

Looking Back 報告

JALTCALL 2012 conference reflection

Juanita Heighem

The JALTCALL 2012 conference took place from June 1 through 3, 2012 at Konan CUBE, Hirao School of Management, Konan University, Nishinomiya. The conference had an intriguing theme, *Beyond CALL: Integration, normalisation, or separation?*, and the discussions it inspired were numerous and wide in scope and left participants feeling that their attendance had indeed been time well spent. It was certainly time well spent for me, and I'm very grateful to the SIG for graciously giving me a JALTCALL conference pass to attend the event.

The weekend began with pre conference workshops on Friday evening with engaging options to choose from that included using iPads in class, game mechanics, automated feedback devices and using a free web-application to create sharable slideshows. These hands-on workshops eased participants into a weekend of non-stop sharing and learning. Throughout the two main days of the conference there was a wide variety of quality paper, show-and-tell and workshop presentations that ranged from the introductory level, for those new to using technology in their teaching, to the advanced, for those writing applications and programs for

teachers to use. Thus both the novice and the expert could find something of use and interest for their own particular context.

I myself benefited from many excellent presentations, two of which I will introduce here. Michael Wilkins and Craig Gamble gave a great workshop called *Social Media and Language Learning: The Advantages Facebook Brings to the Educational Arena*. This workshop highlighted the growing influence social media has on education, along side the well-founded concerns institutions have using social media as a learning platform. Some inventive, and invaluable, tips on how to use Facebook like a class blog or website were also given. Another exceptional presentation I saw was given by Bill Mboutsiadis. His show and tell *Digital Comics: Language Learning Narratives of Past Journeys, Present Realities and Imagined Futures* was informative, inspiring and fun. Bill explained how easy-to-use digital comics can be used to promote learner autonomy by giving students a creative outlet to develop and speak in their own voice. His arguments were convincing, and I was immediately able to put the tools he demonstrated to good use.

There were three invited speakers at the conference: keynote speaker Stephen Bax (University of Bedfordshire, UK), and plenary speakers Lance Knowles (DynEd International,

USA) and John Brine (University of Aizu, Japan). All three speakers had something of interest to share. Stephen Bax's discussion of the normalization of technology in education, the process of a technology becoming so much a part of teaching and learning that it becomes invisible—like paper and pens have become—was particularly thought provoking. Lance Knowles' talk emphasized differences China and Japan have in adopting technology, and he clearly thought China's approach was more effective. John Brine talked about the importance of educators considering both predictions and unintended outcomes of technology, and his pictorial history of the computer was very entertaining and highlighted how far technology, and our acceptance of it and dependence on it, has come in just a few decades.

The conference itself was extremely well organized. Conference co-chairs, Henry Wolf and Robert Chartrand, the site chair, Roger Palmer, and countless other volunteers are due a long round of applause for the success of their hard work. Konan CUBE was an excellent venue as it is close to public transportation, has first-rate facilities including state-of-the-art equipment, is easy to navigate and has a wonderful space for eating and networking. I'm quite sure we'll be seeing other JALT events held at this superb site.

I enjoyed this conference. It offered the opportunity to learn a lot through quality

presentations and workshops, and it was well run at a great venue. Over the years, JALTCALL has shown that it has high performance standards, and they live up to them year after year. With the next conference coming soon and celebrating JALTCALL's 20th anniversary, you might want to mark your calendar so that you can participate in what's likely to be another outstanding event.

Are you feeling inspired and interested in taking part in JALT CALL 2013?

Please see Hugh Nicoll's preview of the JALT CALL LD SIG Forum 2013, which can be found in the next section "Looking Forward."

**JALT 2012 National Conference, Reflection:
A Learning Community of Teachers**

Aiko Minematsu

'What a massive amount of input!' This was my thought as I got on the bullet train heading back home to Tokyo from Hamamatsu, where the 2012 JALT National Conference was held. I felt as if my head would explode from the plethora of teaching ideas that popped up in my head as I listened to different presentations and participated in discussions with teachers from around Japan, some even teaching outside the country. Though I am not much of an athlete, I was pretty certain that this is how it must feel like after running a full marathon: this feeling of great achievement and satisfaction after a full workout of presentations, discussions, mingling with

fellow teachers, and sharing ideas.

I got so much input and interacted with so many different people that it is quite challenging to process everything and put it all together. One of the first presentations that inspired me was the one given by Inggy Yuliani Pribady from Indonesia. She shared her work with junior high school students in her environmental-issues writing project. It was amazing to see the way her students developed through their work inside and outside the classroom. Other presentations also gave me practical ideas for how I might foster learner development in my own classroom. By the end of the first day, my mind was spinning wildly as I tried to organize everything I had seen, heard, and discussed with other teachers. Even after coming back to Tokyo, I still keep going back to the handouts and material I got during the conference, or remember bits and pieces of the presentations and conversations from the conference.

One truly inspiring presentation was given by one of the plenary speakers, Suresh Canagarajah. I have read some of Canagarajah's works, and empathize with his idea of bringing Western methods and "local/periphery" contexts together to create a hybrid methodology in the English classroom. So when I saw that he was giving a presentation titled "Periphery to the Center: Making a Difference," I was excited to go and see him present his ideas in person.

It turned out that not only was he an excellent presenter, he also articulated the dilemma that I have been having as a non-native speaker English teacher. This dilemma could be described as the feeling of having a double identity. For me this is the feeling of having an Asian identity matched with a westernized teaching belief. In other words, being in the *periphery* yet learning methodologies from *the center*, the Western community of practice. He introduced quotes from Wenger's (1999) *Communities of Practice*, pointing out that this "tension of conflicting identities" will never go away, and that instead of seeing this as conflicting viewpoints, he encouraged the audience to become "brokers," people who make new connections across different communities of practice. Moreover, he proposed that in order to bring new ideas and be a "broker" ourselves, we need to build an inclusive environment for professional development: a learning community instead of a teaching community.

His message was truly empowering for me, because wherever I go, I seem to end up feeling stuck in between the native-speaker/non-native speaker dichotomy especially in Japan, and especially at my workplace in a private secondary school. Hearing him speak made me feel that seeing myself as a "broker" and trying to make new and innovative connections between these communities would be so much more productive than feeling stuck in between

different communities. I feel that this self-perception may change the way I act in my own community of practice.

And it was after having such a revelation that I headed over to the LD SIG forum, where I was to give a presentation on "Learner Development through Self-evaluation and Reflection." Through my presentation, I shared my frustration regarding the assessment/evaluation system in secondary schools, and my attempt to encourage self-evaluation and reflection among my students with the use of reflection sheets. Because the SIG forum was set up to be interactive, I was able to have small discussions with various teachers as part of my presentation, and was pleasantly surprised to find that so many teachers had similar concerns about the evaluation system in their schools. I also enjoyed sharing ideas with them on how to foster learner development through self-evaluation and reflection.

At the end of the SIG forum, we broke into small discussion groups and each shared our thoughts and interests as well as reflecting on topics presented in the forum. As we conducted our discussions, it dawned on me that I was right in the middle of what Canagarajah described as "a learning community" of teachers. We were teachers with different teaching/learning backgrounds, from different communities of practice, and yet we were all working as "brokers" to create an inclusive community for our own professional

development.

Looking back on my experience at the JALT 2012 National Conference, it was that feeling of being a part of a learning community that was the most empowering. The thought of being a member of such a community motivates me to be innovative in my teaching practices, and although I was exhausted on the following day (which was a Monday!), it never killed my motivation and aspiration to develop as a teacher. It is this feeling of empowerment that continues to thrive in me as I participate in local SIG get-togethers, and it is my hope that this learning community continues to expand and develop. I hope to see you all again at JALT 2013!

Interested in taking part in JALT 2013?

Please see what Ian Hurrell, the new LD SIG programme Coordinator, has to say in his Call for Participation in the LD SIG Forum 2013, which can be found in the next section!