

Chui's Student Excellence Scheme (徐氏卓越學生計劃)

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Learning Report

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“The most valuable resource that all teachers have is each other. Without collaboration our growth is limited to our own perspectives” – Robert John Meehan.

This single quote by the American educator Robert John Meehan effectively summarises the main reason for me participating in the 16th Asia TEFL, 1st MAAL and 6th HAAL 2018 International Conference.

This marks my first academic conference in which I am a presenter and not simply a participant. While the main objective is for me to present my findings based on a coursework done during a university course (BBED6272 Teaching and Learning in Small Classes taught by Dr Gary Harfitt, taken in semester 2 of the 2016/17 school year), I also aimed to take the opportunity to connect with experts in the fields: regardless of whether they are professors, lecturers, teachers, student-teachers like myself or other stakeholders in education, and learn from their experiences. Despite only participating in the said programme for the first two days of the 3-day function (due to a time clash with another conference in Hong Kong), given the richness of the events, I believe I have fulfilled all my initial objectives.

My poster session was organised to be on the first day of the conference, meaning that I had to set up before the keynote speech began. The first person who I talked to was actually a staff member from the University of Hong Kong, and we conversed mainly about our topic before we went to visit other posters prior to proceeding to the first keynote speech (the official presentation session was around lunchtime, but as all posters were already up at the time, we walked around together in the area).

The most interesting poster I saw was actually a poster about a drama workshop and its effects on primary students' motivation in English learning, produced by my own alma mater. Not only did I find the contents intriguing, but the fact that my alma mater has a research team formed by teachers really amazed me. The main message this brought to me was that quality research and teaching are really not mutually exclusive, but are in fact hand-in-hand, as good research informs better teaching; in turn, teaching gives rise to more room for research and investigation.

In my opinion, my own poster session was a huge success. I did not expect the amount of audience at my poster, listening to me and asking me questions. All the feedback I have gained from the few hours in conversation with the many experts on site gave me a lot of insight on how to further improve my research design if I had another chance, and also how to further refine my paper for future publication. This has given me a lot of encouragement and confidence in my current steps, but has also humbled me with how far my targets still are. In fact, my biggest surprise was when a university professor from Mainland China (see image 4 in my photos) approached me and asked me for my full paper, telling me that he wanted to cite me in his teacher training course. The thought of being able to inspire fellow educators is extremely gratifying and pleasing.

Nonetheless, this academic conference is surely not only about my own poster presentation, but also about going to other seminars and workshops by other international presenters. I have had the privilege to sit in many other seminars, though the one that I felt most inspired by was how a Japanese professor talked about the use of e-learning tools in education: we should not be over-cautious about the negative impacts brought about by the emergence of e-

learning tools, but we should, in fact, embrace such changes and try to make use of their positive impacts in our classrooms. In particular, he talked about how Grammarly and Ginger are great applications that can help students check basic, fundamental mistakes, while some other applications like Quizlet and Kahoot! may aid classroom teaching in terms of adding interactive components into the classroom. Siri, Dragon Dictation and Google Translate can be used for basic pronunciation guidance for ESL students. Communication media applications like Instagram can also serve as a good source for authentic materials for impromptu speaking or various other communicative activities. The fact that the Cloud environment has expanded so quickly should be acknowledged and teachers should actually equip students with the required 21st century skills, rather than holding themselves with the past and how they used to teach.

In the large picture, I was greatly humbled and inspired by the experience. In addition to the inspiration and feedback I got from the many people who came to my poster session, I have also learnt multiple perspectives in how I can analyse the work of a teacher. This has paved the path into what I am trying to be in the first few years of my graduate career: a full-time teacher with a heart for the students and the passion to further improve through constant research and collaboration with others.

I look forward to more future chances to go to more academic conferences to inspire and be inspired.