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# On CALL

The Newsletter of the Computer Assisted Language Learning Interest Section

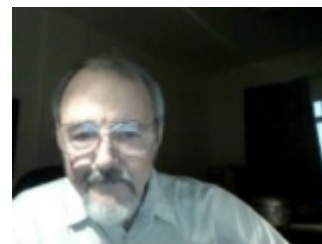
## LEADERSHIP UPDATES

### HOW THE TESOL CALL INTEREST SECTION BEGAN (UPDATED)

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Co-founding member and first officially appointed chair of TESOL CALL-IS

*This article is based on an original prepared for the CALL-IS newsletter (Stevens, 2003). It draws on emailed recollections of Carol Chapelle, Elizabeth Hanson-Smith, Deborah Healey, Roger Kenner, and Claire Bradin Siskin. This revision updates the earlier work.*



The story of **CALL-IS** starts more or less with the 1982 TESOL Conference in Honolulu, Hawaii, which attracted a dozen presentations involving computers, notably one by David Sanders from Concordia University in Montreal on 'Design and Implementation of a Communicative CAI Program' (at the time, what we now know as CALL was widely referred to as CAI, computer-assisted instruction). Joan Jamieson and Carol Chapelle also presented there, giving two skillfully choreographed back-to-back 3-hour sessions all day on Saturday, one on ESL lesson design and the other on programming in Pilot. Also at that conference, David Wyatt, whose software was on display at the ALA booth, chaired a 'Rap Session' on 'The Why, Where, and How of C.A.I.' (in addition to Carol and Joan, the panelists were Frank Otto, Anne Jackson-Muller, and Roberta Lavine).

The technology could be recalcitrant in that era. Anne and Peter Muller struggled to get their program to load ten minutes into the time their presentation was due to begin while their audience grew restless with the delay, and this was typical of the way the technology could be expected to work, or not, as the case may be. Vance Stevens was not listed in the program, but nevertheless made a cameo appearance at the video interest section's academic session, where he demonstrated a crude authoring system which would cue a video cassette tape, play a segment, ask a question, and depending on response, wind the tape to another frame, play that, and so on. The program required a ten-minute load to memory which had to be initiated during the change in speakers just prior to his turn, and that unfortunate speaker had to endure distraction from the clicking of the disk drives and whirring of the VCR at irregular intervals during his presentation. The drives had settled down by the time it was Vance's turn to speak. To his great relief, text appeared on the screen, the tape played, and the program worked long enough for him to briefly overview it.

Hawaii was not the first TESOL event where interest in CAI had been shown. David Wyatt had also presented on a computer-based topic in Detroit in 1981, and Joan and Carol had done a computer-based presentation as early as 1980 at TESOL in San Francisco. According to Carol "It was an introduction to CALL and authoring on PLATO. We got terminals from a Bay area PLATO rep, had phone lines installed, and taught people how to author." The following year, Jamieson and Chapelle "looked at the benefits and limitations of three hardware/software environments for developing and using CALL: micro, mainframe, and instructional mainframe (the latter was PLATO). We had programmed the same material on the three, brought the three terminals to Detroit in my car, had phone lines installed in the conference room, and showed them live!!" Carol enjoys recalling these events: "These memories are very vivid because these events were extremely difficult to set up logistically, and they were very rewarding to conduct." Joan and Carol followed up their mini-course by sending a mailout to those involved. This was an early attempt at pulling together a community of CAI enthusiasts within TESOL, but Carol and Joan backed off from organizing further "after realizing how much secretarial work was involved!" (quoted from email 15 & 16 May 2003, with Carol's permission).

After 1982, it was clear that interest in CAI was growing regarding its potential for language learning. Therefore, an invited symposium was scheduled for the next annual TESOL conference in Toronto, 1983, and this symposium

was notable for many things that both happened and didn't happen. One important thing to happen was that John Higgins argued eloquently that the name of our endeavor should be changed forthwith to CALL, to place the emphasis on 'learning', and we eventually became the CALL interest section. One thing that didn't happen at this symposium was that, since it was an 'invited' event, a volunteer was stationed at the door to check badges against her list of invitees; thus was Earl Stevick turned away and disappeared down the hall before anyone could catch him to invite him back.

However, the 40 some-odd people who had been invited did discuss becoming an interest section. Toward this end we went so far as to elect a chair. As David Sanders had taken the initiative to organize and convene the symposium, he was elected first chair of the interest section-to-be. Next on the agenda was election of an associate-chair, and many more deserving candidates declined to stand before Vance Stevens was finally elected associate chair of what we hoped would soon become an interest section in TESOL.

A steering committee was then elected, among which was Roger Kenner, who took on the role of 'Official Secretary'. Roger maintained an archive of CALL-IS history from its inception up through 2003 (Kenner 2000, 2003). His "A Short History of the Founding of the CALL-IS Interest Section" deals specifically and in greater detail than here with the behind-the-scenes leading up to the Toronto symposium and the years immediately after (see Kenner, 1996).

Despite the fact that, according to Roger's record, the symposium had been orchestrated to lead to the formation of an interest section, this was another thing that didn't happen in Toronto. We soon learned that certain steps in the procedures we would have to follow could not be taken until the next year's convention. Meanwhile, David Sanders developed other interests and his place in our lobbying efforts was assumed by his colleague at Concordia, Roger Kenner. These developments were communicated among the principles (David and Roger in Canada, the TESOL front office in Virginia, and Vance in Hawaii) through snail mail.

We had managed to muster enough favorable reaction in Toronto among the higher-ups in TESOL that Roger and Vance were each treated to a night in the Hyatt in Houston, 1984, in order to attend a day-long TESOL leadership workshop there (Kenner, 1996, provides insights into what was going on between TESOL and the unofficial CALL interest section). Here we learned the hoops we would have to jump through in our interest section bid and how to approach them. Our proposal had to be put before each existing interest section, as each would have to decide how to direct its delegates to vote at the mid-week Interest Section Council meeting, where Roger and Vance would appear to make our case in person. The approval of other interest sections was crucial and fraught with politics. More interest sections meant greater subdivision of the pot of limited resources available to all interest sections (e.g. money, hence pages, for newsletters) and dilution of influence in the Interest Section Council, so that it was in the interest of the most powerful interest sections to stringently vet newcomers. However, our argument that we represented a substantive issue in TESOL backed with a groundswell of support won the day, and our petition was approved.

During the week, we met frequently with our co-conspirators in the spacious atrium of the Hyatt. When we learned we needed to quickly draft a Statement of Purpose for our group. Joan Jamieson picked up a napkin off the table and began jotting down our working notes and handed these over to Roger. Don Loritz, who was way ahead of most of us with his LISP-based parsers, happened to have brought his 'portable' with him (which in those days meant a kind of typewriter) so Roger went up to Don's room and clattered out the document we needed to attain the next hurdle in the ratification process.

Once an interest section is approved by the Interest Section Council its recommendation goes before the Executive Board, which meets after the conference and, assuming it supports the recommendations of the Interest Section Council, then appoints the new interest section's chair and associate chair. As our group's two spokespersons behind the scenes at the Houston convention, Roger and Vance made sure that the right people had our names spelled correctly, and we were informed of our appointments later in the year.

The concept of the CALL-IS Hospitality Room and its evolution into the Electronic Village is another thread that is worth pursuing in tracking the development of the interest section. Vance Stevens took the first step in this direction by organizing a software fair in Houston in 1984. There was no precedent for this, but those of us presenting became aware that each of us was developing software the others might like to examine at leisure. So, at the next software fair organized by Roger and Vance in New York in 1985, some of us stayed behind to copy our freeware onto each other's five-and-a-quarter inch truly flexible floppies before the computers we had assembled could be packed away at the end of the session.

Neither Roger nor Vance were in Anaheim in 1986, but Roger's documents state that the first 'Hospitality Room' appeared at that conference. In 1987, Macey Taylor turned a room in the convention hotel in Miami into a CALL-IS Hospitality Room. She set up her Amiga there along with some DOS PCs and Apple IIe computers and kept it

open to those wishing to drop by and learn more about our interest section. Roger recalls that the following year, 1988 in Chicago, Peter Lee arranged to provide computers for a Hospitality Room and union rules had to be circumvented through discrete tipping to get them in and out of the conference center.

The idea of assembling computers in one place at annual conventions for the purpose of presenting language learning software led to the establishment of a regular venue for sharing and exchanging it. Soon, freeware and shareware software collections for Apple, Mac, PC, Commodore, etc. were maintained by separate librarians for each different platform. The collections themselves were brought to each conference; lists were published in newsletters during the year, and copies of the software were mailed to people who sent money to cover cost of postage and diskettes. In 1989 Claire Bradin Siskin compiled a number of these lists into one big list and brought it to San Antonio with her. She remembers that before the conference started, she ran off about 100 copies and put them in the HR. "They immediately disappeared, and people kept demanding copies ... so we took one master copy and put it at the central handouts booth. The funny thing then was that the master copy kept disappearing from the handouts booth, and they kept asking me for a new master copy! None of us had anticipated the great demand for the list, and this experience was probably what led Deborah and Norm to start the first 'official' CALL-IS list the following year." (quoted from email 17 May 2003, with Claire's permission)

Deborah Healey and Norm Johnson produced biannual print-version updates of the CALL-IS Software List from 1990 through the rest of the decade. The 1999 version was listed in TESOL Publications as late as 2004, and it was for a time a source of revenue for CALL-IS as well as for TESOL. Claire recalls one important aspect of this arrangement: "When CALL-IS gave TESOL the rights to sell the printed version of the list, Deborah made sure that CALL-IS retained the rights to the electronic version. This is significant because it meant that in the many workshops that Deborah and Claire and others gave in the subsequent years, we could legally distribute the electronic file on a floppy disk [and] why we can have the list available on the Web today" (quoted from email 17 May 2003, with Claire's permission). The list is still available as of this writing thanks to Deborah Healey's having created "a new home" for it: [here](#).

By now commercial vendors at TESOL had begun to take what was by-and-large a healthy interest in CALL-IS and the librarians were becoming heir to boxes of donated commercial software that had to be stored between conferences and then shipped to the next venue. In 1993, Deborah Healey and Jim Buell greatly aided the management of this situation by arranging through Lloyd Holliday at La Trobe University in Australia for the CALL-IS public domain, shareware, and commercial demo software collections (and the electronic version of the CALL-IS Software List) to become available via FTP from CELIA (Computer Enhanced Language Instruction Archive; the collection was retrievable on May 15, 2003 from <http://www.latrobe.edu.au/education/celia/celia.html> but was found to be timing out after May 20, 2003). Then in 1996, with the instigation of Elizabeth Hanson-Smith, these materials were ported to a CD-ROM which was published by TESOL, and listed in their catalog as late as 2004, just below the software list (Figure 1).

Figure 1: The last Internet Archive snapshot of <http://www.tesol.org/pubs/catalog/tech.html> was made July 26, 2004 [here](#).

As the Hospitality Room grew into a place where conference delegates could come each year to try out a growing collection of commercial and non-commercial software in a setting free of promotion and bias, the job of arranging for the computers at each conference, installing software on them, and maintaining and networking them grew increasingly complex and labor-intensive. Roger mentions the guitar jams we used to have late at night in the CALL Hospitality Rooms. These occurred because CALL-IS volunteers and steering committee members used to have to work late nights after each conference day to maintain the computer software and networking in the HR (networking was a late development - initially we resorted to 'sneaker-net' - and Deborah nostalgically recalls hours happily "spent copying those damn shareware floppies" (quoted from email 16 May 2003, with Deborah's permission). We would keep our guitars under the tables during the day and send out for food and drinks as darkness fell. Early to late evening we'd maintain and copy, and man you shoulda heard us, just about midnight.

Roger notes that 1997 in Orlando was the year that the HR became known as the EV, or Electronic Village. Eventually the CALL-IS has succeeded in getting TESOL to contract out for setup, maintenance, and network administration of the EV, and CALL-IS organizers can now walk away from the conference like everyone else after the last discussion session has wrapped up. This has led to marked improvements in the stress and sleep deprivation levels of the organizers, but also to a loss of what used to be a great source of entertainment and community spirit in what was once a much smaller and very close-knit CALL-IS. But size has its advantages as well, and it is gratifying to see events set in motion so many years ago develop into an interest section whose many offshoots have become institutionalized for the benefit to so many people.

And that is how CALL IS began. But there's a lot more, much of it recorded in Roger's "The CALL Interest Section Community History" (Kenner, 2000, 2003). If you read through this, you can't fail to notice first that Roger has

taken great pains to document our beginnings and maintain that record. You also can't fail to notice that as the years go on, the documentation gets sparser. Who is going to fill in the gaps and refresh the record before memory fades? Could it be you?

## References

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*NOTE: This article has not been copy edited due to its length.*

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