Revitalizing CALICO—The Bob Fischer Project

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Many of you have come to know CALICO as an authoritative, financially sound, and increasingly well-respected international organization, uniting scholars from virtually everywhere in the world, who are interested in the intersection of technology, pedagogy, and research in promoting the acquisition of world languages and cultures. Many scholars and practitioners have nurtured CALICO as an organization through its relatively short life, but none have been more central to the organization’s survival than Bob Fischer. Often self-effacing and willing to give credit to others for his good work, it’s time to rectify this. I may not be recalling all of the facts exactly as they happened, but this is my recollection of what happened at the CALICO conference hosted at the West Point Academy in 1997, where members of the Executive Board—including myself—suddenly found themselves faced with the challenge of finding a new executive director and journal editor who would be able to lead the organization back from the brink of dissolution.

There is no reason to open old wounds by providing the details of the decisions and actions that led up to the state the organization found itself in that spring. As the elected representatives of the membership, it fell upon the Executive Board to determine the future of the organization in the absence of the then-current Executive Director. Fellow Board members at the time included Keith Anderson, James Pusack, Dana Paramskas, Bob Fischer, and Gary Smith. In addition to our responsibilities to the membership, we were all concerned about personal and professional liability as a by-product of serving on the board. One of the options available to us was to disband altogether and to declare insolvency, somehow hoping that our memberships and library subscriptions would not be asking for refunds right away. (One of the things we were able to conjecture through connecting the dots was that dues and subscriptions revenues had been spent prior to the actual production of the journal, and the journal itself was behind in production, so the organization was, in essence, living on borrowed money.)

We agreed to hold an open meeting in the lobby bar of the hotel rather than behind closed doors, so that all could come who had issues or information to share, and no particular invitations to members were issued. We were then a small enough group that word of mouth sufficed to encourage a number of members to attend the meeting. The focus of the meeting was a plan of action to return the organization to solvency.
The membership at that time voted to engage in an alternative solution, one of seeing who (in his or her right mind) would be willing and ready to take on the management of the organization if the current situation was not illuminated and addressed by the Executive Director to the satisfaction of the Board. Obviously that person would need to have the support of his or her institution, as there would be no money in the organizational coffers to pay for typesetting (which was the standard practice at that time) or editing to be able to catch up with the production of the *Journal*. Further, the new location would have to provide space and some staff to assist the Executive Director. I had thought of offering but lacked the assurance of institutional support, as I was brand new to my position at San Diego State University and did not know how this could fit in with my duties as newly-hired Director of the Language Acquisition Resource Center (LARC). Bob asked if I wouldn’t reconsider taking on this challenge, but I (and many others) thought he would be the right person for the job. He gave it considerable thought, and, at a much later date, came back to the Board with a proposal that had the blessing of his institution. He never looked back, and neither did we. He has been an excellent Director of CALICO and Editor of the *CALICO Journal*, which nobody can deny!

Not only did Bob agree to house the organization at his institution, Texas State University, but he also agreed to edit the journal, which was a major undertaking in itself, particularly considering the back issues that were owed subscribers and members. He secured pledges of support and accepted a generous gift from an anonymous donor who literally saved CALICO and enabled him to catch up on the back issues of the *Journal*. No one can fully know, except perhaps Esther Horn and Bob’s wife, Joyce, how much the decision weighed upon him throughout the years, through times when there were not enough submissions, when there was not enough money for a proper booth at national conferences, when much of the final editing of articles fell on his shoulders, etc. He has represented the organization throughout the world since 1997, and in doing so, he has done us a world of service.

The organization we have today produces a journal with very respectable acceptance rates ranked among the most influential in our field, one that is the reflection of years of contributions by many, but none so much as Bob Fischer. We owe him a debt of gratitude for all that he has done to make both the *CALICO Journal* and the organization itself the world-class entities that they are today.