
Review

New Frontiers in CALL: Negotiating Diversity

Reviewed by Jonathan J. Harrison

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The annual JALT CALL SIG conference was held from May 30 to June 1 at Nagoya University of Commerce & Business, a secluded, immaculately landscaped modern campus on the outskirts of Nagoya, Japan. Mostly sunny skies welcomed the presenters and participants to the lush, green campus.

On Saturday, registration began early at 9:00. Those who were not quite awake visited the basement of the Foyer Language Centre, which overlooked a pond, for coffee, tea, and a tranquil view. In this area, materials were on display from the conference sponsors, including The English Company, Macmillan, Pearson Longman, Cengage Learning, Oxford University Press, Cambridge University Press, Seibido, Perceptia Press, IATEFL Learning Tech, and the Extensive Reading SIG. For educators wishing to use Moodle, Manabu 3 was there to offer various Moodle-related services. The opening ceremony started just after 10 a.m. with workshops and presentations beginning at 10:40. With eleven sessions running concurrently until 4:30, there were some touchy choices to be made.

The Saturday morning speakers included John Paul Loucky, who presented *New Frontiers in Maximizing Online Vocabulary Learning*. He stressed the importance of intentional study of vocabulary and compared a few online reading comprehension and vocabulary

development programs and tests. His comparison introduced a number of Web sites, and he suggested integrating Web sites with 10 major learning phases to systematically teach and track vocabulary development online. Participants were able to try some of the Web sites and discuss their use of online vocabulary sites and their teaching philosophies.

Just after lunch, Thomas Pals presented *Simple Solutions: Creating Interactive Websites with Drag and Drop Wizzywigs*. Recognizing the difficulty many teachers encounter with technology, Pals described how to use WizzyWigs such as iWeb 08 and BlueVoda. The click and drop widgets make the creation of personal Web pages easy without writing any code. Pals mentioned that trends in higher education may leave part-time professors with limited resources and time. Creation of a personal Web site which can combine blogs, forums, and more recently, news clips, Google Maps, YouTube videos, and other widgets may offer a solution, especially as advertisements on the site could help with setup and hosting costs. His relaxed demeanor allowed the audience to ask questions about his Web pages, his program, and how to create pages to suit their individual needs. One of the great aspects of this conference was the availability of the presenters. A number of participants stayed after sessions, such as this one, to ask further questions.

Another Saturday afternoon presentation was *Anytime-Anywhere: Mobile Phone Applications for Modern Foreign Language Instruction* by George MacLean and James Elwood. MacLean and Elwood discussed using mobile phones and other technologies that students possess and have working knowledge of to engage students in English projects. One of these projects included requiring students to take pictures with their mobile phones and then import them into Word or PowerPoint. Students then made presentations to their note taking peers. Their peers evaluated the presentations using “clickers” which are wireless handheld devices that send a signal to a laptop computer allowing

every student to answer every question at the same time. One other task included having students record readings of a text and send the audio files to their teachers. Another was mobile phone video skits. To conclude, MacLean and Elwood described mostly positive results from a survey of student perceptions on the use of technology. This was one of various presentations that dealt with creative usage of mobile technology to motivate and educate students.

The final workshop I attended on Saturday was by Jason LaGreca. LaGreca began *Moodle and LAMS: Making e-learning Simpler in a Hands-on Workshop* by slapping traditional methods in the face, saying that Moodle is not an online textbook and it should not be used like one. His workshop focused on the use of LAMS, a learning activity management system, which allows for sequences of learning activities to be organized visually. On their computer screens, students see a diagram of activities which they, at their own pace, must work through individually and collaboratively to complete the lesson. Workshop participants were able to experience LAMS as students working through a sequence of a forum, some Internet research, and a discussion. Then participants were given a chance to be teachers and build a LAMS sequence of activities quite quickly using the drag and drop interface. For those new to Moodle, this was a great crash course. For those unfamiliar with LAMS, this was an impressive introduction.

Saturday's academic activities concluded with a keynote address by Dr. Phil Hubbard, Senior Lecturer in Linguistics and Director of the English for Foreign Students Program at the Stanford University Language Center. He spoke on *Developing CALL Theory: A New Frontier*. To summarize, CALL practice and research have been evolving rapidly over the last twenty years, while CALL theory has not. Theory is often borrowed, usually from SLA. He ended stating that CALL is a discipline only when those outside the field are convinced it is so. Now it is a practiced based field, and as the address title suggests, theory needs to be further developed.

After the keynote address, there was a change of venue as people filed out of the conference hall and into the evening's buffet hall. Plenty of salads, sandwiches, and sushi awaited the attendees. Glasses were filled before a few words and after a quick toast spirits mingled, and there was more networking before heading back into the heart of Nagoya.

Sunday workshops included Daniel Beck's workshop *Using Enhanced Podcasts to Extend Language Instruction*. Beginners attending this workshop were shown the ABCs of podcasting from setup to upload. Once the basics were on the table, participants were shown an enhanced podcast, from <gtbcast.com>, and how to use Garageband to add audio, video, pictures, and documents to a podcast. Teachers of all levels benefited; novices gained some practical know-how, and veteran podcasters were able to discuss equipment and various other aspects of podcasting.

In another Sunday presentation, Steve McCarty presented *Curtain Call: Online Performances for Integrative Motivation*. McCarty described the content-based curriculum at his college and the contests and other performance events, including podcasting, YouTube video, and a narrated slide show. The presentation focused on authentic performances with an expanded online audience and international recognition or feedback. Feedback obtained from interviews with students was discussed, and McCarty stated that a research topic yet to be explored is motivation and online performances.

After lunch on Sunday, Gavin Dudeney, Director for Consultants-E, gave the plenary address, *Brave New World, Web3D, Teaching, and Training*. With plenty of wit, Dudeney described Moodle and Blackboard as traditional before moving on to Web3D as both cutting-edge and the future. Second Life® (SL), as the leading player in Web3D, was introduced as possibly the tool for second language teachers now and in the near future. Second Life Educators (SLED) has over 130 participating universities, and SLanguages 2007 is an SL language

conference. Although stating he was not working for or selling SL, Dudeney presented how SL is currently used by educators in fields ranging from architecture to political science. Engaging the audience with statistics and stories, Dudeney painted an impressive picture of SL as a tool, with merits and demerits, to promote collaboration, creativity, engagement, and authenticity.

The final Sunday presentation I attended was *Using Librarything.com to Promote Extensive Reading* by Dale Brown. Brown demonstrated how his students used this commercial website to record what graded readers they had read and to write reviews of the books. He discussed both positive and negative student feedback. His results implied that when his students were given autonomy, they read on average approximately double the number of graded readers he could cover if he used a more teacher-centered approach.

JALTCALL 2008 was a fantastic experience. The picturesque location and facilities gave the conference a resort-like ambiance. The number of informative presentations and workshops and the variety of topics covered were mentally stimulating. The presenters and participants were all in good humor, and I felt a sense of teamwork as we were all working toward contributing to the education of our students and their understanding of technology and language. At the same time, we were enjoying the exploration and adaptation of technologies ourselves. The conference was a great place to network, as well as obtain fresh ideas, deeper knowledge, and new skills. If you would like more information, please contact the JALTCALL SIG at <<http://jaltcall.org>> or myself at <harrison@penta.ge.cst.nihon-u.ac.jp>. Looking forward to JALTCALL 2009!

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