

UEC Official English Faculty Development Conference 2018

Report

The official UEC Faculty Development (FD) conference of 2018 was held at UEC on Tuesday, October 16, in room 301 of the Library Building, from 9:30am to 13:00pm. The theme of this year's conference was *Innovation in teaching and research in English language education*. A total of 5 papers that addressed this theme were presented by members of the full-time and part-time English faculty. A total of 17 participants attended the FD conference.

The conference opened with a welcoming address by the Chair of the English faculty, *Dr. Atsuko Jeffreys*.

The first presentation was a plenary lecture given by *Dr. Damian Lucantonio* from the full-time faculty. The title of the lecture was *Merging theory with practice (in syllabus design and teaching practice at UEC)*. The paper emphasized that one of the biggest innovations in teaching and research in English language education in recent years has been the issue of merging linguistic theory with pedagogical practice. The paper described how the UEC syllabus has been designed by merging a theory of language with a theory of learning to account for the 2 core elements of critical thinking and autonomous learning. Genre theory (Martin, 1985; 1992; Martin & Rose, 2003), which has emerged from systemic functional linguistics (Halliday, 1985a; 1985b; Halliday & Hasan, 1985), is the underlying linguistic theory that provides the theoretical justification for the genre-based syllabus of the compulsory 1st and 2nd-year courses. The scaffolding process (Gibbons, 2002; 2006), which has been derived from sociocultural learning theory (Vygotsky, 1978; Lantolf, 2000; Lantolf & Thorne, 2006), focuses on 5 interrelated processes that are considered essential to learning and regarded as an important pedagogical tool in achieving autonomous student learning. The paper described how the SFL model of language and the SCLT model of learning have been integrated into the teaching curriculum. Some of the main implications of the genre-based/scaffolding approach that underlie the teaching practices were then given. These included constructing holistic texts, speaking and writing for a purpose, explicit teaching, scaffolding, flexible teaching methodologies, and the need for ongoing professional development.

The second presentation was given by Mr. Steven Suzuki, a part-time teacher. The title of the presentation was *Essential pedagogical considerations when teaching the basic reaction paper in EFL tertiary education*. One of the main components of the genre-based curriculum for second-year students at the University of Electro-Communications (UEC) is teaching students the 'reaction' genre, both in written and spoken forms. Learning these important academic skills could be daunting for students, and teaching them could present significant challenges. Some of these difficulties for students could include understanding the importance of citations and references, how to properly cite and provide sufficient reference information, how to effectively summarize a larger text, and how to provide a critical and meaningful reaction. In this presentation, key aspects of the basic reaction genre were considered in terms of the written form. In particular, three factors of the reaction paper were the main focus: The summary (Hauser, 2011), the reaction, and citations

and references (Rose, 2015). By analyzing and discussing these three elements, Suzuki stated that instructors experience a noticeable increase in the pedagogical awareness of the reaction genre. Also as a likely outcome, instructors will be empowered with increased confidence to assist their students in better understanding this important academic genre. Although the focus of this presentation is in the writing of reaction papers, much of the presentation was relevant to the spoken aspect as well. Overall, the presentation encouraged rhetorical consciousness-raising and reflection, and participants found the material informative and practical.

Following this, Mr. John Cross, a part-time teacher, gave the next presentation. The title of the presentation was *Using Popular Science Videos as Text for Written Summaries: An Example*. Mr. Cross stated that the use of video materials may be an effective way to engage and motivate students in class. This practice-oriented presentation gave an example of how a short, popular science video may be used as a text for written summaries. As information is increasingly delivered in hybrid audio-visual forms and for students growing up in such an environment, use of video may seem as valid as a use of written text alone, and this sense of validity can stimulate engagement in materials presented in the attention-grabbing format of video. The example used was a science-themed piece suitable for the UEC context, and demonstrated contemporary presentation styles with its simultaneous use of film, animation and spoken and written text. It also provided relevant listening practice of authentic language. In the presentation, the vocabulary of 'eyebrow(s)' was elicited and participants were asked to consider the question: *why do we have eyebrows?* They discussed in pairs/groups and reported orally to the conference audience, answers being noted by Mr. Cross on the blackboard, and then categorized. Next, participants were asked to view the video, initially without note-taking. Further viewings (up to five) allow opportunities for note-taking and peer sharing of ideas or text details. Participants were then asked to make a short list of key points in the text, and to rank them in order of importance, before writing, in class, a 50-word summary. Examples of excellent student summaries – note form and in full – were shown on the screen and explained. Mr. Cross has used this particular approach with UEC students of Year 1, 2 and 3, as well as post-graduates, and in all cases students were engaged and challenged.

The next presentation was given by Mr. Lee Arnold, another part-time teacher. The title of the presentation was *Blogs as adjuncts to LMSs for learner and teacher course tracking and assignment contextualization*. Mr. Arnold explained that while WebClass is one of the main learning management systems (LMS) at UEC, some first-year students may still find LMSs as a whole sometimes difficult to access and manage for the tracking of course assignment content and material. In a similar vein, some teachers shy away from LMSs for commensurate reasons, denying themselves the possibility of a ready means of course progress tracking. This presentation showed how a blog on an easily-designable and user-friendly platform such as Blogger may serve as an adjunct or entrance to an LMS, given its ease of use and ready access to students and teachers alike on mobile devices, tablets, and laptops, yet with the additional feature of assignment contextualization and anonymous publication of student work.

The final presentation was given by Dr. Atsuko Jeffreys, the chair of the English faculty. The title of her presentation was *Dealing with CVD in class while YMMV*. Dr. Jeffreys explained that whether the teachers are aware or not, there are, according to statistics, two or possibly three students with color vision deficiency (CVD) in a class of 40, at a male-dominant school such as UEC. Dr. Jeffreys explained that the Japanese government eliminated the color vision test from the annual physical examination at primary schools in 2003 on the premise that most CVD pupils did not find their lives difficult to live. Because of this decision, schoolteachers eventually became indifferent to the students' challenges, which resulted in their being categorized as rebellious and/or learning disabled. This presentation argued that we need to raise the forgotten awareness in how teachers could adjust teaching materials, enabling all students to access them equally. Dr. Jeffreys explained that many materials of late are color-coded, and the creators of these and classroom teachers seem oblivious to the fact that they may be putting stress on CVD students' learning, be they a small fraction (5% of Japanese males and 0.2% of females). Color vision correction glasses have recently been developed, as savior to some but not satisfactory to others. The glasses resemble mirrored sunglasses, which may not always be welcome in schools, and many also experience darkening of the vision. They are therefore not a universal solution in Japan, where CVD is still considered stigmatizing. This is not to discourage the use of colors in teaching, however. Dr. Jeffreys stated that many of the textbooks are in vivid colors, and it cannot be denied that the majority of students do benefit from color-coding. The presentation then offered suggestions for easy measures to improve the learning environments for both CVD and non-CVD students, such as the use of different fonts and font sizes, encircling or drawing borders around distinct information, and using colors distinguishable for CVD students. The presenter concluded with a wish to gather anonymous first-hand information from any interested participants on CVD.

Following the final presentation, the FD conference concluded with a general discussion involving the conference participants. The discussion focused on issues raised during the conference, including how to help students with CVD, practical suggestions for summarizing, and the role of English-medium instruction involving group work and class activities.