

WAESOL Professional Development Grant Report

THE IMPACT OF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT ON MY TEACHING PRACTICE: A REFLECTION ON THE USE OF A GRANT FOR CONFERENCE PARTICIPATION

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As a community college adjunct professor in the field of English language learning (ELL), I am continually striving to enhance my teaching practices to better serve my diverse student population. The recent grant I received has been instrumental in providing me with an opportunity for professional development that I might not have been able to access otherwise. The funding allowed me to attend an international conference focused on ELL education, AAAL 2025 Denver, which has had a significant impact on my teaching and my students' learning experiences.

Purpose and Use of the Grant

The grant was awarded to me for the explicit purpose of attending a professional conference out of state. I attended the AAAL 2025 in Denver on March 22nd-25th 2025. The conference is one of the two biggest meetings in the field of ELL. It gathered experts, educators, and researchers from all over the world to discuss linguistic approaches, emerging AI trends, pedagogical approaches, and best practices for teaching English language learners. This event was particularly valuable to me because it focused on the intersection of technology, cultural inclusivity, and effective language acquisition strategies—topics that align directly with the challenges and opportunities I face in the classroom.

The grant covered my registration fees and travel expenses, which made attending the conference financially feasible. Without this support, attending a high-quality, national event of this caliber would have been outside of my personal and professional budget.

Insights Gained at the Conference

One of the most impactful sessions I attended was a plenary by Dr. Hayriye Kayi-Aydar: "An Intersectional Look at Critical Applied Linguistics: Current Research, Future Directions, and Some Skeptical Remarks" This talk looked at how critical applied linguistics can help address unfairness around the world, especially by including voices and identities that are often ignored. It highlighted the importance of supporting marginalized communities through education and research.

As an ELL instructor in a multicultural classroom, I learned how students' different identities affect their learning and felt encouraged to use more inclusive and fair teaching practices. I really enjoyed the session.

Another session focused on "Generative AI as a roleplay interlocutor in L2 task-based pragmatics learning". In this session, the scholars shared that Korean EFL learners who practiced L2 with ChatGPT showed greater improvement than those who worked with peers, due to the chatbot's tailored responses and detailed feedback. Learners also reported positive experiences using ChatGPT, appreciating its authentic interaction and support during communicative tasks. After this session, I was more encouraged to integrate ChatGPT as a language partner to provide students with individualized, consistent speaking practice and immediate feedback, enhancing pragmatic competence outside traditional classroom interactions.

In addition, I attended several discussions on cultural topics including diversity. One was "Relational multimodal composing: Sustaining diverse identities, cultures and communicative repertoires" This colloquium looked at how students from different cultural and language backgrounds can use digital and creative storytelling to work together, share their identities, and build confidence in different learning settings. My takeaway was the importance of honoring students' diverse voices and communicative repertoires in digital storytelling as a means of promoting inclusion, identity development, and meaningful learning relationships.

A nice surprise was that the conference chair was Professor Manka Varghese from the University of Washington. I've long admired her work on teacher identity, so it was a meaningful experience to meet someone whose research has influenced my teaching.

Implementing New Strategies in the Classroom

Upon returning to my college, I began integrating some of the strategies and tools I had learned about at the conference. One of the first changes I made was to incorporate more

technology into my lessons. I was already using ChatGPT and Copilot. After the conference, I introduced a few new language practice applications, like HelloTalk, and AI tools, like Gemini, that students could use to practice speaking and writing skills outside of class.

I also integrated culturally relevant materials into my syllabus. We watched videos from different cultures and they made presentations about their home countries. This has not only increased engagement but has also helped students see the relevance of English language learning to their everyday lives.

I also implemented collaborative learning activities in which students could work together in pairs or small groups to complete real-life tasks such as learning about and applying to RealID in the US, fostering peer-to-peer support. This approach aligns with research I encountered at the conference, which suggests that collaboration not only improves language acquisition but also builds a sense of community among learners.

Impact on Students

The changes I've made in my teaching practice have had a noticeable impact on my students. They have reported that they were involved in more real-life situations, more speaking activities and felt more confident in their language abilities. The use of technology has allowed them to practice outside of class, providing them with opportunities for additional language exposure. Students who don't have many friends outside the classroom tried to find more opportunities to make friends to practice English. Some who were shy to speak in front of the class now engage more in discussions and interactive activities.

Moreover, the incorporation of culturally relevant content has allowed my students to see themselves reflected in the curriculum, which has boosted their sense of pride and motivation. They've expressed greater interest in assignments that explore their own cultural backgrounds and the ways in which

language connects to identity. This has been particularly meaningful in fostering a more inclusive and supportive learning environment.

Long-Term Benefits

The grant-funded conference experience has also had long-term benefits beyond immediate changes in my classroom. Attending the conference allowed me to network with other educators and researchers in the field of English language learning. I have since been in contact with several colleagues from other institutions, exchanging ideas, resources, and advice. This professional network is invaluable as it provides ongoing support and inspiration for my teaching practice.

Additionally, the strategies I learned have helped me refine my overall approach to ELL instruction. I was also invited to share my conference experience at the administrations level at my college. It was really rewarding.

Conclusion

The grant I received has had a transformative impact on my teaching practice, my students' learning experiences, and my professional development. By attending the AAAL conference, I gained new insights, tools, and strategies that I have successfully implemented in the classroom. These changes have not only improved student engagement and language proficiency but have also created a more inclusive and supportive learning environment.

I'm sincerely grateful for the opportunity and for the support I've received through the WAESOL Professional Development Grant. I'm so glad I joined WAESOL in 2024, and I'm already looking forward to WAESOL 2025 in November!