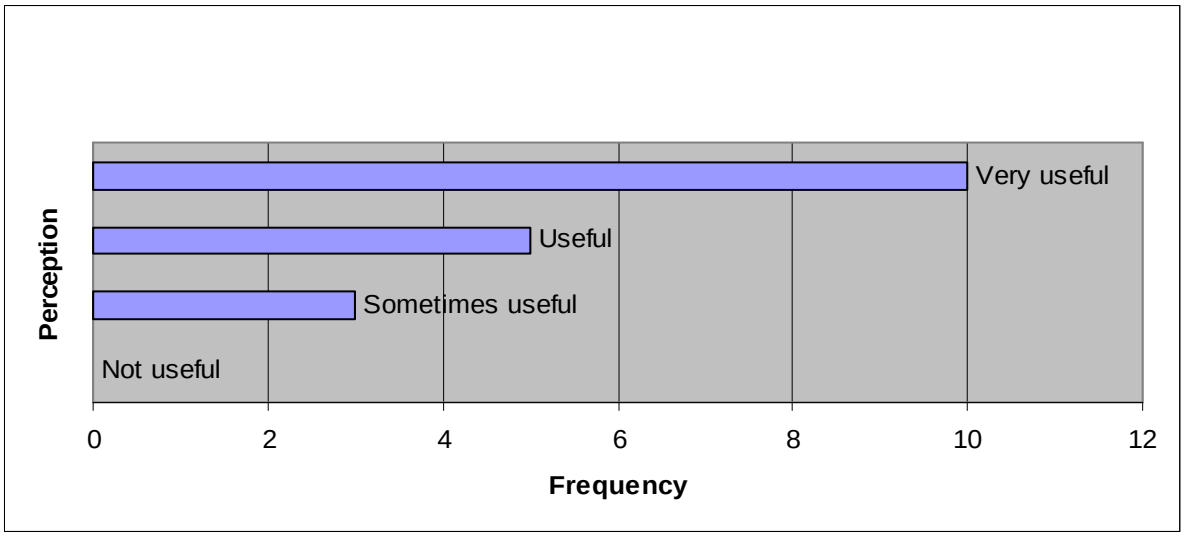



**Table 5.19 Staff perceptions of the usefulness of CALL**

| Staff perceptions of the usefulness of CALL | Frequency |
|---|---|
| **Not useful** | **0** |
| **Sometimes useful** | **3** |
| **Useful** | **5** |
| **Very useful** | **10** |

| | |
|---|---|
| **Mean** | **3.39** |
| **Median** | **4** |
| **Standard Deviation** | **0.78** |
| **Count** | **18** |

### *What staff perceive CALL does best; the four basic skills*

Staff are generally optimistic about the ability of the computer to help students learn to write in English (see Figure 5.10 and Table 5.20), with a similar but more positive pattern than students. A greater proportion think CALL is *very useful* and none think it is *not useful*. There were only 4 students who perceived CALL to have no use in the teaching of writing, although, of course, this is a small proportion of the far greater numbers of student respondents.

*Figure 5.10. Writing - Staff perceptions of the usefulness of CALL.*

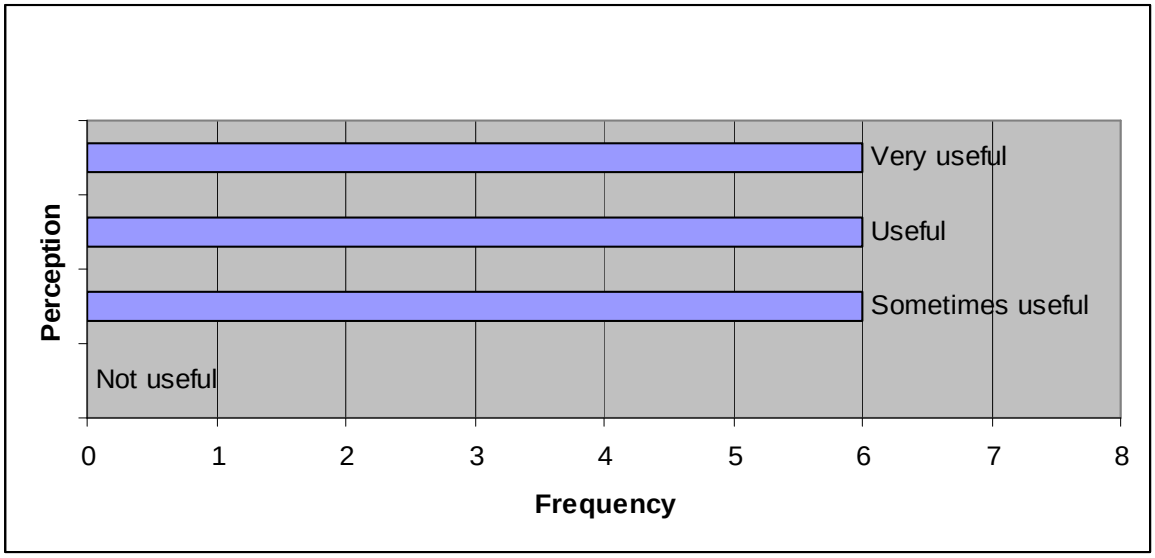



**Table 5.20 Writing - Staff perceptions of the usefulness of CALL**

| Writing - Staff perceptions of the usefulness of CALL | Frequency |
|---|---|
| Not useful | 0 |
| Sometimes useful | 6 |
| Useful | 6 |
| Very useful | 6 |

| | |
|---|---|
| Mean | 3.00 |
| Median | 3 |
| Standard Deviation | 0.84 |
| Count | 18 |

In reading, however (see Figure 5.11 and Table 5.21), there is a marked difference in perception between staff and students. While the majority of students saw CALL as *useful* for reading, staff avoid being too positive or too negative, but are nevertheless convinced. Staff have a mean of 3.56 compared to the student mean of 2.87. Again no staff think that the computer is *not useful* for reading.

This positive attitude is repeated for listening (see Figure 5.12 and Table 5.22), where the staff have a mean of 3.56 compared to the students' mean of 3.03 and, like the students, they are clustered in the *very useful* end of the scale. This very favourable attitude to the use of CALL for listening was reflected in comments made during staff interviews, where several teachers commented on the usefulness of students being able to access audio files. A few administrators had even pursued copyright permission to turn all their CD-ROMS and tapes into computer files,

*Figure 5.11 Reading. – Staff perceptions of the usefulness of CALL*

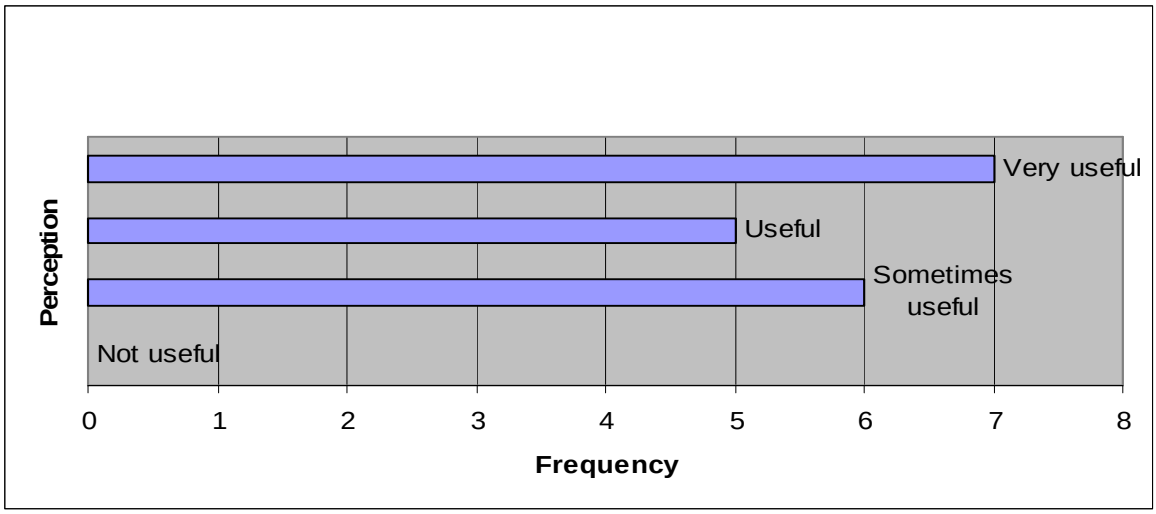



**Table 5.21 Reading - Staff perceptions of the usefulness of CALL**

| Reading - Staff perceptions of the usefulness of CALL | Frequency |
|---|---|
| **Not useful** | **0** |
| **Sometimes useful** | **6** |
| **Useful** | **5** |
| **Very useful** | **7** |

| | |
|---|---|
| **Mean** | **3.06** |
| **Median** | **3** |
| **Standard Deviation** | **0.87** |
| **Count** | **18** |

as they noted how much easier it was for students to access sound files in this way. The one teacher who felt listening was *not useful*, an experienced computer user, seems to be an anomaly although it is interesting to note that she said in the next question that the thing the computer did best was provide interesting listening material. Although she felt the provision of authentic materials on the Internet was the biggest benefit to students, she rarely used the computer to teach her students.

*Figure 5.12. Listening- Staff perceptions of the usefulness of CALL*

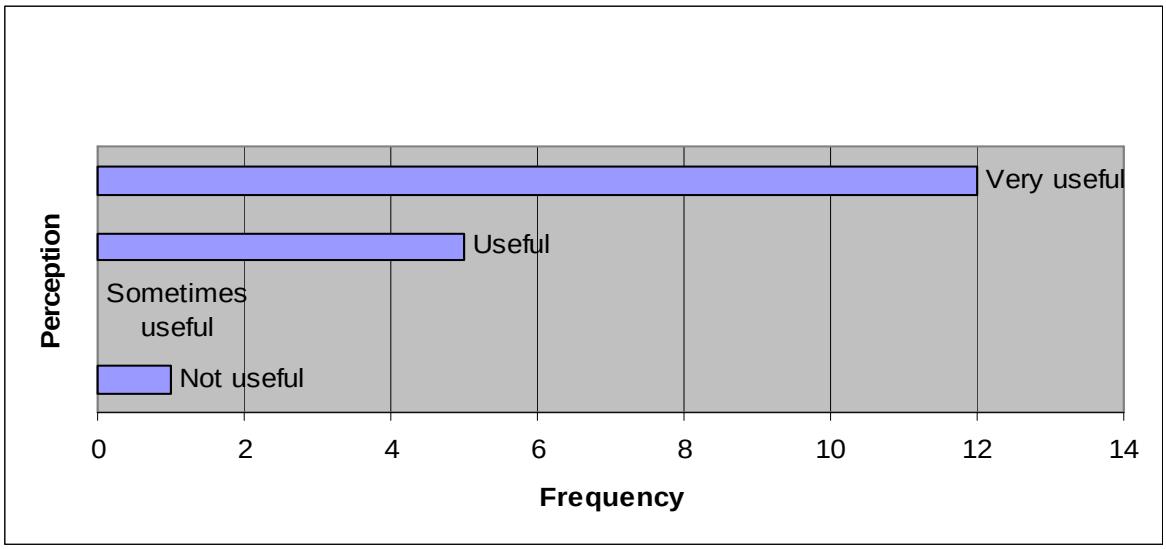



**Table 5.22 Listening - Staff perceptions of the usefulness of CALL**

| Listening - Staff perceptions of the usefulness of CALL | Frequency |
|---|---|
| Not useful | 1 |
| Sometimes useful | 0 |
| Useful | 5 |
| Very useful | 12 |

| | |
|---|---|
| Mean | 3.56 |
| Median | 4 |
| Standard Deviation | 0.78 |
| Count | 18 |

As with students, staff were not as positive about the benefits of CALL for learning to speak (Table 5.23). The student mean was 2.03 compared to the staff mean at 2.44. More students than staff proportionally felt that CALL was *not useful*, but perceptions were reasonably close in this category. The technical difficulties of using speaking programmes may have some influence on this perception.

Overall, staff were much more positive than students about the potential of CALL to help student language learning in these four modes. However, they largely correlated with the student ranking of importance of the modes.

*Figure 5.13. Speaking – Staff perceptions of the usefulness of CALL*

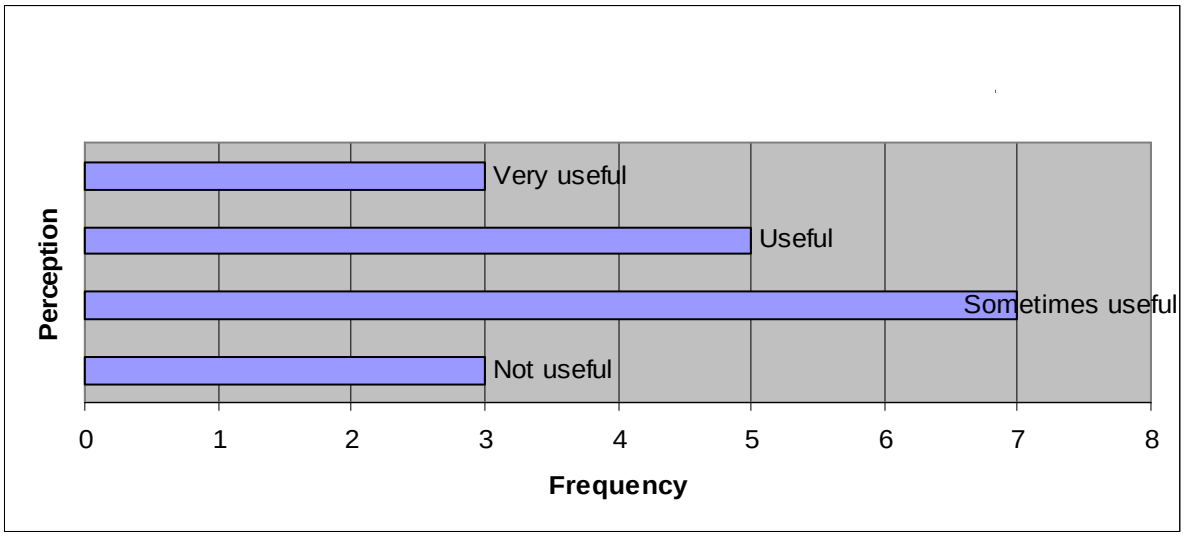



**Table 5.23 Speaking - Staff perceptions of the usefulness of CALL**

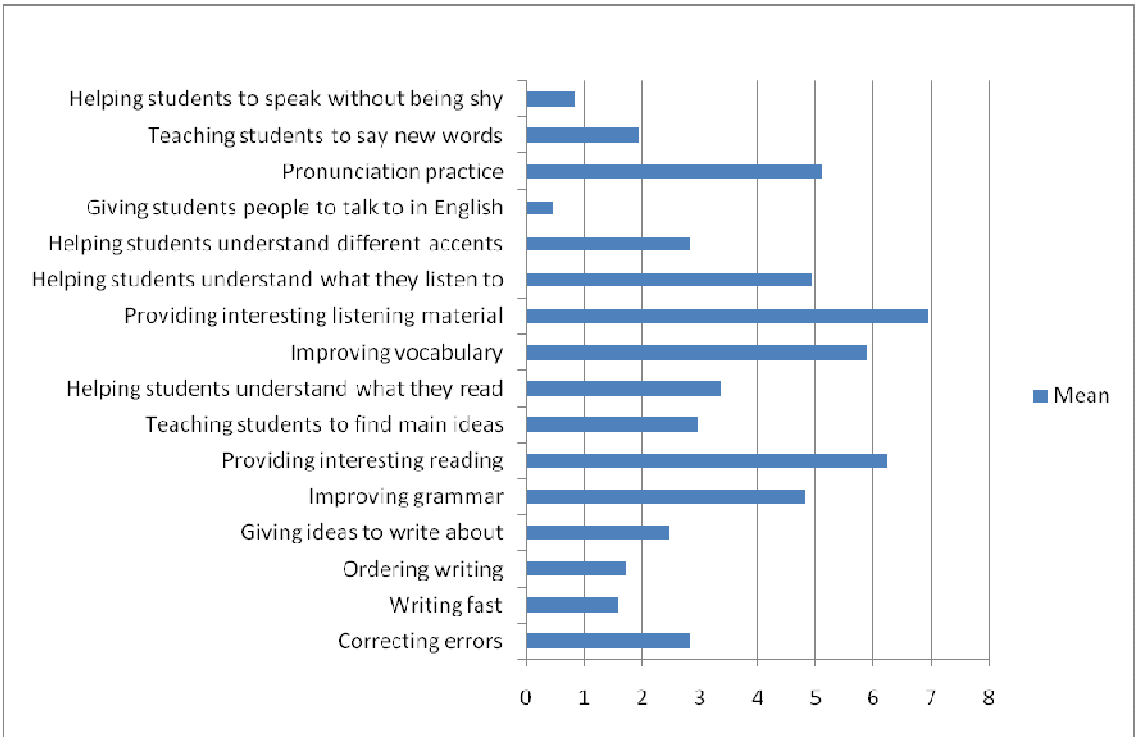
| Speaking - Staff perceptions of the usefulness of CALL | Frequency |
|---|---|
| **Not useful** | **3** |
| **Sometimes useful** | **7** |
| **Useful** | **5** |
| **Very useful** | **3** |

| | |
|---|---|
| **Mean** | **2.44** |
| **Median** | **2** |
| **Standard Deviation** | **0.98** |
| **Count** | **18** |

### *The specific areas in which CALL is seen by staff to be most useful*

Question 9 on the teacher questionnaire asked the staff *to rank things computer programmes or websites which teach English (in self-access situations) do best.* The number 10 was assigned to the highest ranked characteristic and number 1 to the lowest. Not all numbers from 10 to 1 needed to be used. There were 16 options (See Appendix B) and there was provision for extra answers to be added. Scores were then added to create an average for each option. The results can be seen in Figure 5.14. Staff perceive *the provision of listening material, followed by the provision of reading material* to be the most useful areas of CALL. This is closely followed by *pronunciation practice*, and *helping students understand what they listen to*. The least useful area of CALL is the provision of *people for students to talk to*.

*Figure 5.14. Areas staff perceives CALL as being most useful: Staff means*




## Is there a significant difference between staff and students in terms of their perceptions of the usefulness of CALL?

Staff perceptions of the specific areas in which CALL is most useful to students differ considerably from students' perceptions. There are eight areas that staff place more value on than the students (see Table 5.24), three areas they rate as less valuable than students, and another three that are rated close to the student ratings. Table 5.24 compares these ratings and also shows the standard deviations for staff (see Table 5.18 for student standard deviations). The means were then themselves ranked to enable a comparison to be made between areas staff considered CALL performed best and areas students considered CALL did best (see also Table 5.24). "1" indicates a top ranking and "16" the lowest importance. Five areas staff and students seem to value similarly are *improving grammar, helping students/me understand what they/I listen to, teaching students/me to find main ideas, helping students/me understand different accents* and *ordering writing.* Staff valued all other CALL teaching areas more than students apart from *correcting errors, teaching students/me to say new words* and *helping students/me to speak without being shy.* This positive attitude reflects the optimism seen in the previous question.

The comparative ranking scores are even more interesting. *Improving vocabulary* and *providing interesting listening* again score in the top three for both students and staff but the students' third choice *correcting error*s is the staff's tenth choice. As mentioned before, this could be the result of students valuing the spellchecker and grammar checker in its tool function. And the second choice for staff , *providing interesting reading*, is only the students' sixth choice. This supports the staff position in the previous question, where they saw the skill of reading as being one of the very useful features of CALL, while students were less positive. Staff value *pronunciation practice* at fourth place but students put it at eighth. Considering the number of categories, this is not a large difference, but it again confirms the speaking results in the previous question where staff were much more positive about CALL's potential for teaching speech. *Helping students understand what they listen to* gains fifth place for both staff and students and *improving grammar* is sixth for staff and fourth for students, which is fairly close. A number of areas gained exactly the same or similar ranking from students and staff, even though their means might have been quite different.

**Table 5.24 What CALL does best: Staff means and ranking compared to student means and ranking**

| CALL Assistance | Mean Staff | Standard Deviation | Mean Student | Staff Ranking | Student Ranking |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Correcting errors | 2.82 | 3.66 | 4.45 | 10 | 3 |
| Writing fast | 1.59 | 2.65 | 2.51 | 15 | 12 |
| Ordering writing | 1.71 | 2.85 | 1.71 | 14 | 14 |
| Giving ideas to write about | 2.47 | 3.26 | 1.69 | 12 | 15 |
| Improving grammar | 4.82 | 2.53 | 4.42 | 6 | 4 |
| Providing interesting reading | 6.24 | 3.33 | 3.47 | 2 | 6 |
| Teaching students to find main ideas | 2.94 | 3.42 | 2.28 | 9 | 13 |
| Helping students understand what they read | 3.35 | 2.57 | 2.64 | 8 | 11 |
| Improving vocabulary | 5.88 | 2.47 | 4.87 | 3 | 1 |
| Providing interesting listening material | 6.94 | 3.33 | 4.47 | 1 | 2 |
| Helping students understand what they listen to | 4.94 | 3.68 | 4.28 | 5 | 5 |
| Helping students understand different accents | 2.8235 | 3.38 | 3.06 | 10 | 10 |
| Giving students people to talk to in English | .47 | 1.94 | 3.15 | 7 | 9 |
| Pronunciation practice | 5.12 | 3.72 | 3.38 | 4 | 8 |
| Teaching students to say new words | 1.94 | 2.86 | 3.43 | 13 | 7 |
| Helping students to speak without being shy | .82 | 2.10 | 1.641 | 16 | 16 |

Overall there was found to be a significant difference, $p<0.05$, between student (Question 9) and staff (Question 7) perceptions of the usefulness of CALL. Students thought computers less useful than staff (2.95 versus 3.39). However, the only individual area of significant difference was found in listening, $t(32.59) = -2.38$, $p=0.02$. Of least difference between student and staff perception was reading, then writing, followed by speaking.

A significant correlation ($p<0.05$) was discovered between previous CALL experience for both staff and students combined and perception of the usefulness of CALL (0.28). The new variable "CALL experience" was created by taking the means of Question 7 (Question 5 for staff) *I have used a computer to learn (or teach) English this year* and Question 8 (Question 6 for staff) *I have used a computer to learn (or teach) English before I came to this centre.* This variable was then used in correlation with *Are computers useful for learning English in self-access situations?* Question 9 (Question 7 for staff). For staff and students treated individually, staff were found to

show a significant correlation between previous CALL experience and the perception of the usefulness of CALL (0.28). A suggestion of correlation was also noted in students but this was slightly below the level of significance of $p<0.05$ (0.23).

There was a strong correlation for teachers (0.48); if they had more experience in teaching CALL they perceived CALL to be more useful. This may indicate a more positive view as a result of a longer personal investment in this mode of teaching or it may indicate that the more they have used CALL with students the more useful they have perceived it to be. There is the added caution of this being a self-selected group, in that teachers using the self-access centre will possibly tend to be those more positive about the opportunities offered there than those staff who choose not to use the centre.

### Is there a relationship between perceptions of CALL usefulness and a) gender b) age and c) previous CALL experience?

This question was to ascertain if there were any factors which might be linked with decisions made on CALL usefulness. Each will be dealt with separately.

#### a) Is there a relationship between gender and thinking CALL is useful?

As only one male was in the staff group, considering the staff separately would not have produced valid results so staff and students responses to Question 7 for staff and Question 9 for students were compared to Question 1. The result on an independent samples t- test on the combined group indicates that no significant relationship was found between gender and perceptions of the usefulness of CALL, $t(74.10) = 0.22$, $p = 0.82$. This is an interesting result given the common perception that computing is a male domain.

Self-access may be perceived to be a more restricted computing environment than other computing fields. Most programmes are provided on CD-ROM or catalogued on an easily accessible database. Students are pointed in the appropriate direction for their stated need. Thus females may feel safer in this environment and this would even out any gender bias (Hale, 2002;

Bernard, 1998) which might normally be present. Because of the removal of the competitive elements (Swann, 1992) that can possibly be present in the classroom use of computers the threat to females is further lessened. Older females who may have had restricted access to computers previously are able to work at their own pace in a highly structured environment. Instructions are usually clear in most CALL programmes and the possibility of becoming lost is restricted. The help of advisors, willing to step students through any new programmes, would further weaken any negative affective factors surrounding computer use.

### b) Is there any relationship between age and thinking CALL is useful?

An Independent Samples t-test for Equality of Means indicated a significant result in the combined group of students and teachers, $t(77.53) = -2.62$, $p=0.01$. Thus there was a significant difference between the age groups and the perception of the usefulness of CALL, with the 25 plus age group perceiving CALL to be more useful than the 16 to 25 year old age group.

The same affective factors mentioned in the previous section, in the lack of gender differences in the perception of CALL, could explain the differences in this group. People over 25 perceived CALL as more useful than those under 25. This is a combined group of students and teachers. The teachers have already been shown to value CALL more highly than students. Is this because they also find it a safer environment, restricted in its boundaries and more linear in its pathways than the use of other computing possibilities such as the Internet and thus feel more confident in using CALL for teaching than they do in using computers generally? This question will be discussed in the next chapter.

It might be thought not surprising that older people are more impressed with the usefulness of CALL than younger people. The familiarity of the computer environment to those under 25 may make them more critical and more judgemental than the over 25 group who possibly see computers as a wonderful new way to learn, with possibilities (such as self marking) that have been unavailable to them before. However, this idea is challenged by the results of an

independent samples t-test on age and thinking CALL is useful in which student answers to question two (*your age*) and their answers to question 9 (*Are computers useful for learning English?)* were compared. A significance of 0.10 indicates no difference in belief that CALL is useful between students over 25 and those under 25. It is not possible to apply this same sample test to staff as all were more than 25 years old.

### Question 7: Is there any relationship between computer experience and believing CALL is useful?

In the correlation between computer experience (Question 4 staff/6 students) and belief in the usefulness of CALL (Question 7 staff/9 students) there is no significant correlation (0.15) seen between computer experience and believing CALL is useful.

This seems to support the idea that it is not just people comfortable in the computing environment who learn well from CALL. What it may indicate is that people's perception is based on the programmes/sites available rather than on the novelty of using a computer. Again this does not discount the possibility that it may be the perceived safety, predictability, and usefulness of the CALL environment which stakeholders like. But the question remains how this positive attitude towards CALL measures up to other resources available to learners in the self-access centres. If CALL is seen as useful, despite the difficulties that lack of computing experience or confidence might present, is it then preferable to other means of learning?

## How does CALL compare to other self-access resources?

### *Student perceptions of usefulness of resources in the self-access centre compared to CALL*

Question 15(13) asked participants to compare the usefulness of CALL resources with other resources in the self-access centre. Participants then had to choose from three options for each resource listed. Resources that were *more useful than CALL* were rated 3. Resources that were *about the same usefulness as CALL* were rated 2 and resources that were *less useful than CALL*

were rated as 1. Staff were given the same choice but their instruction was *Compare resources used in self-access. Tick in the box that agrees with your opinion.*

Given the positive reception given to CALL the results were surprising (see Table 5.25). As a mean of 2 would indicate that other resources were the same usefulness as CALL the student means indicate that five other types of resources are more useful than CALL, one is the same usefulness, and two are not as useful.

**Table 5.25 Student perceptions of the usefulness of resources in the self-access centre compared to CALL-means**

| Resources | Mean | Standard Deviation |
|---|---|---|
| **Textbooks** | **2.33** | **0.68** |
| **Videos** | **2.33** | **0.68** |
| **Television** | **2.22** | **0.76** |
| **One-to-one help** | **2.49** | **0.62** |
| **Magazines** | **1.95** | **0.70** |
| **Worksheets** | **2.00** | **0.81** |
| **Listening cassettes** | **2.09** | **0.71** |
| **Other resources** | **1.75** | **0.56** |

The only resources perceived as less useful than CALL are magazines and a compilation of other resources not previously mentioned. Worksheets are seen as the same usefulness which suggests that perhaps students may see CALL as a kind of paperless worksheet. That one-to-one help should be rated so highly is understandable. A young Russian student who had rarely used a computer for CALL previously, but nevertheless thought it very useful for learning English, makes the plaintive plea in the comment section of this question: “We need any teacher who will speak with people in them free time for improve speaking.” His interest in having a real person to communicate with makes sense.

However, what was truly unexpected is that textbooks, videos, television and even listening cassettes are rated as more useful than CALL. Textbooks are perhaps the cornerstone of most English learning programmes and given the large numbers of Asians in the survey with their preference for this style of learning (Wood, 2005) it is perhaps understandable that students rate them as important. Despite this I did not see large numbers of students in self-access using

textbooks so it could be that this result is a reflection of students valuing textbooks in class rather than, as they were asked, in the learning centre.

However, the high value placed on videos and television compared to CALL cannot be explained away so easily. Many centres had extensive collections of videos and some had satellite links which allowed students to access television from overseas. Almost every centre I visited, where students were actively using the centre, had an impressive number of students accessing the video library and using subtitles or worksheets in conjunction with the video. Videos were often of popular up-to-date television programmes or recent movies. At first I thought students, who often sat in pairs or groups around one set, were simply using the videos as free entertainment or relaxation, but every group I consulted assured me they found videos the easiest way to learn to speak conversational English. Their enthusiasm was evident. Television rates slightly lower than video and this may reflect the fact that not all centres have a live television link. However, some centres that had satellite links reported having to limit student access at certain times because of the pressure of numbers wanting to use it. Some of these students were learning languages other than English and wanted to access the news bulletins or programmes from the relevant culture.

Listening cassettes are most often associated with textbooks or listening exercises but their popularity compared to CALL, where listening can have visual reinforcement, may reflect teacher familiarity with listening resources. The relatively new use of computers to record and play digitalized speech and thus have the ability to slow down speech and increase comprehensibility of spoken authentic materials may eventually consign cassettes to a historical footnote, but as yet this digital technology is not widely used. Centres surveyed were just beginning to digitalize their listening resources and the change may be quite rapid but it was not yet reflected in this study.

### *Staff perceptions of usefulness of resources in the self-access centre compared to CALL*

Staff results were, apart from one result, completely different to students' (See Table 5.25). Apart from one-to-one help, which staff placed as more useful than even students had ranked it, every other mean is less than 2 indicating staff feel CALL is more useful than other resources in self-access. The smaller standard deviations also indicate they are in closer agreement about this than students were about their conclusions.

Both students and staff agree on the relative uselessness of *other resources* but most students, 40 out of 64, did not even answer this question. Fourteen out of 18 staff chose not to answer as well. It can be assumed this is because there were no significant resources outside of those listed in the centres they were in. A few centres did offer other resources such as reading libraries or advice sheets but these were not available everywhere.

Textbooks, listening cassettes and worksheets were seen as slightly less useful than CALL, showing a closer agreement with student means. Magazines get an even lower rating than other resources. However, the most notable difference is with videos and television, where the means are considerably below the student means. Staff do not see videos and television as more useful than CALL and they do not appear to value them as highly as students for learning English.

**Table 5.26 Student perceptions compared to staff perceptions of the usefulness of other resources in the self-access centre compared to CALL – comparison of means**

| Resources | Student Mean | Staff Mean | Student Standard Deviation | Staff Standard Deviation |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Textbooks** | **2.33** | **1.93** | **0.68** | **0.46** |
| **Videos** | **2.33** | **1.80** | **0.68** | **0.41** |
| **Television** | **2.22** | **1.67** | **0.76** | **0.49** |
| **One-to-one help** | **2.49** | **2.75** | **0.62** | **0.45** |
| **Magazines** | **1.95** | **1.60** | **0.70** | **0.51** |
| **Worksheets** | **2.00** | **1.80** | **0.81** | **0.41** |
| **Listening cassettes** | **2.09** | **1.93** | **0.71** | **0.46** |
| **Other resources** | **1.75** | **1.75** | **0.56** | **1.26** |

### *Textbooks*

Many centres had textbooks which were used in classroom courses as well as supplementary books. There was also a heavy emphasis on books designed to help students with high stakes university entrance exams such as IELTS and TOEFL. Textbooks are a familiar resource for both students and staff and Table 5.27 and 5.28 show how highly both groups value them but 42.2% of students felt textbooks were even more valuable than CALL compared to only 5.6% of staff. This may reflect the type of students who choose to use self-access centres, students who want reassurance and an opportunity to use the resources most familiar to them. It may also reflect their belief that a textbook is less experimental and more serious than a computer programme with a more linear pathway. Staff, on the other hand, may be more willing to accept that the same information can be presented in new and more vibrant ways without diluting its intellectual impact. This is an area of research that could be extended.

**Table 5.27 Student perceptions of the usefulness of SAC resources compared to CALL - frequency**
**n = 64**

| Resources | Less useful than CALL | | Same usefulness as CALL | | More useful than CALL | | Total | | Total Missing | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Frequency | % | Frequency | % | Frequency | % | Frequency | % | Frequency | % |
| **Textbooks** | 7 | 10.9 | 27 | 42.2 | 27 | 42.2 | 61 | 95.3 | 3 | 4.7 |
| **Videos** | 7 | 10.9 | 27 | 42.2 | 27 | 42.2 | 61 | 95.3 | 3 | 4.7 |
| **Television** | 12 | 18.8 | 23 | 35.9 | 25 | 39.1 | 60 | 93.8 | 4 | 6.3 |
| **One-to-one help** | 4 | 6.3 | 23 | 35.9 | 34 | 53.1 | 61 | 95.3 | 3 | 4.7 |
| **Magazines** | 16 | 25.0 | 32 | 48.4 | 13 | 20.3 | 60 | 93.8 | 4 | 6.3 |
| **Worksheets** | 10 | 15.6 | 30 | 46.9 | 16 | 25.0 | 56 | 87.5 | 8 | 12.5 |
| **Listening cassettes** | 12 | 18.8 | 29 | 45.3 | 17 | 26.6 | 58 | 90.6 | 6 | 9.4 |
| **Other resources** | 6 | 9.4 | 16 | 25.0 | 2 | 3.1 | 24 | 37.5 | 40 | 62.5 |

**Table 5.28 Staff perceptions of the usefulness of SAC resources compared to CALL - frequency**
**n = 18**

| Resources | Less useful than CALL | | Same usefulness as CALL | | More useful than CALL | | Total | | Total Missing | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Frequency | % | Frequency | % | Frequency | % | Frequency | % | Frequency | % |
| **Textbooks** | 2 | 11.1 | 12 | 66.7 | 1 | 5.6 | 15 | 83.3 | 3 | 16.7 |
| **Videos** | 3 | 16.7 | 12 | 66.7 | - | - | 15 | 83.3 | 3 | 16.7 |
| **Television** | 5 | 27.8 | 10 | 55.6 | - | - | 15 | 83.3 | 3 | 16.7 |
| **One-to-one help** | 4 | 22.2 | 12 | 66.7 | - | - | 16 | 88.9 | 2 | 11.1 |
| **Magazines** | 6 | 33.3 | 9 | 50.0 | - | - | 15 | 83.3 | 3 | 16.7 |
| **Worksheets** | 3 | 16.7 | 12 | 66.7 | - | - | 15 | 83.3 | 3 | 16.7 |
| **Listening cassettes** | 2 | 11.1 | 12 | 66.7 | 1 | 5.6 | 15 | 83.3 | 3 | 16.7 |
| **Other resources** | - | - | 2 | 11.1 | 1 | 5.6 | 3 | 16.7 | 15 | 83.3 |

### *Videos*

The use of video in self-access centres was fairly extensive with over half the centres visited placing emphasis on viewing as an important way of increasing students' listening, comprehension, up-to-date vocabulary acquisition and ability to imitate spoken chunks of language. Table 5.27 indicates that 39% of students see the use of videos as more useful than CALL, and this result was confirmed by the comments that many students made in answer to Question 12.

There was some difficulty in answering Question 15 for students who saw the use of video as part of CALL (because videos can be watched on the computer), although the results seem to suggest that all students treated it separately in the questionnaire, despite possibly feeling it was part of what CALL offered rather than a different resource. A male Korean Intermediate level speaker, who had rarely used CALL before, although he had now come to see CALL as *useful*, said "We can watch movies made in English without DVD players. We can have chances to listen again and again." In the centre this student attends, videos are watched on computers and this is becoming an option that many students are also able to use at home. Interestingly this student (in Question 11- asking what CALL did best) ranked as a 10 "providing interesting listening material", as a 9 "helping me understand what I listen to" and as an 8 "Helping me to understand different accents." All these results may well be a reflection of his use of videos to learn English rather than the use of specific CALL programmes. The point he makes about being able to listen "again and again" is a function that the computer makes very easy. Although CD-ROMS can be used for repetition, computing programmes are easier to manipulate and there is a student familiarity with this function if they have been using MP3 (or similar formats) for music files.

Subtitles in English or the student's own language can be found on both a computer and a disc-player using a DVD. Many centres also download the scripts in English from the Internet, sometimes with glossaries and comprehension questions. All students spoken to, who were using videos and scripts, were enthusiastic about this as a means of improving their language despite

my own reservations about their motivation for watching the videos. They were often watching in groups of two or three. In response to a statement such as; “This must be a nice way to relax between classes,” students stressed that they were not only working but were serious about improving their language skills. The same Korean student mentioned above says in question 16:

> Watching movies with computers is the best way to increase our English skills, just in my opinion. Because, we can [watch] that materials repeatedly. It is also important to study repeatedly whenever we want to do it.

This access to the same materials again and again gives students a confidence that what they cannot understand on one occasion they will be able to access at a later date, unlike the materials in a class situation which may only be available for a short time.

Another Korean (female) student in the same centre, with a very similar learning profile, said, “When we use the computer, we can see with pictures or movie something like that. So we can understand easily.” Yet another Korean student, who thought CALL was *very useful*, said she liked using DVDs: “We can watch movie and see scripts. It’s very useful to me.” The reinforcement of vocabulary and context offered by this visual element can be very important to some learners and this may also be a factor shared by videos and the computer. It helps to understand why this resource rates so well in comparison with CALL.

In Centre G six students mentioned the use of movies positively in their written comments in the open-ended questions. This was by far the greatest number of any of the centres (although this centre also had the greatest number of returned questionnaires). However, while students in this centre seemed to be using a wide variety of resources I only observed one group using videos. Their awareness of the potential of video may well be because the beginning of every lesson was teacher directed with short lessons, either by the teacher or by the centre advisors, on how to use different resources.

No staff (see Table 5.28) felt videos were *more useful than CALL* compared to the 44.3% of students who felt they were. This may reflect staff suspicion that students are using them for relaxation or entertainment rather than learning. However, virtually the same percentage of staff thought they were the *same usefulness as CALL,* as students felt they were *the same or more useful than CALL*. So both staff and students see using videos as an equally valid way of learning English. Many centres were moving to make videos available on-line to ease access difficulties although this can cause some concerns around copyright issues. Students are already used to the idea that videos are easily accessible on-line and like podcasting this is an area that will probably end up in the CALL domain eventually.

Most centres had television and a few offered satellite television so students could watch programmes from other countries or study foreign languages. In some centres there was no direct television access but instead staff had taped television programmes which were stored and accessed like videos. It is difficult to know if students realised that some videos (i.e. the very popular "Friends" for instance) were actually television programmes or whether they rated them under the video category. In retrospect it may have been better to have included television and video as one category of resource.

### *Television*

However, what is obvious is that students value television as a learning resource even more than they value videos (see Table 5.27) and almost 40% feel it is more useful than CALL. However, a caution would be that I saw very few students actually using televisions in the self-access centres, with the exception of one centre where the satellite television had a waiting list, and I suspect this positivity reflects greater access in students' homes rather than in the self-access centre.

Staff, on the other hand, see television far less positively than students (see Table 5.28). None felt it was more useful than CALL (compared to the 39.1% of students who did) although 55.6% of staff (20% more staff than students) felt it was as useful as CALL. Staff may well have been reflecting more accurately on the actual usage of television in the self-access centres rather than

reporting on the perception of the potential of television to aid the learning of English. That students and teachers possibly saw this differently is merely speculation on my part but regardless of the reasons for the difference in perception there can be no doubt that television is seen as a crucial part of the learning tools offered in self-access centres and at least as important as CALL.

### *One-to-one Help*

It is no surprise, and will be very reassuring to teachers, to find in Table 5.27 that 53.1% of students see one-to-one help from staff as more useful than CALL, although it does beg the question of how "autonomous" students really are. 89% of students see this help as *the same* or *more useful than CALL*. It is obviously too soon to conclude that computers will replace teachers.

That staff value one-to-one help (i.e. their own help) as the same or more useful than CALL, is also no surprise (see Table 5.28). What is perhaps surprising is that four staff only valued their help as equal to the help offered by CALL. This might indicate a lack of confidence in their own ability to mentor students (with some staff being administrators rather than teachers) or could be a vote of respect for the help they perceive CALL can provide.

### *Magazines*

That 13 students (see Table 5.27) found magazines more useful than CALL is puzzling. I noticed a small number of students reading magazines in the centres. These varied from magazines offering a fairly substantial reading load such as "North and South" to lighter entertainment magazines such as "New Idea" and "The Woman's Weekly". Most magazines on offer were up-to-date and entertaining and might well be easier to access than the same information online. Students may also perceive CALL as a more serious matter and not feel free to "go off task" by using popular gossip sites while the free availability of magazines they might not be able to afford themselves, could be attractive as a reading option when they are tired or need some time to relax. That they can still be learning would be an added bonus.

Staff are not as positive as students about the use of magazines (see Table 5.28) but 50% still see them as equally useful as CALL. Most centres had a very good selection of current magazines which suggests staff see the subscriptions as worth the large annual investment they require.

### *Worksheets*

Worksheets were available in all centres with some more demanding and more specific than others. I observed a number of students doing worksheets which had for the most part been created by the staff of the centre to meet specific student needs. Staff may therefore, have mentioned that such worksheets were available when counseling students. The popularity of worksheets (see Table 5.27) may also have some relationship to the ease of access. Most were catalogued in some way according to level of difficulty and topic and they were prominently displayed in most centres.

Table 5.28 indicates staff also see worksheets as valuable but surprisingly none saw them as more valuable than CALL as 25% of the students did. This may be a result of staff not trusting their own ability to produce material "better than" commercially produced work or it may be that staff feel this material is not as engaging as technology. However, both students and staff obviously respect the place that individual worksheets have in addressing student need – possibly because the worksheets are directly targeted at recurring need in their own particular institutions. Some worksheets were in this respect of a very high quality dealing with topics such as the language used in specific subject areas such as maths or science. Other worksheets dealt with topics such as particular aspects of grammar that caused problems and others were of a more general nature, giving advice about ways to improve listening or speaking.

### *Cassettes*

Cassettes also appear to compare favourably with CALL (see Tables 5.27 and 5.28). In two centres I saw dedicated rooms for listening to cassettes and one of these rooms was extremely popular and completely full despite the availability of computers. Two other centres had

converted their cassettes into computer files so listening had become a function of CALL. Had this not been the case it is possible that more students would have rated cassettes more favourably. Many students also used CD-ROMS for listening but they were asked to consider these as part of this question. The life of cassettes is probably very limited with CD-ROMS and computer sound files now easier to manipulate and, with the advent of Podcasting, easier to access, and, in many cases, cheaper to acquire.

### *Other resources*

Many staff did not answer the question comparing *other resources* to CALL presumably because they could not think of any other major resources that had not already been covered in the previous questions. The low number of responses parallels the student answers (see Table 5.27) where 40 out of 64 answers were missing. However, fewer staff (see Table 5.28) felt *other resources* were *the same* or *less useful than* students did. Staff are slightly more optimistic about the potential of *other resources* to match CALL.

## What CALL materials do students recommend?

Although learners recommended a wide range of CD-ROMS and CALL websites that they had found useful for learning English the number of programs each mentioned was not very high. They were presented with a list of CD-ROMS used in centres and asked to say which programs they had found useful and why. Programs outside the present self-access situation were included in case students had used programs previously that were unknown or unavailable to the centre staff. Students mentioned a number of programs not on the original list and some titles may not be correct or may be programs created within their centre. Students often commented that they did not know the title of the CD-ROMs they used, choosing them by the icon on the screen. This may explain why some programs that staff said were popular did not receive any or only one mention. Programs such as *Cutting Edge* and *Headway* are used in conjunction with course books

that are available in some centres but students said they had used them in classroom courses and liked to revise their work in self-access.

The programs mentioned most often by the students are the same programs staff said were most often used. These were *Issues in English 1 and 2, English Grammar in Use, Tensebuster* (three levels), *That's Life, Pronunciation Power 1,* and *The Grammar Rom.* Usefulness, ease of use and giving feedback were the main points students highlighted although being able to work at their own rate and being interesting were also highlighted. One student in Centre G said: "*English Grammar in Use* is very good for us, which is easy to understand and do some practices. Especially, for beginner, they can use it to get good basis."

Students were rarely critical but the most popular program did annoy one student also from centre C who said he had done *Issues in English* but he did not like it because although he learnt a few words he learnt no "grammar stuff". However, significantly, he said that although he did not like it before because he could not use it well now he was finding it useful. "When I learnt to use I liked it." An experienced IT specialist noted that this program encompassed all the skills and had really appropriate good quality exercises which were the best they had seen, although some of the video was not really useful as it had no relevance.

*Issues in English* and *That's Life* are similar in their approach. Both involve interactive exercises based on video clips of topical issues. *Issues in English*, from Protea Software, has four different levels from beginner to advanced levels on topics such as Smoking and Immigration. There is a short video of a person speaking, followed by different activities on areas such as comprehension, vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, spelling and writing skills. It is popular with students because they feel they can measure their improvement as they progress through each level. An advanced Japanese student in Centre B commented on *Issues in English*: "Can use four levels.

Choose own level. The first time level one, now level three. Next week level four. I like the feeling of going up. I'm happy."

This program also uses a variety of approaches and offers a more holistic treatment of language learning than drill-type programs. Teachers in Centre H noted that the menu made navigation transparent and the conversations at the higher levels looked very real. *That's Life*, produced by AMES in Victoria, has conversations on familiar topics about everyday life such as shopping, jobs, health and family. Again the exercises cover a wide range of skill areas; listening, pronunciation, comprehension, vocabulary, spelling and grammar and help is offered in twelve different languages.

On the other hand *English Grammar in Use*, *Tensebuster*, *Pronunciation Power*, and *The Grammar Rom* fall into the exercise generation category. They involve practice of grammatical forms or pronunciation. However, they all have an interactive element although possibly in a more limited form than the first two CD-ROMS. *English Grammar in Use*, produced by Clarity language Consultants, is possibly the most traditional of the four. It accompanies a widely used text of the same name and is very exercise oriented although it does have audio recordings of the main exercises and recording capabilities. *Tensebuster*, also a Clarity product, comes in four different levels from Elementary to Advanced and more recent versions of this program are web-based. The program presents a grammar area and then works through systematically from presentation of the concept to the rules, followed by practice and testing. It also allows students to measure their own progress. *The Grammar ROM* has 300 interactive exercises with time tests and audio help in different languages. It uses video, voice recording, and cartoon graphics. *Pronunciation Power 1* offers animated, interactive lessons with a 100 hours of training in pronunciation using photos, videos, graphics and games. It allows students to record their own sounds and compare them in wave diagrams with an instructor's pronunciation. So although all

these programs possibly lack the holistic approach of *Issues in English* and *That's Life* they do encourage interaction and allow the student to track their own progress.

Another notable feature of the programs participants remembered was the number of students who mentioned their use of CD-ROM dictionaries. This was unexpected as dictionaries could be considered more of a tool rather than a learning program. An advanced Saudi male, from Centre G, said he liked *The Longman Dictionary* because it was not only useful for learning English, easy to use and gave feedback but also because he was able to listen to the pronunciation of words, see a photograph and make up tests. Another Saudi male from the same centre, who was not overly enthusiastic about CALL, mentioned only one web site he liked and that was the *Merrian Website On-line Dictionary*. A German male from the same centre, very experienced in using the computer, also commented, "They allow me to look up unknown vocabulary on the fly." Using on-line dictionaries is of course quicker than loading a CD-ROM which would suggest those who make the effort to use dictionary CD-ROMs probably intend to use them for learning a number of words rather than just checking the meaning of a word being used in some other context.

There was very little agreement amongst participants about why particular programs were useful, with one student highlighting some points and another choosing completely different points. The sample of replies is too small to be very informative on this point and this type of analysis is probably best studied to study in a particular centre where students are all using the same programs.

In the Table 5.29 students reasons for preferring specific software are recorded (Question 13. See Appendix B). Numbers refer to the total number of students who ticked a particular category.

Many centres had the same selection of CD-ROMS and teachers spoke highly of the same programmes. This limited range of programs may well be the result of one retailer who has visited or contacted most of the centres in New Zealand and recommended and sold many of the programmes seen there. His opinion may have been fairly influential at a time when centres were first investing seriously in software. Accessibility to products and the opportunity to review the programs under consideration may have influenced purchasing decisions. However, once products have been acquired, teachers have a vested interest in making sure they are used. Thus, like the top listings in a web search engine, there can be a reinforcement of the programs' popularity because the teacher has made a decision to purchase and will therefore, encourage the learner to use it. However, unlike students in a CALL classroom situation, students are free to stop using programs they do not like or which they feel are not helping their English. Thus their perceptions of a programs' usefulness may be more closely related to their honest opinion than would be the case if they had been forced to use the same program for a long period of time, even though they did not find it suited their learning style. On the other hand, there are some programs that students could find difficult initially but once they had mastered the style of learning required, and overcome initial apprehension, they may have found very useful such as the student from Centre C, mentioned previously, who did not like *Issues in English* until he learnt how to use it. If a student is not motivated to overcome their own limitations, and lacks the discipline required to persevere when the material presented is challenging, they may discard the program as "not useful" too readily. Hooking the student in to the learning with interesting material and providing multiple levels so that work demands are not too overwhelming, might therefore, be one of the criteria students consider important. Finding out if this is the case could be a useful extension of this study. It is interesting to note that some of programs mentioned by students fit these criteria i.e. *Issues in English 1* and *2, That's Life.*

**Table 5.29 CALL Programs in self-access centres assessed by participants**

| Programmes | Useful learning Eng | Easy to use | Gives feedback | work at your own rate | Interesting or enjoyable | Other reasons |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Academic Writing** | **1** | **2** | **2** | **2** | **1** | |
| **Britannica Encyclopaedia** | **1** | **1** | | | **1** | |
| **Connected Speech** | | | | **1** | | |
| **Cutting Edge** | | **1** | | | | |
| **Decade Software** | | **1** | | **1** | **1** | |
| **English Grammar in Use** | **5** | **2** | **1** | **1** | **1** | **2** |
| **English in Action** | **1** | | **1** | **1** | | |
| **EAE Listening to lectures** | **1** | | | | **1** | |
| **EASE** | | **1** | | | | |
| **ESL Academic Reading** | **1** | **1** | **1** | **1** | | |
| **ESPRUS (e-book)** | **1** | **1** | | | **1** | |
| **Headway** | **1** | | | | | |
| **Issues in English** | **9** | **7** | **7** | **4** | **4** | **1** |
| **Issues in English 2** | **4** | **5** | **4** | **4** | **4** | **1** |
| **Longman Dictionary** | **1** | **1** | **1** | | | **1** |
| **Microsoft Bookshelf 2 Dictionary** | **1** | **1** | | | **1** | |
| **Microsoft Word** | | | **1** | **1** | | **1** |
| **Oxford Dictionary** | | **1** | | | **1** | |
| **Pronunciation Power 1.** | **3** | **3** | **2** | **4** | **1** | |
| **Pronunciation Power 2** | **2** | **1** | **1** | **1** | **1** | |
| **Skills in English** | | | **1** | | | |
| **Speakeasy** | **1** | | **1** | **1** | **1** | |
| **Streamline** | **2** | **1** | | | | **1** |
| **Successive Skills** | **1** | **1** | **1** | **1** | | |
| **Telephoning in English** | | | **1** | | | |
| **TEPS** | **1** | | | | **1** | |
| **Tensebuster** | **3** | **2** | **3** | **2** | **2** | |
| **That's Life** | **3** | **2** | **3** | **2** | **2** | |
| **The Grammar Rom** | **2** | **2** | **2** | **2** | **1** | |

Programs teachers said were popular but students did not mention include the following:

| | |
|---|---|
| CGEA | Road Code |
| English for Employment | Study Skills Success |
| Face to Face | The Interactive Picture Dictionary |
| GoFabris | |

A Vietnamese student from Centre A found "Streamline" very useful because it had different topics, "So it is good for reading and improving new words." Another Vietnamese student at the same institution, who had been learning English and using a computer for more than five years, also liked "Streamline" and "Headway", not only for the social situations they present but also because they taught vocabulary and grammar. He had originally talked about using a Vietnamese CD-ROM which showed videos of people talking (in English) in social situations and, although he did not always understand it, he felt it showed the computer was most useful for listening and reading. It seems that the presentation of social situations, or interesting subjects in a video format, catches the attention of these learners and expands their English capability in different ways. This is not quite what Siemens (2006) had in mind when he talked about *making connections first* being a more direct way into learning because it is more vibrant, social and action-oriented and therefore, easier to internalise (as he was thinking more of interactive connections such as blogs and online meetings) but it follows the same principles. Students need some personal hook to hang their learning on. They need to make a personal connection with the material and a well-designed CD-ROM which can provide a topic or situation that catches the students' attention, offers that hook.

Far fewer students mentioned using websites than had previously been expected (28 mentioned no websites at all) and the number of sites mentioned was surprisingly limited (See Table 5.30). Although many participants had used sites, they did not necessarily remember what they were (or the name they gave was not absolutely correct), and most recommendations came from teachers in the centres. Some sites did seem to stand out because students recalled them quickly and said

they had used them often. The BBC site came into this category. A student at Centre G noted that, “The CNN and BBC is the most worldwide news company, and from news we can realise what the latest English is, for example vocabulary and new idioms, something like that.”Although interestingly another student from the same centre, a Korean male who had used computers for less than two years, warned against using the news for this purpose: “Usually we use the reading materials in Internet, but sometimes the information and news are wrong and grammatically terrible.” The BBC music site was also noted by a number of students as being useful. A younger male from the United Arab Emirates in Centre G said that listening to music on the computer really helped his listening because [normally] it was difficult to hear the words.

Table 5.30 CALL websites students in self-access mentioned as useful

| Programs | Useful learning Eng | Easy to use | Gives feedback | work at your own rate | Interesting or enjovable | Other reasons |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| bbc.co.uk/worldservice/learningenglish | 5 | 4 | | 2 | 5 | 2 |
| English-cafe.com (may be Randalls cafe) | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | |
| Voice of America | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| Naver.com | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 1 |
| New Zealand Herald | 1 | 1 | | | | |
| cnn.com | 2 | 2 | | 1 | 3 | 1 |
| Listener | 1 | | | | 1 | |
| onlinenews | | | | 1 | | |
| IELTSlearning | | | | | 1 | |
| Merrian Webster Online Dictionaires | | 1 | | | | |
| learnenglish.org | | | 1 | | | |
| Learningweb(an in-house catalogue) | 1 | 1 | 1 | | | |
| National Geographic | | | | | | |
| Dict.leo.org | | 1 | 1 | | 1 | |
| Google or Yahoo(search engines) | 3 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 2 | |
| MSN.com (an interactive texting site) | 1 | 1 | 1 | | | |
| Self study grammar | 1 | | | | | |
| Guide to grammar | 1 | | | | | |
| On-line English Courses | 1 | | | | | |
| Cyber Listening lab | | | | | 1 | |
| Living English | 1 | | | | | |

Sites staff said were used frequently by students but not mentioned in the student survey were the following:

British Council
cdlponline.org
elc.polyu.edu.hk
esl-lab.com
flo-joe.co.uk
lc.ust.hk/~sac(/sacadsheet.html)
onestopenglish.com
parapal-online.co.uk
penguindossiers.com
uefap.co.uk
VILIC (actually a catalogue of sites)
Active Worlds (a moo or virtual world)

The sites above were all mentioned as *useful*, although in some cases only one or two students noted them in that category. Many students used the sites catalogued on their centres intranet page and accessed sites without fully being aware where they originated. The Learning Web mentioned by one student was an in-house catalogue and virtual workspace created by the student's centre but as far as the student was concerned was actually a website. VILIC, the Hong

Kong University of Science and Technology catalogue/virtual advisor, is listed as a site by teachers but although it is connected to a virtual advisor it actually provides links to other sites both on the web and within the university.

Three students mentioned using websites in their own language to study English. A Korean female also at Centre G was one of these: "It is easy to understand, cos sometimes when I can't keep up with study in my class, so I often use website in my country to study by Korean." A Russian woman of mature years, in the same centre, who had only been learning English for 10 months, also said she used Russian/ English programmes:

> When you are starting to learn English most useful for you are programmes on your own language and English (and back). When your English is getting better, you will work with academic programmes and websites.

The flexibility of the web enables students of diverse linguistic backgrounds access to CALL sites, using their own language. This allows students who need this support another pathway to facilitate their learning. The student above commenting on these types of sites was very positive about using CALL to learn English, noting its usefulness in group work as well.

A Vietnamese student in Centre H who had learnt English for less than two years and had used CALL frequently over the past year also noted two other advantages with the web: "I can practise listening, speaking...as much as possible – unlimited time...it provides a large range of different materials with many levels that helps me to choose the most suitable materials for me."

Not all students were convinced of the usefulness of the web or CALL although they were a tiny minority. A younger Chinese male in centre G who had been learning English for 5 to 10 years and used a computer for CALL for two years mentioned no sites or programmes he had used. He thought all other resources were more useful than CALL but surprisingly, given his comments he rated CALL as *sometimes useful*.

> Sorry, I hardly use any computer programme or website for English learning. Personally, I do not think computer is a good way to improve English skills, cause the technology is not advanced enough, and it's too complicated.

An advanced male learner from Saudi Arabia, also from centre G, who had been using a computer and learning English for 5 to 10 years, but had *only rarely* used computers for CALL, thought most other resources were *more useful than CALL*.

> A person may learn a lot by using computers but the problem is it is very hard to find information on the World Wide Web. Maybe if there were easier and more organised sites a person may easily find info. Sometimes sites charge you for more information or just refer you to a book. Reading a book is much easier and you can always highlight important information and keep forever.

A Chinese woman from centre D who had rarely used a computer before coming to the centre found CALL *very useful* for listening but noted one area she felt she wanted to use CALL more.

> I often come into here in spare time. My speaking is low/limited so I need sometimes to improve it. I not often do speak on the computer because my pronounce is very low. I would like more speaking on the computer. I like listening because will help me improve.

A Cantonese speaking student from Centre A, who liked "Skills in English", a DVD, because it gave feedback, was the only student to mention the use of "MSN Messenger" (an interactive real-time texting system). She said it was useful for learning English because it was not only easy to use but also gave feedback: "Students are typing to each other on the Internet. This is an advantage. Can meet a friend and improve their skills." It is possible other students did not mention their use of texting sites because they did not consider them CALL sites but rather considered them as tools. However, apart from one other student, who mentioned email, the deafening silence about communicative programmes was curious. Two staff members mentioned trying to discourage students from spending all their time e-mailing friends rather than using CALL materials on the web so it is possible students see communicative programs as outside the agenda of the self-access centres. The Cantonese-speaking student did not seem to share this view. She also liked the New Zealand Herald site because it was easy to use. She was the only

student to mention this site, which is surprising, given this is the main daily newspaper in the country.

The most detailed commentary on the use of CALL and the web came from a Japanese male over 25 in Centre B, who modestly described himself as a beginner in learning English, although in fact he had been learning English for over ten years. He was a research associate who had taught online courses and found the web very useful for teaching Japanese students as he felt they were very shy and responded far better when writing e-mails, than face-to-face. He had learnt English online and also mathematics and chemistry. He came to the centre every day and thought CALL was very useful particularly for reading and listening. He had found the BBC site most useful and easy to use, but commented that it had no feedback and did not let people work at their own pace. However, he noted the usefulness of videos on the site and said it helped him imagine Britain and learn about cultural things. He liked studying regional languages such as Scottish. (A Korean student from Centre G also mentioned listening material helping him understand different accents.) He also mentioned the "Voice of America" which he said was best for beginners as it was easy to listen to with limited vocabulary, had feedback, could be marked online, and had many levels so students could work at their own pace. He was, however, the only student to mention this site.

This chapter has outlined the results from the interviews and questionnaires and looked at the significance of results. The next chapter will attempt to summarize the findings of both Chapter 4 and 5 and look at the implications of these findings for self-access centres.

# Chapter 6

# Conclusion

## Summary of findings

In answering this study's research questions, the results of the questionnaire reinforce the view that while students feel very strongly that CALL is very useful for learning English, they feel its main usefulness is in listening practice. Both these results support the findings of Cotterall and Reinder's research (2001). While writing and reading are the two other areas students also find CALL useful for they do not feel it is useful for speaking. When asked what CALL did particularly well students felt what it did best was improve vocabulary and provide interesting listening material. This was followed by correcting errors, improving their grammar, and helping them understand what they listened to. Curiously, given speaking's low ranking, the next area of learning they felt it helped was pronunciation practice.

Staff were significantly more positive about the usefulness of CALL than students. Staff and students were also significantly more positive about CALL the greater their experience of teaching or learning using CALL.

Despite very positive feelings towards CALL, students rated every other resource available in self-access centres, apart from magazines and other unnamed resources, as *equally useful* or *more useful than CALL*. Staff on the other hand rated CALL as *more useful* than every resource in self-access apart from one-to-one help. These findings suggest CALL is seen as one of the valuable resources in self-access but is not ranked above more traditional learning sources by students and may be overvalued by staff.

Students made very positive comments about CALL programs but named a very limited range of software that they had found useful, with *Issues in English 1and 2* and *English Grammar in Use*

being the most preferred programs. However, it is important to note that different centres had different programs and in these centres students are encouraged by staff or their classroom teachers to use some programs more than others, so it is impossible to name particular programs as being the most preferred across all centres. However, the types of programs favoured fell roughly into two categories. *Issues in English* is an example of a holistic type of software which attempts to utilize a number of different types of tasks while taking advantage of the ability of CALL to integrate video, speaking and listening capabilities into one program. By contrast, *English Grammar in Use*, although the newer version has some interactive elements such as the ability to record the students' attempts at speaking and has some recordings of the text, is actually more like an exercise book online. In some ways these two programs represent the two extremes of self-access CALL and yet both were popular with students.

Students were generally very positive about using computer programs although some had mixed feelings. A Chinese teacher in her thirties, at Centre D, who had been learning English for more than ten years and using a computer for more than five, although she had only used CALL frequently in the last year, liked "That's Life", "Pronunciation Power 1&2" and "Issues in English 1&2". She found the computer had advantages and disadvantages.

> Yes, it's a good way to learn but I need to put many times on the computer, but this is an important way to study English because we can get much information from that. I can study by myself. Can develop my skills. Sometimes you need to [think] quickly on the computer. Use book is more relax. If we always use the computer it is not good for eyesight and sometimes we got headache. This is a disadvantage....Listening is the first my choice because for me it is more difficult and secondly is reading. I think it is quite useful because I...find my English have improved a little. We can use the computer to study by myself. Whenever you like you can study.

A Chinese male in Centre H who had been learning English and using a computer for more than five years and had used CALL often over the previous year found software in his centre useful for cultural knowledge.

> The software I have been using in this centre help me understand the western way of communication-speaking habit....Subconsciously I will be familiar with

> the accent, concept etc of communication, gradually during the process -my view. In other words, this way is very helpful and practical.

Another Chinese male at the same centre also found software very useful for learning.

> Compared to other ways of learning, the software is more likely all-sided including speaking, listening, reading and writing which is not available by other simple resource. Generally I would say this is the advantage of hi-tech which allows us to learn more efficiently.

Although students said they used websites, they were in fact unable to name very many, with the BBC site and search engines named most often. Some centres had selected relevant websites and incorporated them into their own catalogue of sites on a centre or language school intranet and, although students used these, they could not recall the name of individual sites.

There was no significant correlation found between gender and perceptions of the usefulness of CALL and neither was there any correlation between computer experience and thinking CALL was useful. There was no correlation between age and thinking CALL was useful amongst students. However, when teachers, who were all over 25, were included there was a significant difference between the age groups and the perception of the usefulness of CALL, with the 25 plus age group perceiving CALL to be more useful than the 16 to 25 year old age group.

The influence of the advisor on the choice of software used, and their personal attitude to CALL, is also acknowledged as crucial (Gremmo and Riley, 1995) but was dealt with in this study only as it related to teacher interviews. It is probably to be expected that the administrators of all the centres were “people people” and, although some were very experienced with computers, almost all were ‘digital immigrants’ (Prensky, 2001). However, this is a major factor in influencing the way centres are run and possibly also has an effect on how CALL is used or not used in different centres. A number of staff have noted that students need training to use CALL effectively. Some made cautious comments about the need for students to be taught how to use the software properly. One administrator from Centre H summed this up by saying “Effective use of CALL requires confidence, user training and practice....User training is so important for confidence.

Some programs aren't so transparent for navigating and students might give up. Students need to be steered."

This same staff member also made the point, mentioned by virtually every centre administrator, that CALL required full technical support so that "trouble-shooting" was "close at hand". Another teacher in centre H noted that if classroom teachers incorporated software use into their own lessons it encouraged students to use that software when they went to the self-access centre. This centre consulted classroom teachers about which software was to be bought to ensure it was also suitable for classroom use and offered classes extensive orientation programmes which some teachers chose to use and others ignored.

Staff also worried that computers can tend to "cut students off" from interaction with other people. While there is obviously some truth in this statement, and some staff are rightly concerned that students do not maximise their opportunities, for others these beliefs could stem from concern that students need to be "taught" by humans, not machines, and that it is not possible to interact in a natural way with other people if a machine is the method of transmission. I suspect neither of these beliefs would be applied to use of more familiar technology such as the telephone. People who have never seen a phone before can learn to use one by reading instructions. They may make mistakes and have to repeat operations a few times but success would come eventually. Also the phone can be a tremendous tool to connect people in a way not possible with face-to-face interaction. People are often far more verbal and responsive on such technology because the embarrassment factor of facing someone is lessened. The same could be said to be true of the computing environment. The students we are dealing with now, as opposed to a decade ago when CALL was first becoming popular, are often "digital natives" (Prensky, 2001) and see the technical environment in a way different way from their teachers, as mentioned by the Language Technical Specialist at centre H. To students, a computer is often a more efficient book or pen. These learners are not scared to experiment and they want to push programs to their limits. Centres which were training students how to use computers in a

purposeful way were offering a head start to those whose learning style might not have been so attuned to machines. However, those who are moving their students in the new phases of 'emergent CALL' (Levy and Stockwell, 2006) such as blogs, the use of mp3 audio files, speech-recognition applications, intelligent tutors or the use of corpus linguistics for writing improvement, are allowing students to future-proof their learning potential, enabling them to experiment in ways that may become part of 'established CALL'(Levy and Stockwell, 2006) in the Web 2.0 environment. Although widespread use of communicative CALL was not common, some centres were integrating quite closely with the language centres they were attached to, and projects from the language classes were starting to be undertaken in the self-access centres. In another centre it was the staff within the centres who were trying to interest classroom teachers to make more proactive use of CALL technology.

It is possibly a good time to return to the discussion in chapter 2 about theories of constructivism and connectivism in relation to second language acquisition. Simina and Hamel (2005) see a need for exposure to as wide a variety of materials as necessary, and participants in the survey saw this as a particularly strong point of the web programs they encountered. Results point to the provision of interesting reading and listening material as one of the most useful features of CALL in self-access. The web is, in itself, now an authentic environment and the provision of a wide range of genre (i.e. the instruction manuals mentioned by one student and newspaper sites by another) and a wide choice of learning styles offered by different sites and programs enables greater learner control both of which fulfil two of the criteria cited as important for an ideal CALL environment. Students are also collecting different nodes to suit their own needs, which Siemens (2006) believes is an important feature of connectivism. Self-access allows a learner a great deal of control.

However, where self-access is not engaging in the spirit of these learning theories is its lack of collaborative learning (i.e. use of web-quests and similar project work) and in not taking

advantage of the wide variety of connection-forming tools such as blogs, e-mail, wikis and on-line meetings. In some centres the use of e-mail is actively discouraged and seen as “time-wasting”. Some teachers are, however, making a start on using these tools in classrooms (e.g. individual blogs have been connected to a class blog in Centre E) and students do sometimes continue this work in self-access. In centre G students were observed working on group projects in self-access but this was not common in all centres. The move in two centres (centre G and C) to digitalize their tapes has lead to an expansion of the possibilities of using podcasts and more authentic materials but this work is still in its infancy and has not yet had time to make an impact on most students.

The isolated nature of self-access centres is also changing with a number of centres (C, D, E, F, G and H) using the self-access centres in conjunction with classroom teaching or at least encouraging teachers to do so. This kind of blended learning, using self-access centres rather than language laboratories, seems to have revitalized the use of self-access centres; introducing students to different ways of accessing programs, websites and other materials to meet their differing needs. Some centres also allowed or encouraged students to work together and although this appeared to happen most often with watching videos, there was a number of groups of students observed gathered around computers. This was most noticeable in centre G.

The potential for students’ favourite self-access resources, i.e. tapes, videos, television programmes, textbooks and CALL CD-ROMS, to be digitalized and placed on to a website in the future means that CALL will probably become more important. The ability to study a movie in sections with the script provided concurrently and the scenes followed by questions to check understanding, or pronunciation exercises to practise speaking, can only strengthen the claim of CALL as an important learning environment. However, students at the moment and probably for some time into the future realize that one-to-one assistance is the most valuable help and where this is available it will probably continue to be preferred.

## Implications

This study has several implications for researchers and teachers in the area of self-access CALL.

Students like CALL and find it useful for many skill areas but they value other resources in self-access as much if not more. Centres should not become too dependent on CALL but maintain other resources at appropriate levels as well.

Students seem to find speaking an area they feel the computer does not adequately meet their needs. They appreciate the usefulness of pronunciation programmes especially help with pronunciation of new words. The teaching of interactive speaking is, nonetheless, a more complex science. However, the recent increase in the use of the computer as a cheap or free telephone (i.e. Skype or Google Talk) presents the possibility of linking students from around the world in real-time speaking exercises at little or no cost. This may be an area worth developing. New developments such as *Fast ForWord,* which enable students to slow down parts of words or the use of other programmes to slow down speech, may have a big impact on the use of computers for speech tuition.

In this study, students did not appear to be utilising the wide variety of programs and websites available in centres. Many could not remember the names of programs, which possibly indicates they do not spend a lot of time at one site. Advisors and teachers could take a more active role in promoting the use of programs and websites by naming them in student plans or giving students a wider range of sites to access when students present their needs. Allowing students access to the self-access interactive catalogue from their own home computers, as some centres already do, could also encourage use of a wider range of resources.

Students do not value CALL as greatly as staff which perhaps suggests it should only be used to meet needs where it is demonstrably better than other resources. Staff may overvalue the computer because they see its potential rather than the reality of the programs presently on offer.

Although students liked a wide variety of CALL programs they preferred programs that were interactive or that allowed them to measure their progress. Programs with a more holistic approach, combining a number of different skill areas and varieties of presentation, and which allowed self-marking, were popular. However, programs that accompanied known and trusted texts were also seen as very useful despite offering a more limited range of interaction.

## Further research recommendations

Although this survey managed to include a wide range of tertiary institutions, the number of responses was not large and further work in this area could profitably take a smaller number of institutions of a similar type and interview a larger number of participants in depth about the specific difficulties or benefits they find with self-access CALL. Similar work could be done using some of the more popular software to try and ascertain exactly what students find useful about certain programs and which programs they tried to use but found unhelpful. Given students' conclusions that other resources are as, if not more, useful than CALL, it is worth researching other resources to find out why students find them useful and in what areas and then determine if CALL is capable of providing the same help.

Although this may at present seem a minor field in second language acquisition the student of the future may find more and more of their courses involving CALL, and self-access centres could become more important as differentiation and autonomous learning become more widely accepted concepts (Healey, 1999). Students coming in to such centres will inevitably be more computer literate and some presently perceived barriers to CALL learning may disappear. It is

important for both teachers and researchers to stay informed about the rapid changes that the field is undergoing and how this influences student perceptions. This requires surveys to be repeated at different time intervals.

Autonomous students may perceive CALL as useful in very different areas to those who are looking for structure and remedial teaching. This study did not intend to differentiate between these two groups although this would be an interesting extension for the future. Sobkowiak (2005), in his description of his own attempts to learn German in a blended learning situation, came to the conclusion that motivation drove autonomy and that autonomy was the driver for ICT (Information and Communications Technologies) use, not vice versa. Software and web sites available will offer different degrees of choice and prescriptiveness. Again, student reaction to this would be a further area worthy of research. It would be an interesting extension of this study to find out which students preferred the holistic type of software such as *Issues in English* as compared to the practice exercise software such as *English Grammar in Use*. It is not assumed that the same software will meet the needs of every student but investigating which software will satisfy the learning styles of different students would extend this idea even further.

Students seemed very limited in their choice of software and websites, and researching the effect of introducing more targeted catalogues, which connect students' needs to available resources, could determine if students' perception of usefulness is affected by greater access to more varied work, or if staff recommendations have greater influence.

Paticipants found that CALL was not useful for developing their speaking skills. Yet, in the specific areas they were asked to indicate where CALL was useful, they mentioned that the computer was useful for pronunciation practice (ranked 8$^{th}$ by students and 4$^{th}$ by teachers) and teaching new words (ranked 7$^{th}$ by students 13$^{th}$ by teachers). It is possibly worth trying to examine why students have these contradictory feelings about how useful the computer is for

teaching speaking. It may be that the programs on offer to students are too restrictive, i.e. only teaching pronunciation, and the type of programmes students really require is something more interactive. Overall, staff were much more positive than students about the potential of CALL to help student language learning in these four modes. However, staff responses largely correlated with the ranking of importance of the modes by students.

Students felt the provision of reading and listening material was a positive feature of CALL and improving their vocabulary was seen as the most useful feature that CALL offered. What is uncertain is exactly what features of CALL students felt improved their vocabulary and this area needs more in-depth study.

The effect of greater integration of classroom and self-access centre work also needs further study. Is collaboration with classwork a means of increasing learner commitment and effective use of CALL in centres or does it distract from students' real language learning needs? Similarly, how is the digitalisation of listening tasks and video viewing affecting learner uptake? Does it make it easier for the learner to manipulate the materials and does this have consequences for uptake of language learning?

The possibilities for CALL seem unlimited but in any future research the affective factors and the desire for connection with teachers must also be considered. This study indicates that this is an area that is still important to students. CALL is now well-accepted by students and even more highly valued by staff but as yet it has not become sufficiently appealing to self-access students in New Zealand tertiary institutions to usurp more conventional resources.

# Appendices

A Consent forms

Administrator Information Sheet and Consent Form

Teacher Information Sheet and Consent Form

Participant Information Sheet and Consent Form

B Participant Questionnaire

C Staff Questionnaire (Administrator/ Teacher)

D Interview Questions

# Appendix A

THE UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND
STUDENT LEARNING CENTRE

Mrs K Parker

Applied Language Studies
And Linguistics
The University of Auckland
Private Bag 92019
Auckland, New Zealand

Telephone: 64 9 373 7599 x 88197
Fax : 64 9 308 23 60
g.barkhuizen@auckland.ac.nz

Title of project: A study of CALL (Computer-assisted Language Learning) and Self -Access for ESOL.
Researcher: Mrs Kathryn Parker

To Principal of School and/or CEO and /or Director

My name is Kathryn Parker. I am the Head of Language Support at a local high school but am for this year attached to the Student Learning Centre at The University of Auckland as a research associate. I have been awarded a New Zealand Science, Mathematics and Technology Teacher Fellowship (administered by The Royal Society) to study CALL (computer-assisted language learning) and self-access for ESOL students. I hope to take the knowledge gained by this study back to secondary teachers by publishing in a local TESOLANZ Journal. I would like to find out how useful teachers and students find CALL in different aspects of language learning and which programmes and websites they feel are useful particularly for younger learners. I would also like to understand the routines and best use of other materials found in different centres. As you may be aware secondary schools seldom have the facilities for this type of centre so I am really trying to work out how all these elements can be adapted for use on a much smaller scale, particularly for schools that have only a few ESOL students.

If you are willing for your centre to take part in this study, I would ask some teachers and students (those available on the day who would not be inconvenienced) to complete a questionnaire (this takes about 10 minutes). I would also like to interview both yourself and a few teachers who are able or willing. Neither teachers nor students will have to write their names on the questionnaires unless they specifically wish to do so. Participation or non-participation by teachers and students should not affect their relationship with this centre or the grades of students

All information collected in this study will be treated in an anonymous way, and the name of the school, teachers and students who take part will not be used in any papers or articles reporting this study unless you and they agree. For a period of up to two weeks from the commencement of the research project, you may withdraw your school or any information traceable to your school from the project without having to state a reason. All questionnaires will be stored at the university in a locked cupboard for 6 years then destroyed by the department administrator and some information may also be used in a future MA study. Tapes will be held by the researcher and deleted at the end of this study. If you give your full name and a contact e-mail address and I use a quote from you I will send it to you first in case you want to change what you have said. If you do not give me a contact address and I use a quote from you there will not be an opportunity to change it. You are free to stop doing the questionnaire or interview at any time without giving any reasons, and you may withdraw any information traceable to you at any time up to two weeks after your participation. You can put your name on the questionnaire if you give me permission to use it but if you would prefer to not have your name used then just take note of the number on the top of the paper and if you want to withdraw tell me that number.

I will contact you in a few days to discuss this matter further. If at any time you have any queries or wish to know more please phone me on (09)5344492 ext 842 or write to me at: Department of applied Language Studies and Linguistics, The University of Auckland, Private Bag 92019, Auckland.

Many thanks
Kathryn Parker BA. Higher Dip Tch. Cambridge Cert. TEFLA., Dip NZTESSOL

For any queries regarding ethical concerns please contact: The Chair, The University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee, The University of Auckland, Private Bag 92019, Auckland. Telephone 373-7999 ext.

88197. or Associate-Professor Gary Barkhuizen, The University of Auckland, Private Bag 92019, Auckland telephone (09)3737599 ext 88197 g.barkhuizen@auckland.ac.nz

APPROVED BY THE UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND HUMAN PARTICIPANTS ETHICS COMMITTEE on the

8th of June 2005 for a period of 3 years, from 8/6/05 Reference 2005/217

THE UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND
STUDENT LEARNING CENTRE

Mrs K Parker

Applied Language Studies and Linguistics
The University of Auckland
Private Bag 92019
Auckland, New Zealand

Telephone: 64 9 373 7599 x 88197
Fax : 64 9 308 23 60
g.barkhuizen@auckland.ac.nz

PRINCIPAL /CEO / HEAD of SCHOOL CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH PROJECT

*THIS CONSENT FORM WILL BE HELD FOR A PERIOD OF THREE YEARS*

Title of project: A study of CALL (Computer-assisted Language Learning) and Self-Access for ESOL.
Researcher: Mrs Kathryn Parker
To the Principal / CEO / Head of School

I have been given and have understood an explanation of this research project. I have had an opportunity to ask questions and have them answered. I have also had time to consider whether to take part.

I understand that taking part in this study is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw from the research at anytime without giving a reason, irrespective of whether or not payment is involved and that I may withdraw any information traceable to me at any time up to two weeks after my participation. I understand that material gathered for this study may be used in future research study and will be held for up to three years when it will be destroyed by the researcher.

I understand that my participation in this study is confidential and that no material that could identify me will be used in any reports on this study unless I have given specific permission below. I agree that no staff member or student who undertakes to answer questions will be affected in any way in terms of their employment, marks or position in this centre because of their participation or non-participation.

I give/ do not give (cross out what does not apply) permission for my name to be used.

I agree/ do not agree (cross out what does not apply) that I may be audio-taped and understand that, even if I agree, I may choose to have the recorder turned off at any time.

I agree to take part in this research and to allow students and teachers who wish to take part to do so.

Signature: _____
Name (please print clearly): _____
Date: _____

APPROVED BY THE UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND HUMAN PARTICIPANTS ETHICS COMMITTEE on the

8th of June 2005 for a period of 3 years, from 8/6/05 Reference 2005/217

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Applied Language Studies
And Linguistics
The University of Auckland
Private Bag 92019
Auckland, New Zealand

Telephone: 64 9 373 7599 x 88197
Fax : 64 9 308 23 60
g.barkhuizen@auckland.ac.nz

A Study of CALL (computer-assisted language learning) & Self-Access for ESOL

Participant Information Sheet- Teachers

You are invited to take part in a research project to find out what computer programs (or websites) are most useful for students who are learning English as a second language. This information will be used to help secondary school teachers understand how useful computer work is thought to be by students and teachers in different areas of learning English such as listening, reading, writing and speaking. The Centre you are working in at the moment has given permission for me to ask teachers and students if they wish to take part. This information will be confidential to the researcher and will not affect your employment in this centre in any way. An article may be printed in a research journal using this information.

If you agree to be involved, I would ask you to fill in a questionnaire which will take about 10 minutes to complete. You can ask me for help to do this at any time. If you have any extra time at the end I would like to talk to you for about five minutes about your use of computers and will ask you if you are willing to do this. If you don't have time to talk that's fine, just filling in the questionnaire will be very helpful. Interviews may be taped so the researcher can check her notes and these will be kept by her until the end of the study and then deleted. However, if you do not want to be taped the recorder can be turned off at any time even after the interview has started.

If the information you provide is stored or published this will be done in a way that does not identify you as its source unless you have given permission. All data will be stored at the university in a locked cupboard for 6 years then destroyed by the department administrator. Some information may also be used in a future MA study. If you give your full name and a contact e-mail address and I use a quote from you I will send it to you first in case you want to change what you have said. If you do not give me a contact address and I use a quote from you there will not be an opportunity to change it. However, if you agree to do the questionnaire and interview, you are free to withdraw your participation at any time without giving any reasons, and you may withdraw any information traceable to you at any time up to two weeks after your participation. You can put your name on the questionnaire if you give me permission to use it but if you would prefer to not have your name used then just take note of the number on the top of the paper and if you want to withdraw tell me that number.

Thank you very much for your time and help in making this study possible. If you have any queries or wish to know more please phone or write to: Mrs Kathryn Parker, The Student Learning Centre, The University of Auckland, Private Bag 92019, Auckland. E-mail: kparker@orcon.net.nz Telephone 373 7599 extension 88850.

Many thanks
Kathryn Parker BA. Higher Dip Tch., Cambridge Cert. TEFLA., Dip NZTESSOL

For any queries regarding ethical concerns please contact: The Chair, the University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee, The University of Auckland, Private Bag 92019, Auckland. Telephone 373-7999 ext. 88197. or Associate-Professor Gary Barkhuizen, the University of Auckland, Private Bag 92019, Auckland telephone (09)3737599 ext 88197 g.barkhuizen@auckland.ac.nz

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Applied Language Studies and
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Private Bag 92019
Auckland, New Zealand

Telephone: 64 9 373 7599 x 88197
Fax : 64 9 308 23 60
g.barkhuizen@auckland.ac.nz

TEACHER CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH PROJECT

*THIS CONSENT FORM WILL BE HELD FOR A PERIOD OF THREE YEARS*

Title of project: A study of CALL (Computer-assisted Language Learning) and Self-Access for ESOL.
Researcher: Mrs Kathryn Parker
To Teachers

I have been given and have understood an explanation of this research project. I have had an opportunity to ask questions and have them answered. I have also had time to consider whether to take part. I understand that permission for my participation has been given by the head of this centre but my non-participation will not affect me in any way.

I understand that taking part in this study is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw from the research at any time without giving a reason, irrespective of whether or not payment is involved and that I may withdraw any information traceable to me at any time up to two weeks after my participation. I understand that material gathered for this study may be used in future research study and will be held for up to six years.

I understand that my participation in this study is confidential and that no material that could identify me will be used in any reports on this study unless I have given specific permission below. I understand that the testing will be stopped if I am in any discomfort and that I may ask for help if I find any questions puzzling.

I give/ do not give (cross out what does not apply) permission for my name to be used.

I agree/ do not agree (cross out what does not apply) that I may be audio-taped and understand that, even if I agree, I may choose to have the recorder turned off at any time.

I agree to take part in this research.

Signature: _____

Name (please print clearly): _____

Date: _____

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STUDENT LEARNING CENTRE

Mrs K Parker
**Applied Language Studies and Linguistics**
The University of Auckland
Private Bag 92019
Auckland, New Zealand
Telephone: 64 9 373 7599 x 88197
Fax : 64 9 308 23 60
g.barkhuizen@auckland.ac.nz

## A Study of CALL (computer-assisted language learning) & Self-access for ESOL

**Student Information Sheet**

You are invited to take part in a research project to find out what computer programs (or websites) are most useful for students who are learning English as a second language. This information will be used to help secondary school teachers understand how useful computer work is thought to be by students and teachers in different areas of learning English such as listening, reading, writing and speaking. The Centre you are working in at the moment has given permission for me to ask students if they wish to take part. This information will be confidential and will not affect your participation or marks in this centre in any way. An article may be printed in a research journal using this information.

If you agree to be involved, I would ask you to fill in a questionnaire which will take about 10 minutes to complete. You can ask me for help to do this at any time. If you have any extra time at the end I would like to talk to you for about five minutes about your use of computers and will ask you if you are willing to do this. If you don't have time that's fine, just filling in the questionnaire will be very helpful. Interviews may be taped so the researcher can check her notes and these will be kept by her until the research is finished and then deleted. However, if you do not want to be taped the recorder can be turned off at any time even after the interview has started.

If the information you provide is stored or published this will be done in a way that does not identify you as its source unless you have given permission. All questionnaires will be stored at the university in a locked cupboard for 6 years then destroyed by the department administrator and some information may also be used in a future MA study. Tapes will be held by the researcher for up to three years and then deleted. If you give your full name and a contact e-mail address and I use a quote from you I will send it to you first in case you want to change what you have said. If you do not give me a contact address and I use a quote from you there will not be an opportunity to change it. You are free to stop doing the questionnaire or interview at any time without giving any reasons, and you may withdraw any information traceable to you at any time up to two weeks after your participation. You can put your name on the questionnaire if you give me permission to use it but if you would prefer to not have your name used then just take note of the number on the top of the paper and if you want to withdraw tell me that number.

Thank you very much for your time and help in making this study possible. If you have any queries or wish to know more please phone or write to:
Mrs Kathryn Parker, the University of Auckland, Private Bag 92019, Auckland.
E-mail: kparker@orcon.net.nz Telephone (09)5344492 ext 842
Many thanks. Kathryn Parker BA. Higher Dip Tch. Cambridge Cert. TEFLA. Dip NZTESSOL

For any queries regarding ethical concerns please contact: The Chair, the University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee, the University of Auckland, Private Bag 92019, Auckland. Telephone 373-7999 ext. 88197. or Associate-Professor Gary Barkhuizen, the University of Auckland, Private Bag 92019, Auckland telephone (09)3737599 ext 88197 g.barkhuizen@auckland.ac.nz
APPROVED BY THE UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND HUMAN PARTICIPANTS ETHICS COMMITTEE on the 8th of June 2005 for a period of 3 years, from 8/6/05 2005/217

THE UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND
STUDENT LEARNING CENTRE

Mrs K Parker
Applied Language Studies and Linguistics
The University of Auckland
Private Bag 92019
Auckland, New Zealand

Telephone: 64 9 373 7599 x 88197
Fax : 64 9 308 23 60
g.barkhuizen@auckland.ac.nz

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH PROJECT

*THIS CONSENT FORM WILL BE HELD FOR A PERIOD OF SIX YEARS*

Title of project: A study of CALL (Computer-assisted Language Learning) and Self-access for ESOL.
Researcher: Mrs Kathryn Parker
To students.

I have been given and have understood an explanation of this research project. I have had an opportunity to ask questions and have them answered. I have also had time to consider whether to take part. I understand that permission for my participation has been given by the head of this centre but my non-participation will not affect me in any way.

I understand that taking part in this study is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw from the research at any time without giving a reason, irrespective of whether or not payment is involved and that I may withdraw any information traceable to me at any time up to two weeks after my participation. I understand that material gathered for this study may be used in future research study and will be held for up to six years.

I understand that my participation in this study is confidential and that no material that could identify me will be used in any reports on this study unless I have given specific permission below. I understand that the testing will be stopped if I am in any discomfort and that I may ask for help if I find any questions puzzling.

I give/ do not give (cross out what does not apply) permission for my name to be used.

I agree/ do not agree (cross out what does not apply) that I may be audio-taped and understand that, even if I agree, I may choose to have the recorder turned off at any time.

I agree to take part in this research.

Signature: _____

Name (please print clearly): _____

Date: _____

## Appendix B

**A Study of CALL and Self-Access for ESOL**

**Participant Questionnaire**

Name (optional)_____ Your personal number._____

e-mail or address (optional)_____

Please read Participant information sheet before filling in this form. If you have never used a computer or you are under 16 years old please give the form back to the researcher. Thank you.

1 I am female☐ male ☐

2 I am 16 years to 25 ☐ over 25 years ☐

3 My nationality is _____ My first language is_____

4 My English level is Beginner ☐ Intermediate ☐ Advanced ☐

5 I have been learning English for
- more than 10 years ☐
- more than 5 years (less than 10) ☐
- more than 2 years (less than 5) ☐
- less than 2 years ☐

6 I have been using a computer for
- more than 10 years ☐
- more than 5 years (less than 10) ☐
- more than 2 years (less than 5) ☐
- less than 2 years ☐

7 I have used the computer to learn English this year

Often ☐ Sometimes ☐ Rarely☐

8 I used the computer to learn English before I came to this centre.

Often ☐ Sometimes ☐ Rarely☐

9 Are computers useful for learning English?

Not useful☹ ☐ Sometimes useful ☐ Useful ☐ Very useful☺ ☐

10 The things the computer helps me with best in learning English (in self-access) are:

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Writing | Not useful☹ ☐ | Sometimes useful ☐ | Useful ☐ | Very useful☺ ☐ |
| Reading | Not useful☹ ☐ | Sometimes useful ☐ | Useful ☐ | Very useful ☺ ☐ |
| Listening | Not useful☹ ☐ | Sometimes useful ☐ | Useful ☐ | Very useful ☺ ☐ |
| Speaking | Not useful☹ ☐ | Sometimes useful ☐ | Useful ☐ | Very useful ☺ ☐ |

11. Put numbers in the boxes below to show which are the things computer programs or websites which teach English (in self-access) do best. Put 10 for the best thing they do 9 for the next best on down to 1. You do not have to use all the numbers if you do not think they do 10 things well.

| writing | reading | listening | speaking |
|---|---|---|---|
| Correcting errors | Providing interesting reading | Providing interesting listening material | Giving me people to talk to in English |
| Writing fast | Teaching me to find main ideas | Helping me to understand what I listen to. | Pronunciation practice |
| Ordering my writing | Helping me understand what I read | Helping me understand different accents | Teaching me to say new words |
| Giving me ideas to write about | Improving my vocabulary | | Helping me to speak without being shy |
| Improving my grammar | | | |

12 Is there something that computers do well in English teaching that has not appeared in question 10 or 11?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

13. List the programs/websites you think are most useful for you to learn English by yourself and tick why you like them. They can be programs you use or have used in this centre or anywhere else. You can look at the list of programs the researcher has if you have forgotten some names.

| Program Name | Most useful for learning English | Easy to use | Gives feedback | Lets you work at your own rate | Interesting or enjoyable | Other reasons |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | |

14 If you ticked “other reasons” above say what those reasons were.

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15. How do other resources compare to computer resources (CALL) when you are learning English but are not in a class. Tick in the box that agrees with your opinion.

| | These are more useful than CALL ☺ | These are about the same usefulness as CALL 😐 | These are less useful than CALL ☹ |
|---|---|---|---|
| Textbooks | | | |
| Videos | | | |
| Television | | | |
| One to one help | | | |
| Magazines | | | |
| Worksheets | | | |
| Listening cassettes | | | |
| Other resources | | | |
| | | | |

16 If there is anything else you would like to add about using the computer to learn English please write it here.

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## Appendix C

## A Study of CALL and Self -Access for ESOL

**Staff Questionnaire (previously Teacher and Administrator Questionnaire)**

Name (optional) _____ Your personal number._____

E-mail or address (optional) _____

Please read Teacher information sheet before filling in this form. If you have never used a computer or you are under 16 years old please give the form back to the researcher. Thank you.

1 I am female ☐ male ☐

2 I am 16 years to 25 ☐ over 25 years ☐

1 I have taught English for
- more than 10 years ☐
- more than 5 years (less than 10) ☐
- more than 2 years (less than 5) ☐
- less than 2 years ☐

2 I have been using a computer for
- more than 10 years ☐
- more than 5 years (less than 10) ☐
- more than 2 years (less than 5) ☐
- less than 2 years ☐

5 I have used the computer to teach English this year

Often ☐ Sometimes ☐ Rarely ☐

6 I have used the computer to teach English before this year.

Often ☐ Sometimes ☐ Rarely ☐

7 Are computers useful for learning English in self-access situations?

Not useful ☐ Sometimes useful ☐ Useful ☐ Very useful ☐

8. How useful is the computer for students learning English (in self-access situations) in the following area?

Writing Not useful ☐ Sometimes useful ☐ Useful ☐ Very useful ☐

Reading Not useful ☐ Sometimes useful ☐ Useful ☐ Very useful ☐

Listening Not useful ☐ Sometimes useful ☐ Useful ☐ Very useful ☐

Speaking Not useful ☐ Sometimes useful ☐ Useful ☐ Very useful ☐

9. Put numbers in the boxes below to show which things computer programs or websites (which teach English in self-access situations) do best. Put 10 for the best thing they do, 9 for the next best, on down to 1. You do not have to use all the numbers if you do not think they do 10 things well.

| writing | reading | listening | speaking |
|---|---|---|---|
| Correcting errors | Providing interesting reading | Providing interesting listening material | Giving me people to talk to in English |
| Writing fast | Teaching students to find main ideas | Helping students to understand what they listen to. | Pronunciation practice |
| Ordering writing | Helping students understand what they read | Helping students understand different accents | Teaching students to say new words |
| Giving students ideas to write about | Improving vocabulary | | Helping students to speak without being shy |
| Improving grammar | | | |

10. Is there something that computers do well in English self-access that has not appeared in question 8 or 9?

_____
_____
_____
_____

11. List the programs/websites you think are most useful for teaching English in self-access and tick why you like them. They can be programs students have used in this centre or any others you have used or seen. You can look at the list of programs the researcher has to remind yourself of the names of commonly used material.

| Program Name | Most useful for learning English | Easy to use | Gives feedback | Lets student work at their own pace | Interesting or enjoyable | Other reasons |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | |

12 If you ticked “other reasons” above say what those reasons were.

_____
_____
_____
_____

13. Compare resources used in self-access? Tick in the box that agrees with your opinion.

| | These are more useful than CALL ☺ | These are about the same usefulness as CALL 😐 | These are less useful than CALL ☹ |
|---|---|---|---|
| Textbooks | | | |
| Videos | | | |
| Television | | | |
| One to one help | | | |
| Magazines | | | |
| Worksheets | | | |
| Listening cassettes | | | |
| Other resources | | | |
| | | | |

Do you feel the investment in computing software and hardware has any problems or benefits for institutions other than pedagogical concerns? -

_____
_____
_____
_____

Do you think computer-assisted language learning is better used in class situations or self-access situations?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

If there is anything else you would like to add about the use of computers to learn English please write it here. Feel free to express your opinions about the usefulness of computers in a self-access situation.

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

## Appendix D


Mrs K Parker
Applied Language Studies and Linguistics
The University of Auckland
Private Bag 92019
Auckland, New Zealand

Telephone: 64 9 373 7599 x 88197
Fax : 64 9 308 23 60
g.barkhuizen@auckland.ac.nz

A Study of CALL (computer-assisted language learning) & Self-Access for ESOL

Interview Questions – these questions are a guideline only and will vary according to the different situations investigated. It is not expected that administrators or teachers will be able to answer them all but that they will act as a basis for discussion.

Can you explain the purpose of this self-access centre?

How is attendance at self-access organised?

Do students come in their own time or are they scheduled in?

Do you have dedicated staff and if so how many and what are their duties?

How are student needs assessed and how are they directed to appropriate material?

How do you catalogue materials so they are easy to access?

Is there anything in the set-up of your self-access area that you feel could be improved or that you would do differently given the opportunity?

What do you think students gain from self-access?

What materials do you think are most useful in helping student acquisition of English and why?

What materials are most popular with students and why?

Do you believe CALL has any advantages over other types of self-access provision?

Do you believe CALL has any disadvantages compared to other types of self-access provision?

What CALL programmes do you have available to students?

Which CALL materials do you believe are most useful for students and why?

What features of these programmes are particularly useful?

What have you observed about the students who have used these programs?

Were these programs affordable and are they readily available?

Which CALL materials are most popular with students and why?

Have teachers developed their own CALL material?

Which of the CALL materials you have or know about do you believe would be suitable for secondary level students wanting an academic course?

What pedagogical areas are not yet covered or covered poorly by CALL materials?

What advice would you give to a secondary teacher, with a small budget, attempting to set up a small self-access facility that was to incorporate CALL?

# Appendix E

## French centre

### *Nancy II*

It was in the Centre de Researches et d'Applications Pedagogiques en Langues (CRAPEL) of Nancy ll in France, in1974, that research on self-directed learning in self-access started (Healey, 1999: 391) "A major focus of its work has been on teaching learners how to work in autonomous settings." CRAPEL was founded by Yves Chalon, who as part of a Committee informing the council of Europe's Modern Languages Project made "autonomy" an important element in the framework (Bailey, Gremmo and Riley, 2001). Chalon created the first "tailor-made" (Gremmo and Riley, 1995: 153-156) self-access centre and then the first big multi-lingual centre. His work continued at CRAPEL under Henri Holec, Edith Esch, Philip Riley (the present director of the centre), Marie-Jose Gremmo and others dedicated to the idea that language learners should determine why and how they should study (Melanges Crapel, 2006).

Marie-Jose Gremmo has been critical of the present use of CALL and it seemed important to find out why. Gremmo kindly gave me two days of her precious holiday time to explain how the self-access centre at CRAPEL operated and what she believed were the most important resources in a self-access centre. Because it was holiday time the centre was closed and no students could be observed but it only made the stunning size of the centre even more obvious. The centre consisted of a very large resource area with shelves of resources, two enormous computer rooms and two counselling or conversation rooms. Although the campus was built in the 1960's the centre had only been upgraded only five years previously. The reason for the enormous size of the centre became clear when Gremmo explained that there were four to five thousand users of the centre out of a total student population of 10,000. Three thousand students who attend specialist language courses use the centre well. First and second year students are obliged to sit an exam in

a foreign language and so most use the centre's resources. Another two thousand students are studying French as a foreign language and also use it. The centre can be "crammed" when students are under pressure but Gremmo said, despite the large numbers of students, they saw very few autonomous students who were able to work independently.

The centre was extremely well-equipped. There were numerous computers, although Gremmo pointed out they were possibly not what would be chosen now. There were facilities for students to tape themselves using cameras and playback, satellite television and cable television (which some students used to get news from home), cassette players sitting in the desks, video recorders (although it was intended to update videos to CD-ROMS), textbooks, magazines (not very popular) and department libraries. There was an analogue tape service catering for numerous languages but this would soon be digitalised. The catalogue was computerised but could also be accessed in paper form. The department was staffed with a full-time technician, two documentalists in charge of cataloguing and buying resources, one full-time and two part-time people on the reception desk, a director and two part-time counsellors. The centre also relied on a lot of voluntary workers. Counselling counted as teaching but there were no teaching staff attached to the centre at the present time.

Despite this impressive array of resources it was obvious that what Gremmo values most is developing the students' learning competence, so they use these resources according to their individual needs. She believes any material can be used to teach language, the more authentic the better, as long as the learner knows what it is and what they want to do with it: "We can make any document a learning document. What transforms the document into learning materials is the action of the learner." She therefore, sees the Internet as an impressive source of would–be learning materials and situations, but the action of the learner is fundamental. Thus the training of the learner is important and helping students find adequate resources. She explains:

> Given that most of our teaching is directed at moving students to working autonomously, what is important to teach students before they use self-access CALL? Firstly, moving students to notice authentic text. Would I have used

> the same English? The same way of constructing? Once I have written it, how does it go in terms of English? This is when computers could be useful [although] its difficult for computers to analyse writing….Some students have some skills outside language learning that can be very useful inside language learning; e.g. has [he got] computer skills [then] he can use corpus linguistics. Teaching them before doesn't make sense. That's coming from a teacher context. Teach them while they're using self-access so they reflect while they discussing that. What is important is to teach them how they think, how they learn.….this is important in self-access because if they don't understand you can give them a demonstration…..listen to what they say and the way they say it. Ask questions so that the person discusses why he has done it this way ….he reflects on the way he should [have done it] …..Pinpoint need – the whole objective of counselling is to get the student to analyse the need.

Gremmo also outlined the way students are trained to look for mistakes in their work before they see the counsellor and the usefulness of corpus information when the student is unable to correct errors using a dictionary. She says noticing is a skill students need to be trained in. Also the relationship with the counsellor was important. The counsellor needs to adapt to the student's individuality and work out if the learner is confident, motivated by the learning situation, has a confident learning style and is willing to take risks. With computers the challenge is to make students use the computer more efficiently by working out what they do in front of the computer. Gremmo asks the question: What options does the student think they have and how does the computer pinpoint or make explicit learning for this individual? If the student chooses work that is too hard, and wants to struggle, that is a feature of autonomy. What help can the counsellor give the student? Making clear what level a resource is, seems to be one answer. Gremmo pointed out that is why they give a summary of resources in their centre's catalogue system. Gremmo and Riley (1995:160) point out this is where computers have advantages as they make "possible the cataloguing and retrieval of materials on the bases of configurations of descriptors far more numerous than any card-index could provide."

As for helping students choose a methodology, she has made the point before (Gremmo and Riley, 1995: 157-158) that

> any given methodology favours certain categories of learners and disadvantages others... [And] there are many different ways of being successful in language learning…we need to set up types of learning, not types of learners… [We need

> to] help learners to come to terms with their strengths and weaknesses, to learn a language efficiently in ways which are compatible with their personalities.

Asked what the connection was between CALL and counselling, Gremmo said 90% of distance education will fail if there is no adequate counselling. In 1995 Gremmo and Riley (ibid: 160) stated that

> some applications of educational technology are a real threat to both the understanding and practice of self-directed learning. It is perfectly possible to use highly sophisticated technology in a most directive, pedagogically retrograde way. CALL applications…are at best a useful but not essential tool, at worst thoroughly counter-productive. It is vital, in self-directed learning systems, that technology be at the service of the learners and not vice versa…'hi-tech' facilities are not a priority in setting up self-access systems…no technology has ever in itself helped anyone learn anything. The crucial elements in these systems are the learner-training and counselling services they offer. When learners in 'high-tech' resource centres are not trained to become competent autonomous learners, the centres risk the same fate as language laboratories suffered decades ago.

In the decade that has passed since she wrote this, despite the new opportunities technology now offers, Gremmo has not felt a need to change her position. So from the cradle of self-access, the message on the use of CALL is that it is only useful to the student if adequate counselling can help the student notice the gap between their own language and the authentic language material they meet in CALL situations. Helping students to find that authentic material and giving them strategies, such as how to use corpora, is an important part of moving students into autonomous learning. Finding the right match between methodology and the student's learning styles is also important. CALL may or may not find a place in this process depending on the individual student's needs.

## Hong Kong centres

It is perhaps appropriate, and slightly ironic, that one of the people credited with playing an important part in the development of self-access in Hong Kong was Philip Riley from CRAPEL (see link to HASALD http://lc.ust.hk/~centre/conf2004/riley.html). The 1990's saw an increased interest in autonomous learning in Hong Kong, which led to the creation of self-access centres in

seven of the Hong Kong universities, to support their English language courses. Morrison (2002: 73) reports that these centres all "attracted generous funding and were set up in large, well-appointed areas as technology-rich centres with large collections of materials and a wide range of audio-visual equipment."

Although some centres are now a little faded, and the equipment is ready for updating, the Hong Kong centres have been very influential in research efforts into advising, cataloguing and integration.

### *Hong Kong University of Science and Technology*

Hong Kong University of Science and Technology (HKUST) is a fairly new university, founded in 1991. It is a modern and beautifully situated on a hillside overlooking Clearwater Bay about thirty minutes out of central Hong Kong. The founders of the university were determined to create a world-class research institution (Kellogg-HKUST EMBA Program, 2003) and this is reflected in the current research budget which in 2006 stood at HK$269.5 million for a university with only 8,823 students (http://www.ust.hk/en/index.html).

Sarah Toogood, an advisor in the university self-access centre (and a language instructor in the language school to which the SAC is attached), and Richard Pemberton, previously the centre head, have written a number of papers on advising and learner autonomy. They have experimented with semester-long courses as part of the English language learning programme in the university, to introduce students to self-access learning. These involved students in: analysing their needs, setting goals, posting to a Web Board, touring the self-access centre, and undertaking two hours of self-access work per week (Benson & Toogood, 2002). Apart from this interesting research, what attracted me to this centre was a project Toogood and Pemberton supervised; The Virtual English Language Advisor (VELA). This is an " interactive, adaptive, dialogue-based system for providing case-specific advice to learners of English" (http://www.archetude.com/sarahtoogood/) and has been funded by the university grants council. All advisors in the self-access centre are teachers in the language school and although they are

allocated a number of hours to advise in the centre, Pemberton and Toogood developed the computer advisor because they felt there was a need for more advisory hours to be available to students than could be provided for within the Language School time allocation. The virtual advisor offers students the opportunity to narrow down the areas of need, and the programme then automatically directs students to the resources that will meet those needs, whether they are online or catalogued on the shelves of the centre (Toogood, 2005; Toogood, 2006). The students are stepped through a planning stage on the computer based on a model called FTG – focus (on the knowledge), transfer (using the knowledge) and general (exposure to authentic English). When the plan is complete the students send it to themselves or the advisor. Not everyone in the centre is enamoured of the online advisory set-up – VELA - with some students finding it a little tedious and other people finding that it does not necessarily fit their philosophy. There is, however, also a possibility VELA could be used to help secondary schools in Hong Kong promote reading, with centre staff taking training sessions. However, human language advisors are also considered very important and the centre has a reputation for researching ways to improve student/advisor contacts.

The real power of VELA is the ability to catalogue resources for other institutions who want to use it. When one institution catalogues texts or other resources such as web-site material (into appropriate skills and levels) this information can be utilised by another institution: thus minimising the workload for all concerned. Print materials available in one institution may not be available in another so they can be blocked from the database serving that institution. Online resources can be catalogued as they become available and thus the database can be kept current. Creating such a powerful database has been extremely expensive and on-going funding is an issue, so the potential of the virtual advisor has not yet been fully realised. At present, although not yet completely finished, it is being offered free to other universities and secondary schools who agree to help with the cataloguing. The English language self-access centre we are developing in my own secondary school is included in this group.

Elza Tsang, another advisor at the Centre, who has been involved with a project to bring self-access to secondary schools, offered to show me around the centre in the holiday period. There were no students present as the centre was officially closed, although it is usually open six days a week until 8 pm from Monday to Friday. The centre, purpose built in 1990 (Gardner and Miller, 1999), is packed with as many resources as can be fitted in to the available floor area of $300m^2$, but it uses the space very cleverly, dividing it into seven separate areas. There is a lobby and office area, a seminar room, audio area, a video and well-equipped multimedia room (satellite television was available), a reading and writing area and a large audiovisual and computer room. There is provision for both English and Chinese materials and foreign language materials are kept in the video area. A wide range of self-study materials for foreign languages are also available. There are large numbers of textbooks and audio and video tapes and reading material. Students can access the Virtual Learning Advisor from within the centre or anywhere with a net login.

Although it was not possible to see the centre under normal working conditions, reports from advisors and Gardner and Miller (1999) suggest it is extremely heavily patronised, not only by the local and mainland Chinese students but also by staff and classes from the Language School, who make use of material related to their courses. The centre is run by a director from the language school and administrative staff look after resources. Despite the emphasis on technology, the centre also had a card catalogue (one of only three I saw in my research). There were also numerous print materials written by advisors and available to students. So despite the focus on a technological solution to the need for more advisors than were available, and a clear focus on research, this centre remains a comfortingly human space. Further information about this self-access centre can be found at http://lc.ust.hk/~sac/

### *Hong Kong University*

The University of Hong Kong, overlooking the harbour in the middle of the island's main business district, is the oldest tertiary educational institute in Hong Kong and is proud of its prestigious reputation for attracting the largest number of postgraduate research students in the

territory (10% of the 19,000 student body.) Over 45% of staff come from overseas and the university attracts top researchers including Professor David Nunan, and many researchers into autonomy and self-access and CALL.

Peter Voller, who is well-known for his work on one-to-one counselling, showed me around the Meng Wah Language Resource Centre (LRC) which is a part of the English Centre in the University. It opens from Monday to Friday from 9am until 8pm. The centre is in a very large room divided into some smaller rooms and areas partitioned off by large bookshelves. It has extensive facilities and resources, comparable with HKUST but in a larger space. A virtual tour can be seen at the website provided at the end of this section. The centre has an activities room where students can practise videoing their presentations, or use an OHP, CD or tapes in a group or individually to practise their speeches. It has two large reading areas, and offers local newspapers or international magazines in English, a central bank of twelve computers, most of which can access the Internet and the Virtual English Centre (VEC), a bank of audiotape players which allow students to record and listen to themselves speaking, 12 DVD players and 18 special video televisions (each with two headphones) which have the capability of playing video subtitles. There were literally hundreds of videos and CD-ROMs of popular television shows and movies and Voller emphasized their popularity with students, especially in their attempts to understand speech and idiomatic language. He also mentioned the popularity of the activities room where teachers sometimes take discussion groups.

As in HKUST, Voller sees well-trained consultants as crucial to the centre functioning properly. Consultants are only available at limited times. Students can book online for a maximum of one consultation a week of 15 to 20 minutes duration. They can also book for discussion groups, which last 50 minutes, or workshops. In the year to May 2004, there were 1,120 consultations with advisory consultants, and 498 participants in discussion groups held three to five times a week (Annual Report, 2004). Teachers keep electronic notes on student profiles to assist the advising process.

Students also make extensive use of the Virtual English Centre (VEC) which allows them to identify suitable language learning materials in the centre and on the World Wide Web. Students are able to search a catalogue, maintained by Voller, by category e.g. academic English, study skills, TV entertainment, or they can search by media type, i.e. audio, computer, and worksheets. There are not many entries under the category of computer but a large resource bank of CD-ROMs is available. In May 2004 it was reported that 305 people a day were using the VEC, with the most popular pages being listening and IELTS preparation. SpeakEasy and the University Word Web were reported to be the most frequently used web sites (Website of Hong Kong University Annual Report, 2004). Other facilities included a conversation exchange programme which students could register for on the VEC.

It was obvious that this centre took their advisory service very seriously and would like to expand it. Voller is also interested in the VELA project and he is keen to see more integration with the English curriculum. At present only first-year students have the centre integrated into their course and it is voluntary for 2nd and 3rd year students. In 2005 only 20% of the student body were actively using the centre – the motivated and the desperate, as Voller says - but Voller feels more students could benefit.

Like HKUST, The University of Hong Kong's self-access centre is extremely well-resourced, stresses the importance of a sound advisory service, is using computers to give students easy access to suitable resources for their learning needs and has integrated CALL into the list of available materials, but offers a wide variety of other resources as well. Both centres are frustrated by a lack of advisory hours and both are striving for more integration with English Language Programmes. Further information about this self-access centre can be found at http://ec.hku.hk/vec/lrc/lrc.htm

### *City University of Hong Kong*

Our visit to the City University of Hong Kong was arranged at the last moment by another centre and it happened to be the week the centre was moving into a new facility. Tim Chung was, however, kind enough to show us around and let us see the many extremely useful booklets the centre had devised to help students with their work. These came under skills headings such as 'Speaking' or were directly related to subject areas, and used curriculum material to help students grasp essential vocabulary and appropriate genre. Whereas the professionally produced subject orientated books at HKUST were used in the English Language Department, at City University the self-access centre seemed to have included them in their work. A clear and helpful booklet was also given to new students to help them understand how the centre worked, explain the Independent Study Plan and point them to highly recommended resources in different skills areas. It included a number of websites. Another booklet listed pathways appropriate to different needs at different levels of competency.

The centre was compact and neatly and efficiently laid out, with a reception area (and a friendly receptionist); an advisory room and office; a technicians' room; a multimedia room with a number of computers; and a reference storage area. The main room had desks, a reading area with readers that could be issued to students to be taken out of the centre, a CALL/ CD-ROM corner (the centre had about 40 CALL programmes on offer), a movies section, a worksheets shelf, and video booths near a stand with video worksheets, reference books and textbooks shelves. There were an online catalogue and tape recorders, and laser disc players were available. Despite the holiday time and the disruption of the move, students were still accessing the centre and several were busy on worksheets and computers. Students are able to access the English Language school site called SOLO (Student Online Learning Opportunities) in the centre, or anywhere with a web connection (similar to the Hong Kong English Language School site). This site includes "Grammar surgery" and "Listen In" sections and other materials, so the emphasis in the Self-Access Centre was on advising and other materials. The Language Learning Advisory Service

(LLAS) consisted of teachers from the umbrella department of the English language Centre (ELC). Students need to make appointments with advisors and records are kept.

This was a small but efficient centre where the emphasis seemed to be on integration with student courses. The provision of guidance material in booklet form catered for those students who may not have felt comfortable with the computer catalogue, while the provision of the SOLO meant the focus of the centre was taken off CALL. Further information about this self-access centre can be found at http://www.cityu.edu.hk/elc/elc/facilities/index.html

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