

Surfing the Waves of Change in San Diego

By Tiffany S. Kim

I'm always full of anticipation the week before a CATESOL conference, and this time was no exception, even with the trek from Los Angeles to the San Diego Regional Conference on April 21, 2018. As I drove, I was also filled with gratitude for the opportunity to attend as a volunteer and a recipient of the CATESOL Education Foundation's Regional Conference Stipend.

With the theme "Surfing the Waves of Change in Challenging Times," this conference brought me the closest I have ever been to surfing. However, I related to the sport much more than I'd expected to, particularly with the illustrations used by plenary speaker Jayme Adelson-Goldstein (Lighthearted Learning). She kept us on our toes, literally and figuratively, with an engaging presentation on the waves of change in the world of teaching English. Her insight and advice was inspiring, and her in-depth research into surfing thoroughly impressive. Not only did I come away with new phrases like "soft top," but I also gained a more enriched understanding of our changing climate and of how to "ride the waves" in a "sea of ambiguity, according to Jayme's rendition of "Surfin' Safari" by The Beach Boys.

Since I'm barely a second-year ESL instructor, one thing that especially resonated with me was Jayme's encouragement to "get used to wiping out," which she used as an analogy to embrace and demonstrate the growth mindset (for students). This had me pause and ponder Jayme's final point: to have fun. In fact, I was quite mind-blown by the last quote that she shared, which was, "we confound the people that would thwart us when we delight in our work."

I was immediately able to see these principles in action at my next session: "Catch the Wave! Teach Vocabulary with Tech, Maximize Learning" with Kristi Reyes and Debra Poortenga. My difficulty with choosing sessions is that I always want to attend more than one, if not all of them, since they cover such a wide variety of relevant topics. However, with my ability to only be in one place at a time, I selected the above-mentioned session to learn about principles that I could apply to my teaching contexts — and learn them I did! The session was fast-paced and interactive and I loved the suggested activities, so much so that I made plans to incorporate them into my class starting Monday morning.

Just before this vocabulary session, I happened to bump into a colleague that I'd met at another CATESOL workshop, and it turned out that she was also a stipend recipient! Faii Athiprayoon is from the Los Angeles area as well, so of course we had a take a photo together. She is currently a graduate student, and has inspired me with her diligence and commitment to professional development.

Since I was a lunch volunteer — though how people were able to eat more after a bountiful breakfast spread generously donated by publishers I will never know — I was able to attend four exceptional presentations altogether. I especially appreciated the session on "Getting Hired and Working Abroad: Challenges Faced by EFL Professionals," which featured a panel of instructors with extensive experience abroad. I have never attended something like this, and it had me consider such questions as, "What am I willing to do to prepare to teach English?" especially since my husband and I hope to work abroad.

This conference allowed really wonderful networking opportunities such as this, as well as insight into research and practical teaching tips from sessions on multi-level communication and

effective warm-ups/fillers. That being said, I was even more thankful for the drive back to LA, which gave me ample time to process all that I had gathered at the conference.

I'm keenly aware that I have much to learn, and I was so grateful for the opportunity to learn from and network with seasoned professionals who are passionate about their work and the learners in their care. The more I get involved in CATESOL, the more gratitude I have for this community of dedicated educators "surfing" together.

I also want to express my heartfelt appreciation to all those involved in making this conference such a wonderful experience. Thank you for your many hours and devotion to this community and the 2018 CATESOL San Diego Regional Conference!