

## LD SIG GRANT AWARDEE REPORTS | LD SIG 研究助成

### What I Learned from Attending My First Conference

Miki Iwamoto

Email: <miki198611@gmail.com>

Master's Program, Temple University, Japan Campus



Before attending my first conference, I had no idea about what a conference would be like, and there were many things I wanted to know and do there, such as presenting at the poster session, meeting new people, and learning about useful ideas for my lessons. The biggest thing I wanted to do was to learn useful and effective activities for my lessons. As an English teacher in a public high school, I face some constraints, such as not enough equipment in the classroom or a large number of students in one class. I have tried some activities in my lessons, such as dictations or pair conversations, and these activities usually worked well at first, but students were bored after several times because they wanted to try new things. Therefore, at this conference, I wanted to find out about more activities that are especially useful for grammar or vocabulary learning, and also I wanted to talk about effective learner-centered activities with other English language teachers.

Overall, the most inspiring aspect of the conference was listening to the various presentations. Because of my context, I usually share ideas for lessons only with other high school teachers. For example, even when I join in-service training programs, which are usually organized by my Board of Education, only high school teachers are present. That kind of training shows us useful classroom techniques, such as how to use technology effectively or how to conduct lessons for presentations. These are also good opportunities to improve my teaching skills, but what we discuss in the training is focused on only high school, and I wanted to hear different ideas or opinions from teachers outside of the high school system. Throughout the JALT2018 conference, I could not only meet people from various teaching contexts, but I could also listen to various presentations from these people. Even though I was not sure what I was interested in specifically, there were many different types of presentations, so I could learn a lot. There were many presentations conducted at the same time, so it was difficult to choose one. Among the many presentations, I focused on the ones about classroom activities. As a result, I could learn about useful activities for grammar practice and listening.

In terms of the activity for grammar practice, I listened to two interesting presentations. One was a presentation by Imogen Custance, *Sentence Tennis: Pushing Complexity in Production*, who explained an activity in which students are divided into two groups and try to make longer sentences than the other group. When we tried this activity during the presentation, I noticed that because people focus on different parts of the sentence to make it longer and more detailed, students can learn from each other. I thought this activity could be effective for my students too if the first provided sentence is not too difficult, especially considering my students' proficiency level. In addition, through this activity, students can notice that they have different points of view and it can help them to understand the differences between each other.

In the other presentation, *A Research-Based Approach to Teaching Grammar* by Tomoko Nemoto and David Beglar, I learned a useful idea about checking students' answers. Because there are 40 students in most high school classrooms, checking all the students' answers is not realistic. In this presentation, the presenter explained how to conduct peer checking effectively even in a big class. Firstly, students work on the grammar

questions from their textbooks. Secondly, students check their answers in pairs, and if there are differences, students can ask the teacher for the correct answer. Therefore, the teacher can understand which questions students cannot answer correctly and focus on explaining these answers.

In addition, I also learned an effective activity for listening. In the presentation, *A Systematic Approach to Teaching Listening*, Andrew Blyth presented an activity with detailed procedures and many repetitions of the same dialogue, so it would be easy to adapt it for my own students' proficiency level. Though we did not have enough time to try this activity for ourselves, it was possible to conduct the same activity with handouts from the presentation, or we could download slides from the presenter website.

I was surprised at the openness of the presenters. I had an image that presenters would be distant from me, but they were all friendly and many of them gave me their contact information, so communicating with them or asking questions is much easier than I thought. Moreover, I could get useful materials for my own teaching context.

During the poster presentations, I had an opportunity to listen to one poster presentation about useful apps for classroom learning at the Apps 4 EFL website (<https://www.apps4efl.com>). One app on the website shows a grammar or vocabulary question with four multiple answers on the screen, and students can use their phones to answer the questions. With this particular app, many students can work on the same question together, and teachers can understand how many students get correct answers. Even though there are some constraints such as no internet or no TV in most high school classrooms, I really want to try these apps for grammar or vocabulary learning with my students if I have an opportunity. Because the poster session was 90 minutes long, I could talk with the presenters more than at other presentations, which were only 20 minutes each.

The other good experience that I had at the conference was meeting new people. For high school teachers, because there are not many opportunities to talk with people who teach in different contexts, it was a new experience for me and a good chance to create connections and deepen my knowledge about language learning. In addition, the people I met at the conference were all friendly, and open-minded when listening to other people's opinions. Therefore, it was easy for me to express my opinion.

Overall, I am really glad I could join the conference and I'd like to thank the LD SIG for giving me this opportunity. During those two days at JALT2018, I was able to get some useful ideas for my high-school lessons and meet people passionate about education. Next time, I would like to take part in the conference more actively, listen to other interesting presentations, and try to do a presentation by myself, as well.