

Networking...Netplaying: From a New York Minute to a Mixi Second

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All of us are part of networks. Our immediate and extended families, our neighborhoods, our circles of friends, and the clubs or churches that some of us belong to are all considered networks of the human sort. It's odd that we so naturally refer to communication among these groups as "networking," since, according to the Oxford English Dictionary, the use of this term began in about 1967 in reference to "the action or process of networking a number of computers." Only about a decade later—just as I was graduating from high school—did the term come to refer to "the...process of making use of a network of people for the exchange of information." The readiness and frequency that this term glides off our tongues belies its recent coinage.

These days, many people spend more time in their virtual networks than with the flesh and blood variety. When I hold class in a computer classroom, inevitably, I find students checking their Mixi (social networking) site for new messages or looking to see who's been perusing their postings. It makes me a little sad when I think about how they may be missing the chance to network in the "here and now" with classmates sitting around them, but, for all I know, their classmates may be fellow members of their Mixi group and I may be the odd man out.

Perhaps it is the fear of being left out that's driving so many people to join networks such as MySpace, FaceBook, and Mixi. Ironically, being able to stay in contact with more people (friends of friends of friends...) may just be making us more lonely because if we fail to connect with anyone at a heart to heart level we may blame ourselves for coming up empty-handed in a land of plenty. It's as though we are in a desert with what look like oases of sociability all around us, not realizing they're merely mirages of virtual connectiveness.

Are we approaching a world in which the so-called seven degrees of separation are narrowing to the point where no divisions whatsoever remain between us; where each of us will “know” everyone else, but only for a fraction of a second, exchanging no more than a virtual wave or blown kiss? We will have come from Andy Warhol’s universal 15 minutes of fame to a quarter of a second of anonymous shoulder jostling in chat rooms where people come and go, talking of DiCaprio.

Or maybe we’ll get tired of our virtual networks and set them ablaze in bonfires on Second Life, wake up the next morning, look into the eyes of our partner, and say “Boy, did you have the same dream that I had? Let’s get a life.”

» OFFICER REPORTS

David Ockert (Publicity)

Hello fellow CALLers!

As always, at year’s end, we have time to reflect on everything accomplished, not completed, or simply not done in the past year. This year the CALL SIG has continued its tradition of providing its membership with unprecedented accomplishments: we co-sponsored the exceptionally well-organized and informative Wireless Ready conference at the Nagoya University of Business and Commerce in March; held our most successful ever annual conference at Waseda in June; produced an exceptional double-issue of this very Journal by August; members held several presentations at the Annual JALT Conference in Tokyo and we are now providing the year’s final issue of the JALTCALL Journal.

However, much work remains to be done. We have the Wireless Ready conference again in March and would love to see even more CALL SIG members participate both as presenters and attendees; this journal welcomes your manuscripts for all of us to read what you are up to in the field of CALL and related technologies; and of course the next conference in June will be another grand success that needs you(!) to be the success that it will be - so please lend a hand if even just volunteering to help in any capacity that you can.

What was not done? Well, for myself, I did not get any advertisements in national newspapers - but this year we will. Promise. Also, as your Publicity Chair, it was my duty to say ‘Thank-you!’ for helping make our SIG the great group that it is. So Thank-you!

Looking forward to another spectacular year with you all.

David Ockert

Publicity Chair