

Looking Back 報告

The Japanese Association of College English Teachers (JACET) 52nd International Convention in Kyoto, August 30 – September 1, 2013

Jim Ronald, Hiroshima Shudo University

I decided to attend this year's JACET annual convention, held in Kyoto at the end of August, simply because a friend on the organizing committee asked me to. I registered with a fair number of preconceptions that might otherwise have kept me from going: expectations of not many presentations in English, of a lot of presentations too bound up in theory and experimental data to be applicable to the actual experience of language learning in or beyond the classroom, and of not much of a showing for learner development. On all three counts, the JACET International Convention blew these preconceptions away. Over the three days of the convention, there were 27 presentations listed in the Learner Development content area, and more listed under other headings, making it the largest content area of the conference. The vast majority of the over 200 presentations at the conference were given in English. And many of the presentations I attended were excellent, reporting research and relating to classroom practice.

There are too many LD-related presentations to list here, but two excellent reports of research related to study abroad were given by Kay Irie with Stephen Ryan and by Chihiro Tajima, while Mike Stockwell's gave an inspiring account of project work resulting in authentic output: products with real world uses. I only stayed for the first two days of the conference, which meant that I missed the symposium led by Hideo Kojima, Yuka Kusanagi and Masuko Miyahara on support for learner autonomy, as well as quite a few other

presentations.

I've heard that in some ways this year's conference was different from in previous years: deliberately more international, with a large number of presentations given in English, by both Japanese and non-Japanese presenters, and with a broad range of language-education associations involved. Further, not only was there a large number of presentations, there was also a record number of 1,200 participants. Let's hope that this is not a one-off, but a sign of the direction in which JACET is moving. Certainly, if this year is any indication, as many LD SIG members already seem to know, the JACET International Convention has become an important event in the learner development calendar in Japan.

The PanSIG 2013 Collaborative Forum: *The World, the Language Learner, and Relationships* Saturday, May 18, 2013



by Jim Ronald (facilitator)

"Why make your life more complicated?" This slogan, for a cosmetics brand in Britain two or three decades ago, was not part of the vision for this year's PanSIG forum! It was a collaborative, interactive forum, shared by three SIGs:

Learner Development, Global Issues in Language Education, and Pragmatics. The forum comprised ten presentations, many spanning two or three of the SIGs' concerns, given by thirteen presenters from the three SIGs, in 4½ corners of the same

room. It was far from simple and took a lot of preparation!

The collaborative make-up of the forum, in line with the overall conference theme: From Many,



One: Collaboration, Cooperation and Community, aimed to counteract the “Twenty ghettos under one roof” feel that may result from the “one SIG, one room” way that the PanSIG

conference is usually organized. The title we settled on for the forum was an inclusive The World, the Language Learner, and Relationships. We even made sure that each corner of the room contained a mix of SIG concerns: after all, we didn’t want to find we had “Three ghettos in one room”!

Deciding on the forum title and identifying themes took a lot of discussion between SIG representatives, as did planning the timing and management of the forum. Our communication with presenters was not always all it could have been, which meant that although we, representatives, knew how the forum would be, some presenters felt unsure about important details such as timing or corner-sharing. However, once we got started, everything fell into place, and the corners were well attended, with a good chance for all presenters to join at least one other presentation, to discuss the issues raised in their corner, and finally to hear from each of the other corners. In this way, the various goals of the forum were largely met.

A combined introduction to each of the presentations of the forum is being prepared for the conference proceedings but here, for now, is a list of presenters and topics:

Lori Zenuk-Nishide, Donna Tatsuki	The Benefits of Model United Nations Simulations
Andy Barfield	Exploring contradictions between learner autonomy and critical pedagogy for social justice
Louise Haynes	Raising the topic of the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power disaster
Jane Joritz-Nakagawa	Poetry, global issues, critical thinking and personal growth
Marybeth Kamibepu, Eleanor Kelly	Connecting drama and global/social issues in language learning
Erina Ogawa	Helpful educational manga textbook activities
Kevin Mark	Integrating learner development, global education and language awareness
Ian Hurrell	Introducing pragmatics: hearts and minds
Jim Ronald	Peer feedback: from hurtful to helpful
Seth Cervantes, Robert Olson	The pragmatics checklist: building awareness of interactional practices

Finally, to return to the question that did cross at least one of our minds during the lengthy exchanges of emails as we prepared for the forum, “Why make your life more complicated?”... Looking back, and thinking of what we learned, and of the relationships that were developed through all the preparations and through the forum itself, maybe we can answer that question with, “Well, this time it was worth it!”

Reflections on the LD Forum at CALL2013
Or “Can discourses of best practices in CALL
leave room for autonomous learning?”

Hugh Nicoll, Miyazaki Municipal University

Forum Title: *Digital literacies for autonomous learning*

Presenters: *Joe Tomei, Kevin Ryan, Robert Cochrane,*
Paul Beaufait, & Hugh Nicoll

CALL 2013, Shinshu University, Matsumoto-shi,
 Nagano 1 June 2013

<<http://conference2013.jaltcall.org/>>

Presenters and participants in the LD Forum at this year’s JALTCALL conference considered ways in which teachers may (or may not) be in a position to implement effective practices to support digital literacies for autonomous learning. When I began putting together our presenter team, I was primarily concerned with how to frame the notion of “best practices” in CALL – the conference theme this year – in relation to the goal of fostering autonomous learning in our classrooms. In reflecting on the forum three months down the road, it was clear that we were wrestling yet again with outcomes vs. process approaches to learning and teaching, and that as soon as we tried to pin these contrasts down, paradoxes and contradictions would pop right back up again.

Joe Tomei began our session by discussing what he described as mismatches between CALL and LD. He noted that whereas both LD and CALL researchers often use the same language and same vocabulary, they end up with different conclusions on how to foster autonomous learning. Both talk about autonomy and autonomous learning, about the importance of learning outside the classroom, and encourage teachers to re-evaluate their roles. Joe characterised these differences as centrifugal (LD) vs. centripetal (CALL), noting the tendency of LD oriented teachers to emphasise group work, whereas CALL-resourced language practice activities tend to bring individual learners together. Acknowledging that these characterisations are stereotypes, Tomei noted the primary importance that metaphors of space, time, and the pace of technological change play in both discourses.

LD, according to Tomei, has a number of things to tell (or remind) CALL folk: (1) The fundamental importance of interaction in courses; (2) The role modeling plays in learners' development of new skills and practices; and, finally (3) The potential usefulness of narrative academic writing styles (common in LD) for CALL researchers seeking to better understand their learners' struggles to learn and work with new tool sets, both in and outside the language classroom. Addressing the things that LD practitioners might learn from CALL advocates, Joe suggested that LD practitioners should relinquish authority for a reason, not as a matter of principle, and embrace the ways in which CALL protocols for organizing classroom practice and optimizing data collection will enhance teachers' abilities to collect data and work more appropriately with students on an individual basis.

Kevin Ryan then offered a brief description of MOOCS, Massive Open Online Courses. MOOCs started up in Canada, with groups of about 1,000. Recently, new platforms such as Coursera have come to dominate this emerging model for providing education to the masses. One widely discussed problem with MOOCs is that the course completion rate is low, averaging 10% or less. Nonetheless, Kevin feels that MOOCs offer an interesting example of hybridity between learner autonomy and CALL approaches to teaching and learning. He also noted that while the ‘C’ stands for “courses,” MOOCS really function as communities of learners, learning together online, with students typically organising themselves into study groups. In a fascinating aside, Kevin commented that “open” in English fails to convey the sense of openness, the metaphorical sense that the door is open and that anyone can come in, a sense, he claimed, better expressed in French (*ouvert*) or in Spanish (*abierto*).

The final three presentations addressed the use of CALL tools and resources for extending the work we do in our classrooms. Robert Cochrane discussed CALL-sourced and supported learning activities with low-level learners; Paul Beaufait described a pilot study using English Central; and finally, I discussed in-class and outside-of-class activities designed to encourage interactivity in a lecture course setting.

Robert's question was how to scaffold from the grammar-translation, examination-centered school experiences of what he described as low level, unsuccessful learners to the creation of environments and practice activities which encourage increased language awareness and development of the concept of strategy use. Cochrane's solution to his teaching context's constraints has been to introduce task-based learning homework assignments using Keller's ARCS (attention, relevance, confidence, and satisfaction) approach to courseware and homework design. His goal was to create achievable challenges for his learners to choose from, by integrating internet resources into their out-of-class learning practice through a course blog, and encouraging the use of smartphones for self-regulation and self-monitoring by learners. He reported some successes, via student feedback responses to post-course surveys, with learners self-reporting some satisfaction in goal setting and achievement.

Paul Beaufait described a pilot project using EnglishCentral, and asked "What happens when you let students go?" He divided students into two groups, one with explicit learning targets and one without. Learners then engaged in various online learning activities: video-viewing, vocabulary study, and speaking practice. Paul's most interesting finding was that the group without explicit goals studied only 60% of the words (word-families) that the group with explicit goals did, however, their learning performance was, in fact, better. During his presentation and the follow-up discussions, the importance of task design, motivation, and practice outcomes were explored.

In my presentation, I discussed the use of online resources, made available to students enrolled in my Introduction to American Studies lecture course through the course Moodle site. Students were also required to participate in group work: for in-class discussions of lecture materials; the completion of three group research projects consisting of reports and slide-shows uploaded to the Moodle site; and, follow-up forums on their project work and course reading assignments. At the time of the presentation, we were only seven weeks into the semester, and even now, though the

term has been completed, it will take some time for me to evaluate the students' work and their responses to the post-course survey. The more motivated students used the hypertext versions of reading assignments, participated in forum discussions, contributed to glossaries, and in general, were more active in in-class discussions and contributed longer, more articulate exploratory feedback writings. How successful my attempts to encourage the development of digital literacies, interactivity and learner autonomy were remains an open question, which I will be exploring at greater length in a future article, as well as in the revision of course protocols for the coming academic year.

My tentative conclusion regarding the forum is that while we did not manage to resolve any mysteries, the cracks, flaws, and tensions in our presentations did facilitate a useful discussion with participants. A common question running through those discussions was the efficacy and value of the CALL resources we feel we have spent so much time learning and creating. Trying to grapple with that and other related questions sent me back to 'the parrot book' (Barfield & Brown, 2007). Re-reading David Little and Kelleen Toohey's contributions to that volume I was reminded that the core relationships between learner and teacher development, classroom practice(s), and self-access materials and systems (both analog and digital) are at the heart of any "successful" implementation of learner autonomy. During the follow-up discussions, Darren Elliott noted that as teachers we cannot create communities (of practice, of autonomous learners, . . .), communities create themselves. This stands now in memory as a useful reminder to beware the inevitable temptation for teacher-researchers to over-simplify on-going events in our quest for understanding.

Note: The conference website is available for browsing, and the conference handbook is also available for downloading in PDF format.

Reference:

Barfield, A., & Brown, S. H. (2007). *Reconstructing autonomy in language education: Inquiry and innovation*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.