

Grateful Student Recounts First Experience at LA Regional

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CATESOL News

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By **KHULAN ZAGD**

—I was a homestay mom for more than a decade. As soon as my kids were old enough to take care of themselves and as soon as they could stay a full day at school, I used my opportunity and applied for the TESOL Program at CSU, San Bernardino. Last fall was my very first quarter at the graduate program at the American university. To tell you the truth, it has been overwhelming and so different for a person who graduated the National University of Mongolia in Ulaanbaatar. Coming from a strictly teacher-oriented environment, I am finding it very exciting and eye opening to be learning new ways of teaching and becoming a part of the educational system here in California.



When I found out about the upcoming Los Angeles Regional Conference and the opportunity to apply for a CATESOL Education Foundation Stipend to help offset the cost of attending, I took my chances. I applied for it and fortunately was awarded. One of the requirements was to volunteer for the conference, so I arrived at the CSU, Los Angeles campus at 7:30 a.m. on April 25 to start as early as possible.

I was greeted at the volunteer desk by one of the volunteer coordinators, Nathan Rodriguez, and directed to volunteer at the King Hall. After two hours of assisting the arriving guests, fellow CATESOL members, I reported back to the volunteer desk at the Golden Eagle structure, got my badge, and attended my first session, “Dispelling Pronunciation Myths—Best Practices for Teachers,” conducted by featured speaker Donna M. Brinton at 10:15 a.m. She presented an overview of today’s research in practical phonetics and talked about different ways to carry out best practices.

After the presentation I visited the Nonnative Language Educators’ Issues Interest Group in the U-SU Pasadena Room at 11:15 am, but there I found out that the rap session had been cancelled, so I visited the Poster Sessions in the U-SU Los Angeles Room. There were various presentations, a huge number of visitors, and a very big selection of English-language textbooks on display.



I stopped at the “Innovative Technology-Enhanced Backward Design Projects for College ESL,” presented by Kevin Chan of Santa Monica College/Pasadena City College. Kevin explained what backward design and rigor were and talked about the Shark Tank interactive role-play. Then I checked the “MoviesGrowEnglish (MGE): Watch Movies, Learn English” display. A very friendly Michael Laib from the University of Southern California and his daughter introduced their website, which supports the use of movies for interactive learning for English language learners. My final checkpoint was “Google Hangout to Foster Learner Autonomy in Project-Based Learning,” presented by Kara MacDonald and Unsoon Won of the Defense Language Institute. Their presentation described how social media platforms could be used in or out of the classroom for project-based English language learning.

After my lunch and with renewed strength I went to a 1 p.m. session, “Grammar Explorer—Taking Grammar to Uncharted Territory,” presented by Robert Jenkins of Santa Ana College of Continuing Education in the U-SU San Gabriel Room in the Golden Eagle structure. All participants were given a beautifully illustrated “National Geographic Grammar Explorer 1B” English-language textbook and we had discussions about teaching grammar in a fun learning experience.

The 2 p.m. session “English for Academic Purposes: Research-Based Activities for Reading and Writing” by featured speaker Marguerite Ann Snow was about classroom strategies in EAP instruction and about an overview of research in academic reading and writing. And my last session, the 3 p.m. “Innovate, Transform, Inspire: Examples From Practicing Teachers,” was presented by plenary speaker Luciana de Oliveira from the University of Miami. Dr. de Oliveira provided examples from practicing teachers on innovative practices in their teaching. She gave suggestions to conference participants on ways to be more creative, innovative, and inspirational in their own teaching.

Because there were so many concurrent sessions and little time, I did not have an opportunity to visit my fellow CATESOL Inland Empire Chapter members Ixchell Reyes and Kaz Shida’s session, “Mobile Apps and Web Tools: Promoting Engagement Through a Familiar Medium,” but I was fortunate to meet them during the afternoon snack and opportunity drawing at 4 p.m. I also had a chance to meet personally Don Sillings, CATESOL Board of Directors representative, who greatly assisted in my first conference experience, and Deborah Walker, the Los Angeles Regional Conference Committee member and Poster Session coordinator.

With great gratitude and an appreciation for giving me an opportunity I would like to thank CATESOL, Margaret Teske, and Karen Dennis. Participating and being a part of the conference was a great professional and educational experience for me. Not only did it gave me a chance to meet new people in the TESOL sphere, but it also helped “to improve my preparation and professional expertise, to promote sound and research-based education policy and practices, to increase awareness of the strengths and needs of English language learners, and to promote appreciation of diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds,” as it is described in the CATESOL mission statement.

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Michael Laib of USC and his daughter with their MoviesGrowEnglish (MGE) display. Photo by Khulan Zagd.