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Enhancing the Scenario: Emerging Technologies and Experiential Learning in Second Language Instructional Design

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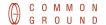
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Abstract: The affordances provided by technology for increasing efficacy of foreign language education have been a major research area within applied linguistics over the past thirty years or so (see Hubbard, 2006 for an overview). In a Japanese context, there are culturally based issues with foreign language education at the tertiary level, such as large class sizes and low student motivation, that present educators with specific challenges where technology may provide effective mediational means to improve practice and learner outcomes. In this article, we describe an eight-week teaching intervention that was designed, through digital and web technologies readily available to teachers, to improve the communication skills of Japanese university students of English. The strategic interaction framework, developed by DiPietro (1987), was enhanced by use of digital video and a freely available wiki site. Performances were digitally video recorded and uploaded to a private wiki and participants used this to evaluate, transcribe and self-correct their performances. The instructor then used the video and text to focus post-performance group debriefing sessions. The results suggest that a wiki, digital video, and strategic interaction-based experiential learning cycles can be effectively integrated to mediate Japanese university EFL students' oral communication development. Technical and pedagogical recommendations are offered.

Keywords: Digital Video, English as a Foreign Language, Experiential Learning, Reflection, Sociocultural Theory, Strategic Interaction, Wiki

Introduction

STRATEGIC INTERACTION (HEREAFTER, SI) was proposed by Di Pietro in 1987 as an approach to second language instruction that is organized around scenarios based on real life events that require students to use their second language "purposefully and artfully in dealing with others" (p. vii) to achieve a fixed goal. For Di Pietro, "a scenario is a strategic interplay of roles functioning to fulfill personal agendas within a shared context" (1987, p. 41). A scenario requires a language learner to listen intently to what another student says (because students do not know each others' roles), and to share information while pursuing individual goals. Di Pietro urged teachers to create and use scenarios based on daily occurrences but to move students beyond "routinized performances" (p. 80) by creating dramatic tension through participants' interlocked conflicting goals (such as a restaurant customer having dietary restrictions and a waiter needing to recommend a chef's special dish). Di Pietro argued that "without the element of dramatic tension, a scenario is not likely to be successful, no matter how relevant its theme might be to learners' functional needs" (p. 3).

COMMON GROUND

Di Pietro (1987) expected language learners to "rise to the challenge of human interaction, with all its uncertainties and ambiguities" (p. 3) and designed a supportive learning network with multiple roles for the instructor ("teacher, coach, consultant, observer, evaluator" p. 21) and numerous opportunities for help and guidance as students (also functioning as "role players, advice seekers and givers, performers and evaluators" p. 21) work together on language and strategy development. SI is a meaningful and collaborative approach to language teaching and learning; Di Pietro placed students in "situations where the motivation to think is translated into the challenge to reach goals through verbal exchanges with others" (p. 10). He wanted the classroom to function as both a "proving ground where challenges are faced and overcome" (p. 10) and a "refuge for the learner" (p. 12) with the assistance from the teacher and other learners. For Di Pietro, debriefing involved more than a teacher correcting students' errors; students were expected to collaboratively find ways to improve their own and others' performances.

> Di Pietro's core SI language teaching and learning approach involved four steps (1987, p. 2):
> Pre-class Preparation: Teacher selects or creates appropriate scenarios and prepares the necessary role cards.
> Phase 1 (Rehearsal): Students form groups and prepare agendas to fulfill the roles assigned to them. Teacher acts as adviser and guide to student groups as needed.
> Phase 2 (Performance): Students perform their roles with support of their respective groups while teacher and remainder of class look on.
> Phase 3 (Debriefing): Teacher leads the entire class in a discussion of the students' performance.

The key insight into language education offered by Di Pietro (1987) is the distinction he makes between language as information exchange (with a focus on grammatical orientation), transaction (with a focus on negotiation and expression of speaker intentions), and interaction (how language works to portray roles and speaker identities). His argument is that often in class settings, educators will effectively focus on information exchange and transaction, but the third element of language, interaction, is often ignored as learners work on various aspects of language as a communicative tool. This argument has found resonance elsewhere in the sociocultural approach to language pedagogy. For example, Donato (1994) cogently argued that the dominant communicative language teaching model is one where "the goal of conversation partners during a communicative event is the successful sending and receiving of linguistic tokens" (p. 34). Placing learners into simulated social contexts where it is necessary for them to take on roles and identities, while negotiating uncertain outcomes in the target language, is Di Pietro's answer to this problem. By doing so, we suggest, producing the language itself becomes a much more vivid and lived experience, with positive benefits for learning to control the symbolic power of that language as it plays out in social contexts.

Our goal in this research was to document the efficacy, or otherwise, of an SI teaching module design that makes use of web 2.0 technologies to provide socio-institutional affordances (Thorne, 2006) for language development. From a sociocultural perspective, the mediational means provided to learners while using language and collaboratively communicating can have transformative effects on the learning and developmental processes (Aljaafreh & Lantolf, 1994). In this paper, we focus in on the scenario, the fundamental aspect of SI

pedagogy, and how technology can enhance this aspect of the language teaching/learning experience.

Strategic Interaction and the Technological Mediation

This project integrates SI phases with experiential learning theory, sociocultural theories of development, and the mediated practice of technology. Di Pietro and Dewey hold similar views regarding learning as "intelligently directed development of the possibilities inherent in ordinary experience" (Dewey, 1938, p. 69) and unable to happen by one person acting alone. Di Pietro and Dewey also shared creative and humanistic perspectives on education; for them, interpersonal communication, human contact and idea making and transfer were central to meaningful learning. Di Pietro and Lewin (1951) both stress reflection and discussion of experiences; concrete, personal experience provides "meaning to abstract concepts while at the same time providing for a concrete, publicly shared reference point for testing the implications and validity of ideas created during the learning process" (Kolb 1984, p. 21). Dewey and Lewin's work was foundational to Kolb's cyclical model of doing, observing, thinking and planning. Dewey, Lewin, Kolb and Di Pietro all required goal-oriented action, reflection and feedback in effective teaching and learning. Argyris and Schon (1996) argued that "single loop" learning merely allows a student to "satisfice" (a combination of the words "satisfy" and "sacrifice" by Simon, 1990) the current situation and does not change the student's fundamental knowledge or abilities. A common element of the experiential learning theories of Dewey, Lewin, Kolb and Argyris and Schon is the "double loop" learning process in which errors made during the first loop of experience, observing, and reflecting are corrected and then subsequently re-tested in a second experience or cycle.

From a sociocultural perspective, the building into a teaching-learning cycle of more social interaction and reflection allows learners to gain greater control over the target language as they shift from other-regulation towards increased self-regulation and control (see de Guerrero & Villamil, 1994). The key point from a sociocultural point of view is that internalized semiotic tools are utilized for the mediation of activity, and these tools are formed and internalized in and through interaction with the social world (Ellis and Barkhuizen, 2005). As Aljaafreh and Lantolf contend: "learning evolves through stages of decreasing reliance on the other person towards increasing reliance on the self" (1994, p. 479). It is within different forms of social interaction that shifts in mediation, equitable with learning, will take place and where they can be analyzed using the microgenetic analysis method (Gutierez, 2008; Ellis and Barkhuizen, 2005). Briefly, microgenesis, or the study of the origin of a particular event, is described by Wertsch (1985) as "a very short-term longitudinal study" (p. 55). As Gutierez informs us, "Microgenesis, refers simultaneously to both the *method* and the *object* of study. *Microgenetic* or historical analysis allows us to investigate and understand a particular event (learning as an *object* of study)" (p. 121). This method provides insights into developmental processes as learners shift in the production of language required to fulfill the roles in the SI. By documenting changes in production we are allowed insight into increasing degrees of learner self-regulation, or independence, as language ability develops. We required students to go through Di Pietro's rehearsal/preparation, performance and debriefing two times with the same scenario to create a more experiential and interactive learning process in our language classroom.

Our instruction was facilitated by the use of digital video cameras and a wiki. Di Pietro (1987, p. 84-85) suggested the use of audio or video recorders in conjunction with SI for the debriefing phase, for later study, for subsequent assignments, for evidence of learning over a semester, for models of interaction for other classes, and for capturing nonverbal aspects of interactions. Doughty and Varela (1998) provide an example of videotaping students' presentations for subsequent peer feedback. A wiki (an online system of "intensely collaborative" (Godwin-Jones, 2003) web pages that can be easily created and edited) was also used by the teacher and students in this project. Thorne and Payne (2005) outline the functionality of the wiki that makes it a useful tool for the specific pedagogical aims of our design: "Within the context of group projects, wikis enable students to adopt a "revise and roll-back" approach to the collaborative production of text and thus obviate the need to meticulously merge individual contributions in order to avoid deleting one another's work" (p. 384). Wikis have been used by groups of language learners to collectively develop knowledge of content and target language accuracy (Kessler, 2009); and also to research and write collaboratively (Arnold, Ducate, Kost, 2009; Lee & Bonk, 2009). Our purpose in this research was to use the functionality of the wiki and develop a shared digital notebook. Students and the teacher could use the wiki to store and view (from the classroom, office or home) digital video of the performances and transcribe (helping students "objectify language and prepare a corpus for the debriefing segment" (Di Pietro 1987, p. 19)) and correct their utterances. Swain and Lapkin (2008) describe self transcription as a process that "take[s] speaking out of its rapid, real-time, meaning-making context and provide[s] students with opportunities to notice their own use [of a language]" (p. 119) and found that immersion French students' developed a "heightened awareness of" (p. 122) and learned lexical items through the transcription of their L2 roleplays.

The Study

This aspect of our ongoing research into SI was guided by the following research question:

> Is there evidence that the digitally enhanced scenario routine provides effective mediation that leads to learning?

This was investigated by analysis of roleplay videos and analysis of learner transcriptions, student reflections, surveys (comprised of 6-point Likert scale items from "1 - strongly disagree" to "6 - strongly agree" and open ended questions) and interview data.

Method

Participants and Instruction

The 17 participants (13 females and four males) in this project were second year students at a public university in a large Japanese city. They were between 19 and 21 years old ($M = 19$), had studied English for approximately nine years, were taking two or three weekly University English classes, studied English for two or three hours weekly outside class using a wide variety of media and technologies, and had scored between 445 and 920 ($M = 691$) on an optional TOEIC IP test offered at the beginning of the semester (not all of the students

in the class were able to take the test). Students, in general, reported positive attitudes towards and proficiencies using English and technology. Students generally also reported a lack of confidence speaking English. The students demonstrated positive attitudes during the instructional activities. The instructor (also the primary researcher) teaches English classes and research seminars at the University and has 10 years of experience teaching English as a Second or Foreign Language, including numerous and varied experiences using technology in the language classroom.

This project was conducted for the last eight weeks of a 15-week semester. The mandatory second-year class met for 90 minutes once a week. The focus of the class was communicative preparation for the TOEIC examination that was mandatory for all second year students in the department. The textbook used in the class was *Target Score* (Talcott & Tullis, 2007). The activities of the instructional sequence, with the enhanced digital scenario a prominent feature, are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1: Overview of Instructional Design and Activity

Meeting	Classroom Procedures	Learner Activities	Outcomes
1	Overview of SI presented. Survey conducted. Target vocabulary list handed out.	Reflection on language proficiency. Study of target vocabulary.	Learners are ready to start the SI cycle.
2	Follow up quiz for vocabulary. SI groups created. Key strategies for SI presented. Role information given.	Focus on understanding scenario and strategies for completion. Preparation of role and language required to participate.	The scenario is in place and learners are in preparation mode.
3	Rehearsal of target and useful language. Familiarization with the wiki and SI procedure. Roleplay space for press conference created. First performance. Embedding of videos.	Rehearsal and familiarization with technology and transcribing processes. First performance complete.	Learners take part in first performance.
4	Rubric of performance distributed. First performance is watched and transcribed. Self-reflection and correction of performance. Instructor prints out and reviews performances.	Performance transcribed and uploaded. Self-correction of mistakes.	Transcription is available for reflection. Performances are reflected on using rubric.

5	Group transcripts distributed and discussed. Group debriefing. Further explicit corrections suggested. Discussion of strong and weak performance factors.	Reflection on first performance and further group work on corrections and performance improvement. Preparation for second performance.	The first performance reflection is complete. Preparation for second loop.
6	Roleplay space for press conference created. Recording of second performance.	Rehearsal and performance of second loop. Videos uploaded to separate wiki page.	Second performance is completed.
7	Viewing and learner transcription of second performance.	Viewing/transcribing of second performance. Self-evaluation according to given rubric. Reflection on performance including further work on language. Learners highlight errors they are not sure how to fix.	Reflection on the second performance.
8	Debriefing session. Distribution of corrected transcripts	Work on comparison of transcripts and language log. Completion of survey.	Completion of instructional sequence. Reflection and feedback procedures.

The Scenario

The Strategic Interaction in this project used a five-person press conference scenario (adapted from Talcott & Tullis, 2007, p. 169). The EFL students used the following roles that interact and conflict in several ways:

Role A (GloTelCom President): You must announce the layoff of 2,000 workers. You must avoid questions about whether the company will move overseas. You do not want to reveal the fact that you have been conducting negotiations with overseas companies.

Role B (GloTelCom Human Resources Representative): You must announce that the layoffs are only temporary. You must explain the benefits package for the workers.

Role C (City Mayor): You must reassure the public and announce your efforts to create more job opportunities.

Role D (Employee Union Representative): You must express your concern about the layoffs. You need to find out if the company will move overseas. If the benefits package is not satisfactory, you must negotiate a better package.

Role E (Journalist): You must find out the reasons for the layoffs. You must find out if the company will move overseas. You know that the President has been conducting negotiations with overseas companies. You must question the mayor's confidence in the local economy.

Groups were given additional information about their identity and goals.

Technologies

Each meeting was held in the class' regular classroom. The classroom had movable desks and chairs, wi-fi Internet access, a digital projector, a screen, wall-mounted speakers, and a large chalkboard. Sanyo Xacti HD digital video cameras on tripods were used to record the roleplays. These cameras were selected for their ease of use, light (640x480/30p) and wiki-compatible (MPEG4 AVC/H.264) video format, and price. The roleplays were recorded on 4GB SD memory cards.

The instructor created a free and private (the students shared one login and password) www.pbworks.com wiki site for the project. A pbworks wiki was selected because of its price, its ease of creating and editing pages, its pages can contain text and embedded video, it has no storage limit for video (videos are hosted externally by http://fliqz.com), students and the instructor could edit and view pages from the classroom, office or home, and that any student could view another student's performance, transcription, and error corrections.

Results

To answer the question regarding the effect of the enhanced scenario, we analyze short transcripts that highlight changes between performances in roleplays 1 and 2. The comparison is important as it shows the efficacy of the feedback and debriefing stage to scaffold subsequent performance. Student identities have been protected with numerical codings.

Data sample 1.

> Transcript 1. Student 1.
> Uh, Hmm...What I said might be wrong, Uh...I, I agree that, but I think, Uh...By, Uh this layoff, we can get, Uh, a, a chance to reconsider our city's financial condition, so, Hmm...I think we are, we were lucky and, Hmm, our job, our local job market, I hope our local job market gets, gets stronger by this, layoff.

> Transcript 2. Student 1:
> OK. Ah, what I said might be wrong, I agree, but, Ah, through this layoff, Ah, I think we got a chance to reconsider our city's financial condition, so, of course I'm really sorry about the layoffs, but this is a good opportunities, so I think, I... I'm sure our local job market gets stronger through this layoff.

Data sample 1 (transcript 2) highlights improvement in fluency, with fewer false starts and pauses. The second performance also demonstrates greater control over the scenario, as evidenced by the more pragmatically sensitive language use in transcript 2: "I'm really sorry about the layoffs." This suggests a greater sensitivity to the context and situation that is unfolding in the scenario. Many of the students made improvements (requiring more complex language) to their identity portrayal and goal-directed actions during the second roleplay. Student 2 (data sample 2) for example, became more direct in her journalistic questioning of the President's motives and plans in order to uncover the truth behind the layoffs. The Union Representative (in data sample 3) decided to appeal to the President's and Human Resource Representative's emotions in her appeals in the second roleplay.

Data sample 2

> Transcript 1. Student 2:
> I have...I have heard you will move operations overseas. Is that true? One of my frineds lives in India. And he taught me the Glo Tel Com is going to employ local people. So...besides, an executive in your company disclose the truth. He is my acquai acquaint-ance. So I think it's already...ready to move operations overseas. I made contact with manufacturers overseas. And one of them told me that the Glo Tel Com will close close its local plant permanently. So...the manufacturers are...so...they are deceived? They said all all plants will move to India.

> Transcript 2. Student 2:
> I want to ask you, president. Why Glo Tel Com have poor financial results? You need...you need to lay off two thousand people? Two thousand? I want to ask one more question. I have a friend in China. He told me Glo Tel Com is hiring some workers there. Are you...are you going to open the plants in China? Glo Tel Com is very...have a very poor results. But you you are thinking about opening another plants? But I know that...you went abroad four times in last six months. I think it's too many...to find cheaper materials.

In general, there is also evidence of more expansive language use in the second performance. There were generally longer turns at talk, with more complex vocabulary use and fewer grammatical errors, as evidenced in data sample 3. The more emotional turn at talk here, in transcript 2, (e.g. Please give us more! Please!) is evidence of further development and control over the role and understanding of the situation. In transcript 1, the learner is apparently more concerned with the linguistic aspects of the task and is therefore unable to fully engage emotionally with the role.

Data sample 3

> Transcript 1. Student 3:
> You said you will give severance pay and six months of health insurance. But it's not enough. We want re-training and education program for laid-off workers. You should pay re-training and educational programs for the laid-off workers. To get a new job.

> Transcript 2. Student 3:
> Every worker think three months additional salary and six months health insurance are not enough for them. I think you think…the profits instead of the workers. Please give us more. Please! You will lose the trust of not only the the workers but also your cus-tomer I think. Please help us. You should think about the workers before the contract. I think this situation is dangerous for the workers. We signed up the contract but now it's not problem because our lives are facing the dangerous situation. We need help. If you can't help us, our life will be broken. We have family. Not only us but also our family member's lives depend on you.

At the conclusion of the teaching cycle, 11 of the 17 students reported that they thought their performance in Roleplay 2 was better than their performance in Roleplay 1. Reflective statements supporting this included the following examples:

> Student 2: Roleplay 2 was better than roleplay 1 because I found my weaknesses and tried to fix them. I got into my role, speaking with feelings.
> Student 8: By doing a second roleplay, we can improve.

Comparisons of the students' self ratings on the evaluation sheets used after each roleplay revealed that the students evaluated their fluency, vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, intonation and independence to have been better in Roleplay 2 than in Roleplay 1. None of the comparisons were statistically significant. The students reported on the post-workshop survey (6-point Likert scale items from "1 - strongly disagree" to "6 - strongly agree" that, on average, they enjoyed the instructional sequence (4.35), thought that their English communication skills improved because of the activities (4.24), thought that the English needed for the roleplays was useful (4.59), thought that the wiki was a little difficult to use (3.88), and thought that watching videos of their roleplays (5.00), reflecting on errors (5.06) and repeating the roleplay was useful (4.35).

Discussion

Evidence of learning could be seen not only in the shifts between transcripts of the two roleplays, but also in the comments students made about the overall instructional design. Di Pietro's intention for SI to put students in "situations where the motivation to think is translated into the challenge to reach goals through verbal exchanges with others" (1987, p. 10) is mirrored in various students' comments: "It's really good to prepare because we have to learn English. Many students want to improve their English, but we make reasons why we can't. The roleplay gives us pressure" (Student 6) and "We had to use a variety of English from our existent knowledge. I think this roleplay put us in that very situation to do so. I practiced a couple times before I came to the class to do the second try. The more I challenged myself, the more clearer my opinion got" (Student 4). Many of the students realized their shortcomings in the first roleplay, focused their preparation for the second roleplay and were rewarded with better performances. The students had to think about how to improve their communication and the instructional phases and learning system provided scaffolded support that allowed them to reach their goals. Many language students may be able to communicate well enough to reach a conclusion the first time through a scenario. While this may be a meaningful learning activity because of its interpersonal communication, idea transfer, concrete experience (Dewey, 1938) and practice of communicative strategies (Ellis, 1984), the result of one interaction may not be the one the student or instructor actually wants. The integration of Dewey, Lewin, Kolb and Argyris and Schon's feedback phase and a second loop helped change students' fundamental knowledge of and abilities in their second language. From a sociocultural perspective, this was achieved by the mediation offered to the learners by the transcript they created that effectively became a tool for further thought about language choice in the given situation.

As in Swain and Lapkin's (2008) study, the students in our project were able to notice and improve their English by watching, transcribing, self-correcting and discussing their

performances. Students were able to work collaboratively in the group feedback phase to prepare for their subsequent roleplay, and many of the students appreciated and incorporated self-corrections, peer suggestions and instructor feedback in their next interaction. The debriefing allowed the teacher to offer further language and role-related instruction. In this regard we see the mediational affordances of the technology as key in this important provision: "Through group cohesion, planning, and feedback, students [are] allowed to develop the self-confidence that might in other, more-traditional classroom activities be lacking" (Brown, 1993, p. 513-4). In our study, students improved their grammar and vocabulary and gained confidence. The crucial dramatic tension of SI was somewhat maintained by using new partners who acted differently to reach goals in the shared context. The teaching methods were effectively supported by instructional media that afforded learners the mediational means to interact in a communicative situation, and to reflect and learn from instructor and peer feedback. The video cameras allowed the students to reflect, notice and improve their language knowledge and abilities (as in Doughty & Varela, 1998 and Swain & Lapkin, 2008) - "I could notice my weaknesses from watching my video" (Student 9) and "watching the videos was useful because we usually can't see ourselves" (Student 2). Although the students were nervous at first, this anxiety seemed to lessen during the second roleplay. Students reported the wiki's ease of use. Students were able to self-transcribe and correct language to notice and improve their performance, and were able to use the wiki at school or at home to learn from other students' language knowledge and communication strategies.

Limitations and Pedagogical Implications

The learning outcomes suggested by this data are limited to differences in performance between the two loops built into the pedagogical design. Future research requires evaluations of learner development through recording and analysis of learner reflections on their own language artifacts, and also performance in subsequent SI routines. This will provide a clearer picture of shifts in learner control over target language features, and allow us to understand further the role of each aspect of the mediation afforded by this teaching/learning process. Furthermore, future research will focus on application of technology mediated SI with larger groups, reflecting the reality for many instructors within the given context. Conclusions about the instructional effectiveness of this project are limited in that only 17 students (and only four males) participated in the SI loops.

Language teachers considering the use of SI or experiential loops of learning should consider several issues that arose in our instructional implementation. Although students improved their performance of roleplay 1, roleplay 2 contained instances of students not repairing corrected utterances, or making completely new syntactic and communication errors. This may simply reflect the uneven nature of language development, or may be due to time constraints, or indeed other factors. It may be, for example, beneficial to continue the loops of experiential SI-based instruction (time permitting) until both students and the instructor are satisfied with performances. Time may be a constraining factor in using SI, technology or our extended model of instruction at all; students required eight sessions to complete all of the tasks, and this sequence may be a little tiring for students. SI's core phases (rehearsal, performance and debriefing) might be done in one or two 90-minute sessions (or perhaps less time if technology or transcriptions and self-correction is not incorporated), but this

might increase the risk of students "satisficing" in their interactions and not becoming more aware of their communicative weaknesses.

Conclusion

As Oda (1993) suggested, SI may be a useful teaching framework for Japanese EFL classes. SI tasks, with technology mediating performances, may increase students' practice of real life communication, increase their motivation, and give students numerous opportunities for self, peer and teacher feedback and support. It is our hope that the approach described in this paper and continued research on SI provides all language teachers a solid framework to "re-create the conditions of social life and provide our students with the help and guidance they need to deal with them" (Di Pietro, 1987, p. vii).

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Appendices

Scenarios, preparation sheets, evaluation rubrics and technology guides can be downloaded from: http://langcom.u-shizuoka-ken.ac.jp/si

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The Learner Community

This knowledge community is brought together by a common concern for learning and an interest to explore new educational possibilities. The community interacts through an innovative, annual face-to-face conference, as well as year-round virtual relationships in a weblog, peer reviewed journal and book imprint – exploring the affordances of the new digital media. Members of this knowledge community include academics, teachers, administrators, policy makers and other education practitioners.

Conference

Members of the Learner Community meet at The International Conference on Learning, held annually in different locations around the world, each selected for the particular role education is playing in social, cultural and economic change.

In recent years, the Conference has been held with Universiti Sains Malaysia, Penang, Malaysia in 1999; RMIT University, Melbourne, Australia in 2000; the University of Athens, Spetses, Greece in 2001; Beijing Normal University, Beijing, China in 2002; Institute of Education, London University, London, UK in 2003; Institute of Pedagogical Sciences, Havana, Cuba in 2004; University of Granada, Granada, Spain in 2005; Sam Sharpe Teachers College, Montego Bay, Jamaica in 2006; University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa in 2007; the University of Illinois, Chicago, USA in 2008; the University of Barcelona, Spain in 2009; Hong Kong Institute of Education, Hong Kong in 2010; and the University of Mauritius, Mauritius in 2011. In 2012 the Conference will be held at The Institute of Education, University of London, London, UK.

Our community members and first time attendees come from all corners of the globe. Intellectually, our interests span the breath of the field of education. The Conference is a site of critical reflection, both by leaders in the field and emerging scholars and teachers. Those unable to attend the Conference may opt for virtual participation in which community members can either or both submit a video or slide presentation with voice-over, or simply submit a paper for peer review and possible publication in the Journal.

Online presentations can be viewed on YouTube.

Publishing

The Learner Community enables members to publish through three mediums.

First, by participating in the Learning Conference, community members can enter a world of journal publication unlike the traditional academic publishing forums – a result of the responsive, non-hierarchical and constructive nature of the peer review process. *The International Journal of Learning* provides a framework for double-blind peer review, enabling authors to publish into an academic journal of the highest standard.

The second publication medium is through the book series The Learner, publishing cutting edge books on education in print and electronic formats. Publication proposals and manuscript submissions are welcome.

The third major publishing medium is our news blog, constantly publishing short news updates from the Learner Community, as well as major developments in the field of education. You can also join this conversation at Facebook and Twitter or subscribe to our email Newsletter.

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