

Stipend Awardee Rewarded With Bundle of Knowledge From LA Regional

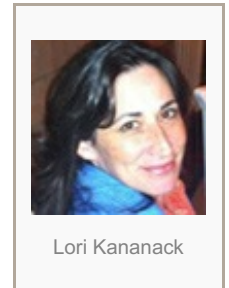
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CATESOL News

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By **LORI KANANACK**

—I applied for and was grateful to receive the Regional Conference Stipend from the CATESOL Education Foundation, which enabled me to attend the LA Regional Conference held March 5 at Cal Poly, Pomona.



The 60-mile drive from Agoura Hills to Pomona was well worth it. I arrived at the campus to find CATESOL signs beneath balloons in every shade of blue directing me from the entrance of the university right up to the registration tables. University students stood ready to help in case I missed the balloons. The conference was held in the Broncos Student Center (pictured below right). I checked in, received my volunteer badge, and was assigned to guide early arrivals to the publishers' tables upstairs, where coffee, tea, and juice stood ready to fortify the masses.

I met several graduate students in the lobby, also volunteers, and we immediately began comparing notes on conferences in general and job opportunities in particular.



The networking had begun!

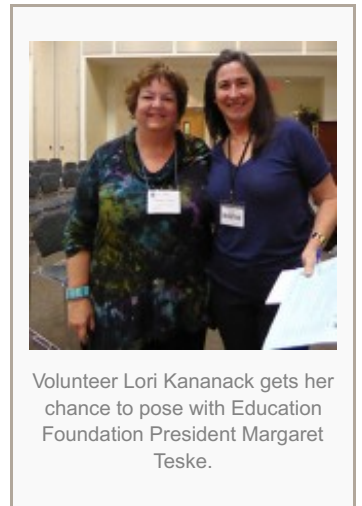
At 9 a.m. I headed down the hall to the large meeting room “Ursula Major,” which, intimidating in its size, had been divided into two rooms for “Teacher Talks.” I was asked to facilitate “How to Make Reading Skills Appealing (Improving Comprehension and Speed).” When I arrived, five young students were waiting, not sure what to expect as they were undergraduates and this was their first experience at a conference. We were joined by several instructors in the field in the next 15 minutes, which made for an interesting mix of perspectives! Three of the undergrads were Spanish majors, and two were studying English Literature. We rearranged the seating into a circle and dove into our topic. The conversation was animated and informative, with the undergrads forming a third of the circle and a variety of ESL/EFL instructors completing the circle. Two Cal Poly instructors joined us, sharing their strategies for reading in college ESL classrooms. One commented, “It’s best when they (his students) challenge the material.” Another instructor, who teaches math and science in Chinese at a school in Orange County, shared her perspective on code-switching between English and Chinese in her classroom, particularly when dealing with word problems. A fellow facilitator joined us and added a great motto to the conversation: “Think. Pair. Share.” She was referring to the breakdown of prereading strategies; the motto struck a chord with me. Site Chair Jennie Watson came by and took pictures of the group in discussion, and I got to pose with CATESOL Education Foundation President Margaret Teske.

Our beloved conference chair, Dr. Karen Russikoff, dropped in as we were wrapping up, and she had some great insights for the undergraduates. As the session ended and attendees moved on to the next discussion group, one student stayed behind to ask about ideas for teaching ESL to a 4-year-old, while a newly arrived professor wanted to discuss whether noncredit ESL courses should be paid the same as credit-level ESL courses. No matter the topic, everyone I encountered was passionate about something. The day truly flew by.

During the poster sessions (noon-12:45 p.m.), I met Mr. Myo Myint (Mission College, Santa Clara), who had a fascinating board on how he introduced Burmese literature into the ESL classroom. His aim was to raise awareness of the diversity of cultures we encounter every day and that a common bond of humanity connects us all.

While taking a break for lunch, I sat with some of Karen Russikoff's students, who all adore her. As Ninet Aghasatourian put it, "She's the reason I'm here today." It was fun to see a passion for teaching passed from one mentor to another, as "Dr. K" later introduced her mentor, Dr. Marianne Celce-Murcia, as plenary speaker.

With so many interesting discussions going on, sometimes the hardest part is choosing one. I teach ESL in the workplace at Cedars-Sinai Medical Center, and I'm interested in community college ESL positions. I know how important keeping up with technology is, and I wanted to learn more about the latest trends. Another of Dr. Russikoff's volunteers, Stephanie, suggested I attend "An Introduction to Flipping a Class," presented by Melody Hanawalt and Sally Olivas. I had heard of the technique through Khan Academy, started by Salman Khan in 2006 to offer free online courses to anyone interested in learning. Melody and Sally took the idea and applied it to teaching ESL. In their introduction, they explain, "This is a pedagogical approach in which direct instruction occurs at home via technology, and the classroom is transformed." The presenters walked us through the entire process, starting with a lesson plan, then on to create a video, upload it, share it with students, and give handouts for the students to work on while watching the video at home and then to bring back to the classroom. Their example included a grammar topic; the presenters stressed that only one theme should be used during the lesson to avoid confusion. Realia and homework in the classroom would complete the lesson plan. Students would have a handout to fill in at home as they watched the video (on YouTube, for example). The beauty of the flipped classroom is that students can replay or pause the lesson as instructed, or as often as they like, at their own speed, before coming into the classroom to work together on the material. More time is spent on student talk, less on teacher talk, making it a win-win situation.



As we left Melody and Sally's inspiring presentation, we joined the flow of teachers spilling out of doorways, taking on new purpose and direction, as everyone headed for Ursula Major to hear our plenary speaker, Dr. Marianne Celce-Murcia.

Dr. Celce-Murcia was introduced by her former student, Dr. Russikoff, with the same reverence for being a mentor that had been afforded Dr. Russikoff earlier in the day. The topic, "How an Overview of Language Teaching Methodology Can Help Us to Think Globally and Teach Locally," was an imposing one, but those in our field are not afraid of long titles, and we listened with fascination as Dr. Celce-Murcia took us through a brief history of language pedagogy. She left us with 10 "microstrategies" to take back to the classroom:

1. Maximize learning opportunities
2. Facilitate negotiated interaction
3. Minimize perceptual mismatches
4. Activate intuitive heuristics
5. Foster language awareness
6. Contextualize linguistic input
7. Integrate language skills, especially reading and writing
8. Promote learner autonomy
9. Raise cultural consciousness

10. Ensure social relevance (can get political!)

Dr. Celce-Murcia wrapped up the day with these words: “TESOL is an exciting field. We need to think globally (what has been done and tried) and act locally (Who are our students? What are their needs?).” She reminded us to explore new technologies in our quest for better teaching methodologies, which made me glad I had chosen the “Flipped Classroom” session. While I didn’t win anything at the closing raffle, I did leave the conference feeling very rewarded.

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