FLAX a winner on the world’s technology stage

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Software designed at the University of Waikato and used all around the world has won a major international competition.

FLAX, which stands for Flexible Learning Acquisition, has taken first place at the Linked Vici Competition, held to acknowledge development in open and linked data for educational purposes.

The win was announced at the 13th International Semantic Web Conference, in Riva del Garda, Italy, with FLAX taking first place from 10 shortlisted candidates.

FLAX, which can be freely downloaded and used both online and in the classroom, was developed by the Digital Libraries Group at the University of Waikato and allows language teachers to create a variety of practice exercises from ‘real’ language texts and multimedia available in digital libraries.

The judges said FLAX provides data for language learning in a new and innovative way by combining corpora (samples), varying from TED (technology, entertainment and design) talks to academic collections. It also supports teachers in creating automated exercises and assessments with these corpora.

Teachers or supporting staff can build their own language collections, serving their specific needs. The FLAX software can be freely downloaded and used both online and in the classroom.

The three-member FLAX team that submitted the entry is Professor Ian Witten and Dr Shaoqun Wu from Waikato University and Alannah Fitzgerald who is a Fellow with the Open Educational Resources Research Hub at the Open University in England, and also a Research Affiliate at Concordia University, Canada. It was Ms Fitzgerald who presented at the Italy competition and picked up the winner’s prize of €3000 (nearly $5000).

Professor Witten says winning an international competition at this level will do wonders for our international profile, and bring the FLAX project to the attention of a lot more people. “Flax has the potential to revolutionize language learning on the web, particularly for those who need to improve their professional and academic written English.”