

HOLA FROM BARCELONA, SPAIN!

The 16<sup>th</sup> International Conference on Learning (ICL09) was held this year in Barcelona, Spain, from July 1st to 4th. It was organized by the College of Education, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, USA. The Learning Conference is held annually in different locations around the world. As the presenter and participant at the conference, I would like to give you my impressions about the conference and the time spent in Barcelona. The 16<sup>th</sup> International Conference on Learning (ICL09) aims to bring together researchers, scientists, engineers, and scholar students to exchange and share their experiences, new ideas, and research results about all aspects of Learning, and discuss the practical challenges encountered and the solutions adopted. The conference offered a wide-ranging selection of papers delivered by a cross section of practitioners, decision-makers, learning technologists and researchers, not only on how technologies are being integrated in education, but also on what process need to be build, frameworks developed, change management initiated and stakeholders needs to be involved and oriented, for exploiting the full potential of technologies in education. This conference paved the way for thinking of learning in a more holistic way, focusing on people-process-program as against technology-structure-systems.

I arrived in Barcelona on Tuesday, June 30th, in the late afternoon hours. After a long and boring trip it was refreshing to meet kind and smiling people at the hotel reception and especially at the conference desk. Short registration, and the proceedings is ready; it is a part of conference materials. I recalled the discussion with one of my colleagues back at home. He organized several conferences and always complained that one of the most difficult tasks is to prepare the proceedings on time and in the decent, professional and technically correct form. The organizers, with Professor Dr. Bill Cope as the Director made an excellent job for the proceedings and selecting about 26% of submitted papers (66 out of 256) and preparing the proceedings with the highest quality. Of course, the authors of published papers made their contributions to the final success. If you are in the field of Educational Psychology, I am sure you will find something interesting in the proceedings: from trends in theory to recent applications. Additional poster proceeding shows how seriously the conference is organized. My first impression was that it will be a pleasant ambient for all participants and good content of professional topics.

The conference brought together over 350 participants from 30 countries around the globe representing national policy makers, institutional leaders, professors, researchers, students, economic and professional sectors, intergovernmental organizations, higher education networks, as well as the civil society. The 16<sup>th</sup> International Conference on Learning featured the work of 200 practitioners from 30 countries around the world. The conference was organized in eight plenary and twelve parallel sessions, discussion and workshops. The first day began with the inauguration of the conference. The Director of Common Ground Publishing, USA, Dr. Bill Cope, inaugurated the conference and the Poster Exhibition.

The inauguration was followed by the plenary session titled the ‘Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)’ by David Istance of France, discussed the synergy between e-Governance and ICT for development and pointed out that e-Governance, ICT for development especially ICT for education and capacity building should converge to create a new paradigm of development. Dr. Denise Newfield elaborated on the development challenges in education and the knowledge society and the need for re-engineering education. She also explained that ICT reflects the increased emphasis on communications and education and is the lead target sector for improvement. She said “*Knowledge society cannot exist without highly educated citizens and Education is sine qua non for the creation of knowledge societies*”.

High Quality Parallel Sessions with important Invited Speakers and big international participation were the main features of this gathering. On the other hand, the authors of the *best of the accepted papers received an invitation for sending an extended version* to the IJOL reputable International Journals. I am so elated that my paper titled “Adult learners in Community development Programs with a Focus on Learning preferences” was chosen and published in this reputable international journals.

The post-tea parallel session focused on ‘Curriculum and Pedagogy, Technology in Learning, Community, culture, Globalization, Arts, Drama and Design, Adult Education, E-Learning and Tertiary and Professional Learning’. This session had thirty four speakers who presented case/research studies from USA, Australia, Malaysia, India, Spain, Pakistan and Iran to name a few. Dr. James Smith of Washburn University, USA tried to analyze the extent to which social work students enter their professional education program with an “average” level of Emotional Intelligence. Angela Mornane of Moansh University presented three models of ICT for capacity building using Radio, PDA, digital photography and internet resources. Latha A of Education & Research Department, Information system Technologies Limited, India presented a framework of capacity building of employees in an organization. Another experience of e-Learning in Iran was presented by Mazid who focused on how web-based learning had effected the attitude of physicians who underwent online trainings. Ramlee Mustapha of National University of Malaysia, discussed the goals and purposes of non-formal adult education in Malaysia and recommended on how the Malaysian government and other stakeholders can work together to support the initiatives. During the afternoon lunch, participants took a break from the intensive sessions for some informal networking. Post-lunch, while the session on ‘Technology for Education and Training’ continued in one hall, a panel discussion on “The role of Universities in ICT for Development’ organized by the University of Washington, continued in the other.

Day two of the conference began with a plenary session on ‘ICT and education: strategies and best practices in Asia’. Prof Dr Mary Kalantzis, University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, USA, gave an insightful perspective on the strategies and practices of e-Learning in USA. Professor Mary pointed out that “*The challenge for e-learning in the future is how to incorporate virtual, social and moral values into the media of e-learning, such that e-learning have real value for education.*”

The second plenary address was by Dr. J.Felix Angulo Rasco, Chairman and CEO of the College of Internet and Distance education at the Universidad de Cadiz, Spain. Dr. Felix presented an analysis of the existing situation of e-Learning in Higher Education in the ten European countries and a recommendation for cross accreditation in order to promote development and free flow of skilled personnel.

After the plenary session, the first parallel session was on “e-Learning Design, Development and Delivery’. The objective of this session was to understand from practices, the key components that needs kept in mind while designing and developing any e-Learning courses, content or curriculum etc. The session also aimed to explore the possible options of delivery of e-learning products. In this session, while Douglas Bell of Education Development Centre (EDC), focused on the designing and delivery of educational software that is a hybrid of rich multimedia and pedagogical strategies, Subrata Kumar Dey of the Independent University, Bangladesh explained how the designing and development of education software needed to be aligned with a product-process oriented curriculum. Pradeep Joseph of Intel India Pvt Ltd further elaborated that products have to developed after a thorough assessment of the need of the users. Ganesh Subramaniam of EZ Vidya, India also pointed out that designing a well thought out holistic curriculum with the diligent use of technology, delivered in a learning environment that is conducive, can enhance higher order thinking in learners. Bunita Pravalpruk of NECTEC, Thailand presented a process for choosing type and format of data for e-learning system according to the receiver’s environment.

While the session on Pedagogy and Practice in e-Learning delved on redefining e-learning, the parallel session on “e-Learning Practices in K-12 Education” saw a several case studies from Asia. The objective of this session was to discuss different models and perspective on how ICTs have been used for the efficient delivery of education. Madhusudan Padhi, State Project Director, Orissa Primary Education Program Authority (OPEPA) Orissa, India presented the state initiated Project e-Shishu where a dynamic Child Tracking System (CTS) was developed to track children by their demographic, educational and physical status.

While the parallel session was in progress, there were groups discussion in another room. The theme “ Developing a Mission and Principles for Service Learning Programs”. I took the opportunity to be in the discussion which I found it to be pretty interesting. One group talked about how, in the somewhat haphazard development of service learning, we have perhaps “created a monster.” And much like Dr. Frankenstein’s monster, service learning’s relations with the community are not as good as they should be. Thus, we need to begin at the beginning, and consciously develop a mission for service learning programs. Three of the breakout groups discussed the importance of developing a clear mission for the service learning program. Such a mission should integrate the missions of higher education institutions and community organizations, have clear values and goals, and be reviewed regularly. The focus, according to one group, should be on promoting better service learning before promoting more service learning.

What is the process for developing a mission for service learning programs? One group discussed using a visioning process. Another discussed the role of an assets and needs assessment. Overall, there seem to be four principles that could guide the mission development and review process:

- *Increasing community benefits:* there was recognition across the groups that we have not focused enough on community partner assets, needs, issues, or benefits.
- *Balancing community and higher education outcomes:* while it may seem contradictory to the point above, this principle is more about finding a good fit between the two parties. Some desired community organization benefits may not fit well with higher education's limitations. And while we need to overcome those limitations, we also need to recognize them.
- *Supporting program sustainability:* two groups talked about the importance of sustainability. Service learning programs are often funded out of temporary soft money, or built on the backs of AmeriCorps\*VISTA members, and build expectations in the community that can't be fulfilled when those resources end.
- *Understanding service learning models and theories:* understanding the difference between community service, service learning, community-based research, and charity versus change models of community engagement is important for understanding what community impacts are possible.
- *Building relationships:* one group discussed the need for the community to understand the university and another group discussed the need for those within the higher education institution to connect to each other.

One group emphasized that this all needs to be done in "baby steps." The process of transforming service learning needs to be done with an eye to the participation of community partners and accountability to the above principles. This also means, according to one group, shifting the emphasis in service learning from getting more people to do it, to getting people to do it better.

The third day of the conference kicked off in the morning was on 'Educational leadership ,Management and e-Learning practices '. The objective of this session was to get a flavor of the various e-Learning practices in Asia-pacific. Erna Surjadi of the Ministry of woman Empowerment, Republic of Indonesia, focuses on capacity building of Gender personal in Indonesia. This presentation was followed by an interesting presentation by Woralak Jumsai Na Ayudhya of Chulalongkorn University of Thailand. Woralak presented a interesting model of ICT-based curriculum and instruction that can bring out a balance of Emotional Quotient (EQ) and Intellectual Quotient (IQ) in the students. Assoc. Professor Claire McLachlan from Auckland , New Zealand presented her experience and perspectives of effective management e-learning for virtual classrooms. Jose Contado Aligaen, representing the Department of Education, University of Portugal presented his experience in implementing the Partner-in-learning program of Microsoft Portugal.

After lunch, while the parallel session on Educational leadership ,Management and e-Learning practices and Design continued, a very interesting panel discussion organized by South-East Asian Minister of Education Organisation (SEAMEO) titled ‘Cyber Education: Management Dimension’ was organized as a panel discussion aimed to provide an opportunity to reflect on how e-Learning can be managed. The session was chaired by Dr Chantavit Sujatanond, Deputy Director (Administration and Communication) and saw presentation from four distinguished experts on various issues of e-Learning management and models of management. Prof Dr Pelin Irgin, Chairman of Board and CEO, College of Internet Distance Education, Mersin University , Turkey, drew from his experience in running a online master degree program at the Mersin University. Prof Dr Paulina Pannen, Director, SEAMEO Regional Open Learning Centre (SEAMEO SEAMOLEC), Indonesia in her very interesting presentation titled “Managing e-Learning: managing the probable”, identified and explained the need and requirement of each components associated with the management of e-Learning. Associate Prof Dr Supanee Sombuntham, Director - Thailand Cyber University (TCU) presented her experience in managing the TCU’s online and distance Education programmes. Alan K Jolliffe, Project Officer, UNESCO Asia and Pacific Bureau for Education, discussed how to use a development model to manage and develop e-learning events, which can be used with e-learning dependant and full delivery events. The last sessions of the day were on “Enabling policies for ICT in education” and “Emerging technologies in education”. Bejamin Vergeldedios, UNESCO Asia and Pacific Bureau for Education, in his presentation “ Policies that make sense” pointed out that there is a need to create policy awareness and support for policy networks among the decision-makers. While in the session on “Emerging technologies in education” speakers Surasit Vannakrairongj, NSTDA-NOLP, Thailand, Dr Suchai Thanawas of Sripatum University, Thailand and Bruno von Niman of European Telecommunications Standards Institute, Sweden presented different technology options that are increasingly being used as popular tools for learning.

The parallel presentations on the last day of the conference centered on themes of “Adult and Life Learning”. In a few parallel sessions that I had attended on Adult Learning it was especially stressed that adult education for democracy, peace and human rights needed to be critical, creative and compassionate, to develop capacities to feel, to learn and to act locally, nationally and globally. A real challenge for adult educators in many countries was to learn how to move from the politics of resistance to the politics of participation; how to move, while carrying hopes and dreams in a slow and fragile process of democratization, towards strategies of more equitable economic development. It emphasized the role of literacy and adult learning in promoting the concept of active and critical citizenship which comprises the ability to interpret experience, to make individual decisions and to participate in political processes, and in the fulfillment of individual dignity.

The 16<sup>th</sup> International Conference on Learning (ICL09) a relatively small conference with a single track oral sessions. In my opinion that is an advantage especially when you have rigorous selection of high quality papers. I recall many good and large conferences where after the session you are lost and alone. The participants at the ICL09 are most of

the time together: during the sessions, during coffee and lunch breaks, during social events in the evening. It is valuable to hear what our colleagues are presenting, but I believe it is much more important to exchange the ideas and establish professional contacts during these less formal events. That is what I will remember about the conference; usually not specific paper at specific session but new ideas and new friendships. Wait a minute; I am not against formal sessions. This time during the conference I will remember my challenging discussions with Dr. David Hyatt about principles of adult learning and validation of data adult learning results. Discussion time during the session was not enough, so we continued during the coffee break and later.

At the conference, small working teams presented and shared best practices from their countries; learning from each other ways in which they can improve their own local efforts; and—as the conference concluded—making recommendations now shared with an even broader group about methods, practice, and policy in math and science education.

I had the unique opportunity to discuss the most current research around adult learning and adult education including the Program for International Adult Education Assessment (IAEA) , an international adult education assessment survey.

The ICL09 conference was a very stimulating and rewarding event, and was impeccably well organized. It attracted some of the most famous names in the language learner autonomy field, such as: Phil Benson, Christopher Candlin, Sara Cotterall, David Gardner, Marie-José Gremmo, Henri Holec, Bruce Morrisson, Sarah Toogood, Peter Voller, to name only a few. This conference was not as large as those of International Learning Conference Chicago, USA , but this made it much easier to meet people, from whom I gained a wealth of ideas for teaching and research as well as great motivation just from sharing the experiences of working in the educational field. The only drawback was that Spain is quite far to travel, but it was well worth it and if you are in any way involved with learning the next ICL conference, to be held in Hong Kong in 2010, is highly recommended.

Other papers presented at the conference dealt with the familiar themes of promoting and supporting self access language learning, evaluating and assessing independent learning, scaffolding learners' attempts at becoming more autonomous and learning outside the classroom.

As is often the case at large conferences catering to a diverse range of topics in English language teaching and learning, sessions of interest are scheduled at the same time, leaving the participant in a quandary about which one to choose and the 16<sup>th</sup> International Conference on Learning held in Barcelona, Spain in July this year was no exception. Of the few sessions I was able to attend that are related in one way or another to independent language learning, the one that generated the most interest by far was that given by Susan Sheerin, one of the leading lights in self-access, and author of a widely-known text full of eminently practical advice about setting up and providing materials for self-access (*Self-Access*, Oxford University Press, 1989). Her talk, entitled *25 years of Self-Access* provided a comprehensive overview of the rationale behind self-access learning, guiding principles, the characteristics of the independent learner and the

relationship between self-access facilities and the development of independent learning. She also touched on the lessons learnt from the experiences of setting up self-access centres (SACs) in many parts of the world over the last two decades, and looked ahead to the key issues for self-access in the next 25 years. While little of what she said was especially novel for those of us who have been involved in developing our own self-access facilities, the heavy turnout of Spanish teachers showed that self-access is still of great interest in that part of the world. Some of the cautions she voiced were well-founded and will, hopefully, be heeded by those who are still at the beginning stages. She touched on the misconceptions that SACs can replace teachers, that computer technology is the answer for independent learning, and that filling a SAC with equipment is more crucial than having appropriate staff. In her experience in visiting and advising on setting up SACs all over the world, Sheerin has found that self-access learning is most successful when learners are heavily supported through preparation, guidance and counseling. The materials should support independent learning, and the teachers role should be recognized, so that teachers feel *ownership* of the self-access centre. Looking forward to the next 25 years, she pointed to five key areas: sustainability through planning and staff development; adaptability to changing circumstances and technology responsiveness to teacher and learner needs integration into the curriculum and the culture; and technology planning for its introduction and expansion . As Susan said, the world-wide web provides both opportunities and threats for self-access. On the one hand, it provides easy access to a range of interesting, authentic, free and motivating material, but on the other, it can be frustrating, time-consuming and provide input of dubious quality for language learners. Those with further questions about self-access were invited to attend a meeting of the Spain TESOL Self-Access Special Interest Group with Susan, which I was unable to attend as it was scheduled at the time of my presentation.

Another session I attended was given by Thai teacher and researcher, Suksan Suppasetserree, who investigated the attitudes of students using the SAC at Suranaree University of Technology. Through interviews and questionnaires, he found that most students wanted SAC materials to focus on speaking and listening, with speaking being seen as the most important skill. Their preferred materials were films and videos, and preferred learning activities *socializing* (meeting in small groups for speaking practice with native speakers), and radio/TV activities. Most students self-rated their proficiency in speaking as the least proficient English language skill. His investigation is still at a preliminary stage, but it will be interesting to see whether these findings are borne out in the full study, and what recommendations he will make to address these needs in the SAC.

Bruce Morrison of the London Polytechnic talked about the role of the teacher in SACs, from the point of view of terminology used to describe the SAC teacher, the teacher role and constraints on the teacher in the SAC setting. His investigation is also on-going, but it is becoming increasingly clear that much of the success of SAC learning depends on teacher involvement, so his area of research also promises much of interest for the future. Another session I attended related to the learning styles and strategies of Malay undergraduates, given by Paramjeet Kaur Dillon. Using the *Perceptual Learning Styles Questionnaire* (Reid, 1984) she found that the perceptual learning styles in the areas of

auditory and group learning were highest, which she attributed to cultural factors. She also found that visual and auditory styles positively correlated with age and number of years of studying English, while kinesthetic styles declined. Thus, it seemed that older, more experienced learners would be more receptive to autonomous learning in an academic setting which is highly dependent on reading and writing.

Although I was unable to attend, there were several other presentations relating to self-access, independent learning, learning styles and technology, e-portfolios, teacher autonomy and developing autonomy in the classroom. It is apparent that the field of learner independence and autonomy continues to attract a lot of interest, a fact that should be encouraging and motivating for those of us who sometimes feel isolated and frustrated dealing with the day-to-day demands of self-access in our own settings.

It was a stimulating, exhausting but wonderful experience . On balance, this seminar was a profitable experience for all the participants.

Several presenters talked about the link between teacher and learner autonomy and how it was impossible to have one without the other. Developing motivation and independence in students were, of course, common themes with one presenter from Japan giving a workshop on some introductory techniques she uses to encourage students to interact both with each other and their teacher.

All in all, it was highly beneficial to see how ILC practitioners in other parts of the world were dealing with issues such as learner/teacher training, learner/teacher autonomy, student responsibility, ILC practicalities, and the internet revolution it seems as though the problems are the same everywhere, but it was enlightening to hear about different solutions. Feedback from the conference was very positive – participants greatly enjoyed the chance to meet like-minded people from so many countries, the opportunity to network and to learn from one another, and the chance to explore ideas.

The 16<sup>th</sup> International conference on Learning also arranged visits to local ILCs after the Conference during which we visited four different centers, two run by AMES (Adult Multicultural Educational Services, Barcelona) and two at the University of Spain. I was also lucky enough to visit the CALL centre at University of Spain. Both the AMES centers had a wide variety of materials giving students plenty of choice with all materials color-coded for level. Computers were available and easily visible so that staff could see, and assist, if students had any difficulty using them. Project and group areas were well placed and a timetable for daily activities was on a board near the entrances. At AMES, there was an option for students to complete some courses on a completely self access basis with records being checked by the ILC staff.

It was an excellent conference with many great speakers who had substance to offer in terms of their knowledge and experience. Also excellent networking, linked to the general high quality of participation, good audience discussion in some sessions and opportunities for follow-up. The primary objective of the conference was largely achieved . One outstanding feature of this Conference was the clear recognition of the central role that learning can play in sustainable development and its contribution in



particular to poverty reduction and income generation, empowerment and consolidation of democracy, disease prevention and sustainable health, and to the protection and improvement of the environment. In overall terms, I was satisfied with the outcome of the conference. The poster exhibition was very useful for me as I got acquainted to a number of e-content vendors who could be of great use to me. I was extremely happy with the quality time that I had spent in the conference as one of the speakers and participants. The level of energy and mutual support at this conference were outstanding. Strangers became friends, shy participants became outspoken and people who once thought they were alone found they had many companions and new friends with similar needs and experiences. I am really enriched after participating the 16<sup>th</sup> International Conference on Learning.

And finally, Barcelona is a super city, nicknamed the most liveable city in the world. Travel by tram, find over 475 restaurants and shopping malls in just one street, get fantastic bargains at the Las Ramblas Market, selling flowers and vegetables, street-theaters, big business-galleries, cafeterias, terraces as well as some of the great theaters of the city, visit the site of the bull fighting, and travel along the port, located at the end of Las Ramblas, is dominated by the tower of Colón, from the top of which has a fantastic view over Barcelona and for some other fantastic scenery. The Sagrada Familia is without a doubt one of the wonders of cathedral architecture. Although incomplete, I was thrilled by the experience. Antoni Gaudí's unique personal style in the service of his fervent religious faith, makes his work the equivalent of that of a modern Michelangelo. Work has been in progress for over 100 years with estimates for completion in 30 years. Gaudí died in the 1920s and is interred on the grounds of his church. He anticipated that the project would involve many decades of work by his successors. He left an abundance of plans, sketches and models for following generations of architects, engineers and other artisans. Gaudí anticipated that they would have to solve many of the structural and design problems that he had not yet resolved. The lower "museum level" where valuable photos, details and renderings are on display that illuminate the church's fascinating evolution. This is a site that one should take more than once in a lifetime, because unlike the completed great monuments, this one is still a work in progress!

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