

Conference Report: The 16th Asia TEFL

Nana Wei

With the theme of *English Language Teaching in the Changing Globalised World: Research and Praxis*, the 16th Asia TEFL was held at the University of Macau from June 27th to June 29th. Up to as many as one thousand participants coming from over 30 different countries/regions attended the Conference. I really enjoyed the three-day conference which turned out to be inspiring, invigorating, fulfilling and rewarding.

At the Conference, I gave a paper presentation titled *Application of Schema Theory in Teaching Oral English to Non-English Major Postgraduates: An Action Research Approach*. My original reason for carrying out such a study was that the postgraduates I taught had a low level of proficiency in speaking but speaking was one of the most important skills that they should hone. I hoped I could find some ways that could really help my students instead of just telling them that they should practice more. As for speaking, without enough input, successful output is impossible. Therefore, input is indispensable in oral English teaching. With the aim of enriching students' input and to improving their output, I applied schema theory to oral English teaching. According to the data collected from questionnaires, interviews, oral tests and classroom observations, the teaching mode based on schema theory can enrich non-English major postgraduates' linguistic and non-linguistic knowledge, improve their ability to use speaking strategies and improve their performance in oral English to some extent. On June 29th, about 20 people came to my presentation, among whom a teacher from Japan was quite interested in my study because she was also teaching speaking and hoping to find some ways to help her students.

For me, attending such an international conference and giving a presentation is a great and valuable opportunity of academic communication. More importantly, it provided me with a precious chance to learn from others, thus improving my teaching and research. Among all the sessions I attended, what impressed me most was the colloquium given by Prof. Wen Qiufang et al.

The topic of the colloquium was *Applying Production-Oriented Approach to Tertiary English Instruction for Chinese EFL Learners*. At the beginning of the colloquium, Prof. Wen explained the social expectations of ELT and the unsatisfactory English learning outcomes. Then she introduced three types of ELT at university, i.e. bottom-up text-centered instruction, top-down text-centered instruction and task-centered instruction. These three types of ELT have their own merits, but they have one problem in common--that is, separation of input from output--which motivated Prof. Wen to propose and develop the production-oriented approach (POA). A detailed description of the five stages of POA development was given in the colloquium. From the revision of "teaching principles", "teaching hypotheses" and "teaching procedures" in different versions of the POA, I could strongly feel Prof. Wen's academic rigor and her patriotism, because she has been dedicated to better language teaching practice in China for years. Besides introducing the theory of POA, Prof. Wen and her team also illustrated how the POA was applied to English teaching in China. In their illustration, what impressed me most was the "step by step

teaching". In my own class, I had found that it was still difficult for students to fulfill some tasks even though they had watched the video clips three times, which was quite disappointing for students and me as well. After listening to Prof. Wen's introduction of "step by step teaching", I realized that maybe it would be better for me to segment the video clips, especially the longer ones, into several parts, with each part being used for one mini-activity, and then have students accomplish mini-activities one by one. After this, we could listen with a focus on the important parts for production. To be honest, it is not easy for me to teach listening comprehension. Nor is it easy for students to improve their listening ability. Therefore, the methods introduced by Prof. Wen and her team provided me with useful insights concerning the teaching of the listening skill.

There were some other interesting and enlightening sessions at the Conference--for example, the plenary on *Teaching Writing across Elementary, Secondary and University Levels* by Luciana C. de Oliveira, Ph.D., president of TESOL International Association. She described a genre-based approach to writing instruction, provided specific strategies to incorporate writing in lessons and gave tips to teachers to address writing demands.

As a green hand in doing research, it was my great honor to have an opportunity to attend such an important conference and learn from others. It is never easy to do research, but once I take the first step and start the journey, I believe I can make progress step by step.

