GloCALL 2009

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The Globalization and Localization in Computer-Assisted Language Learning (GloCALL) conference is a joint conference organized by the Asia-Pacific Association for Computer-Assisted Language Learning (APACALL) and the Pacific Association for Computer-Assisted Language Learning (PacCALL). Last year's conference, hosted by Chiang Mai University in Chiang Mai, Thailand on December 8-11, was the third joint conference held by these two organizations. The goal of the conference is to introduce CALL to teachers in the host country while stressing the global aspects of CALL education. The conference brought together people from all over the world, but the majority of the participants were from Asia, with the largest contingent being from Japan.

The conference was held at the Imperial Mai Ping Hotel in the old part of the city. The hotel was close to the large night market and many good restaurants and shops. The conference organizers also arranged several different tour options for the participants or their families. The first evening there was a conference dinner at a Thai culture center where we were able to see several types of Thai dances, and the second night there was a special theater performance and dinner. The

organization of the conference was typical with plenary, poster, and concurrent presentations and book publisher displays. I attended all plenary sessions and one presentation for each one of the time blocks and stopped by for a few of the poster sessions. I felt most of them were worth attending, and I learned something new at each one of them. I think on the whole the participants were satisfied with presentations because I didn't hear many people complaining about the content of the sessions.

Of the four plenary sessions I thought the one by Professor Tom Robb of Kyoto Sangyo University, was the most thought provoking and had the most interesting title; "Can We Still Call CALL CALL?" We don't use "book assisted language learning", and most teachers use computers in some aspect of their teaching, be it communicating with their students by e-mail or using presentation software to make a slideshow for a lesson, so he feels we will need a new term. He threw out a few possibilities, but it will take a few years before a consensus builds around any one of them.

In attending so many sessions over two days it sometimes difficult to keep the sessions separated in your mind. The one session that I attended that stood out was given by Professor Ian Witten of the University of Waikato entitled "Building Language Materials and Creating Exercises with FLAX (Flexible Language Acquisition Project)". Professor Witten demonstrated how the FLAX software simplifies the creation of practice language exercises using any digital text an instructor wishes to use. It is possible to create scrambled sentences, fill in the blanks, word guessing, and word predicting exercises. I can see this being especially useful for teachers who teach English for Specific Purposes because they can use actual texts from the field that they are working in to create word exercises quickly. An added benefit is that Moodle users can use FLAX as a module. You can learn more about this software and download it here http://flax.nzdl.org/greenstone3/flax?page=home.

Another worthwhile session was "Open-Source Tools and Activities

for the Call Classroom" by Iain Davey of Doshisha University. In his presentation he compared and contrasted free open-source software to proprietary software to highlight the advantages of the former. It is nice to know that if budgets are tight there are plenty of effective, free CALL software tools available.

The first and last days of the conference were dedicated to pre- and post-conference workshops, respectively. I attended the pre-workshop "Introduction to CALL" given by Jeong-Bae Son, the president of APACALL and co-chair of the conference. This workshop was offered for local teachers who might be interested in CALL but were unfamiliar with the field. I decided to attend this workshop, even though I am familiar with CALL, because I wanted get some ideas on ways to better explain CALL to people who think it is just about letting students use the internet. Professor Son gave a good general summary of tools that are available to teachers and covered a lot the terminology and acronyms used when talking about CALL.

The post-conference workshops on the 11th were held in a computer lab at Chiang Mai University. The first session "Digital Learning Objects for World Languages" was done by Professor Carla Meskill from University at Albany, State University of New York. In this workshop she introduced the Multimedia Educational Resource for Learning and Online Teaching repository (MERLOT, http://www.merlot.org/merlot/index.htm), of which she is a co-editor. At first glance it may be hard to see the benefits of the repository and you may think that it is possible to find the same materials using an internet search engine like Google or Yahoo. The power and time savings of the site come from the peer review process, the collection feature, and users comments. Each item has a peer review star rating to indicating the quality. The collection feature allows the user to organize the learning objects (websites, downloadable worksheets, etc.) that they find in MERLOT in their own collection(s). Then each learning object has a number showing how many collections it is in. This makes it faster to see if a

particular object is worth looking at because the more collections it is in probably means it is a useful one. Finally, there is a comments section that allows you to see what other teachers think about it and how they used it. I should stress that this repository is for all subjects, not just ESL. I have only looked around this site a little since my return from the conference, but I will definitely spend more time there as I plan my lessons for the coming school year.

I felt this was a worthwhile conference and my time and money was well spent. There was plenty of useful information for those who don't consider themselves very computer savvy and I am sure you can get some ideas on how to incorporate computers in your lessons inside and outside the classroom. The next conference will be held on 1-3 December 2010 in Kota Kinabalu, Malaysia hosted by the University of Malaysia Sabah. For more information on the 2009 conference and the upcoming one in 2010 go to the GloCALL site (http://glocall.org/).

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David Campbell has taught in Japan for over 25 years, mainly in the English conversation world, but is now teaching full-time at Obihiro University of Agriculture and Veterinary Medicine, Obihiro. He is interested CALL and especially Moodle.