

Guest Editorial Preface

David Barr, Ulster University, UK

WORLDCALL 2018 SPECIAL EDITION

In November 2018, the 5th WorldCALL conference took place at the Universidad de Concepción in Chile. Over 250 delegates from 39 countries across the world attended the conference to hear 200 papers discuss the primary theme of the conference, *CALLing all the CALLERS Worldwide*. The conference concentrated on the need to ensure that CALL development crosses geographical, physical, psychological and financial boundaries across the world. The conference itself provided a very important example of how to achieve this because, as result of the momentum created by the WorldCALL conference in Chile, *LatinCALL* was created, drawing together communities of CALL research and practice from across the South American countries.

The special edition of the International Journal of Computer-Assisted Language Learning and Teaching draws together a selection of six papers from the conference, looking at ways in which CALL can be used as an opportunity for levelling the playing field in education in terms of access to resources, software and opportunities.

In the first paper, Fernando Rosell-Aguilar evaluates the findings of a large scale study into the role of Twitter as a useful tool for autonomous language learning development. The research project concluded that reactions to the use of Twitter were positive, encouraging interaction with native speakers and target language output. The generally ubiquitous nature of social media sites such as Twitter lends itself to enhancing opportunities for language learners separated by geographical location.

In the second paper, also looking at the use of commonly-available software for learning, Ya-Chun Shih considers how Google Street view has been integrated into a 3D virtual language learning environment to aid vocabulary acquisition. The study concluded showing the possibilities for increasing learner motivation and contextualized learning using software that has widespread availability on all forms of technological platforms.

Soraya García-Sánchez's paper, which also focuses on more generic software used to teach CALL, examines the broader skills that CALL teaches, considers the role of an online environment to facilitate EFL debate, aimed at enhancing engagement and professional and social development. The paper concludes that the environment encourages a multimodal educational and professional ecosystem for 21st century learners.

Following the theme of using commonly available software for language learning, the fourth paper in this issue consider Antonie Alm and Larian Nkomo's experiences of using for chatbots used for second language learning and, while the experiences of learners were mixed, they the potential that CALL can be financially accessible to learners, using freely available software, thereby helping to remove the barriers around the use of CALL.

In the fifth paper and also the only one to examine dedicated online language learning software, Kathryn McCarthy *et al.*'s paper considers the impact of iSTART-E for the teaching for active reading and thinking in schools in Chile. The purpose of the reading comprehension support offered by this system was to develop reading levels in that country which, while performing better than other Latin

American countries on the PISA assessment, remains behind the OECD average in terms of reading comprehension. The results of the research showed positive effects on reading comprehension and are a timely reminder of the potential for CALL to contribute to educational development in countries where such opportunities may not readily exist.

In the final article in this WorldCALL edition, Agnieszka Palalas and Norine Wark look at a framework for mobile learning, concluding that learner dimensions, contextual affordances and learner concepts are fundamental aspects in the effective use of mobile learning. The creation of the framework is seen as particularly useful in the context of a shift in educational paradigms to accommodate future employment requirements for flexible, adaptable workers who may use mobile technology to help standards of literacy, thereby enhancing opportunities for educational access.

In the continually-evolving world of the use of CALL, the findings from these six articles provide useful recommendations about the use of technology in supporting language learning and the methodological affordances to be considered to ensure that CALL is as inclusive as possible in order to maximise opportunities for learners who are separated by physical location, learning opportunities and other constraints. The underlying message of these articles is that technology can help to provide some of these opportunities to reduce the barriers, when used judiciously. This is particularly timely, given that we have all been affected by the worldwide pandemic of COVID-19, where we are reminded that the world is a smaller place than it sometimes appears.

David Barr
Guest Editor
IJCALLT