Edulearn17 Conference – Barcelona – July 3-5, 2017

Written by Tracey Butchart

With over 850 delegates from more than 60 countries, the Edulearn17 conference did not disappoint as a stimulating experience in global education. Hosted at the Palau de Congressos de Catalunya on the well-known Avinguda Diagonal, Hlengiwe Mfeka and I were also able to experience the delights of the Mediterranean, historical and architectural jewel that is Barcelona.

DAY 1 – Monday July 3, 2017

The conference started on Monday, July 3, with registration and a plenary session starting at 8h45. The first speaker was Alec Couros from the University of Regina in Canada. Titled 'Anywhere, Anytime, Anyone: Transitioning Toward 21st Century Learning', Dr. Couros outlined some of the most relevant changes in our digital environments and provided possibilities for digitally-inspired pedagogies in higher education.

This was followed by a presentation by Jennie Magiera from Des Plaines School District 62 in the USA. Named 'Courageous Edventures' after her published book, Jenny's inspiring message was that great progress and innovation is only made when brave individuals take big risks. Using the theme of 'The Hobbit', she challenged educators to be like Gandolf, the wizard, rather than like Bilbo Baggins – to be the one to "arrange adventures for others to share in" rather than to be reluctant to take the risk of joining in like the Hobbit. She urged teachers to be willing to embrace the chance of failure, suspend doubts, navigate expectations from school systems, parents and leaders and make leaps into the unknown for the sake of their students while exploring emerging and new technologies in courageous classroom "edventures".

At 10h15 we broke for coffee and tea and the first opportunity to meet some of the delegates. The first session of the day only started at 10h45 and was slightly reduced due to the plenary. This session was made up of five papers presented orally. We had ten oral presentation sessions and an interactive session in each time slot to choose from and I chose to attend the session called 'On-line Assessment 1'.

Day 1 – Session 1

1. ***Methodology and Experiences in Providing E-learning Tests for International Students in Technical*** by C. Grau Turuelo from Technical University Dresden in **Germany**
2. ***Using the Dewis-R Interface to Create Statistics E-Assessments*** by I. Weir from the University of the West of England in the **UK**
3. ***Badges as a Complementary Assessment at Secondary Schools*** by D. Sunikova from Comenius University in Bratislava in **Slovakia**
4. ***Analysis of Using ICT for Continuous Summative Assessment in Mathematics and Foreign Languages*** by J. Matotek from the University of Osijekin in **Croatia**
5. ***Using On-line assessment and Peer Instruction to Improve Mathematical Outcomes for Non-English Native Students*** by R. Zein from Zayed University in **United Arab Emirates**

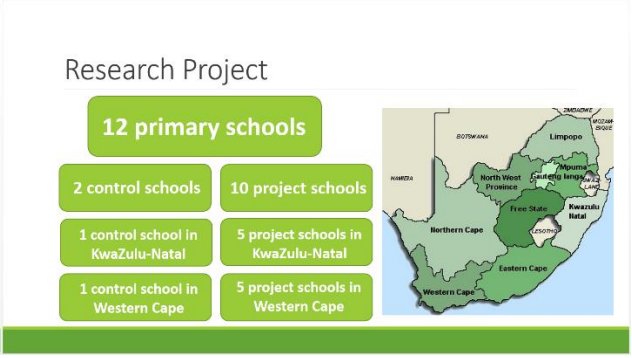
The second session of the day began at 12h15 and both Hlengiwe and I were automatically involved in the Serious and Educational Games session as our ***SchoolNet Learning Gains through Play*** project was one of the six presentations. Hlengiwe did a wonderful job chairing the session – introducing the speakers and topics and managing the time for each presentation so as to maintain the conference schedule.

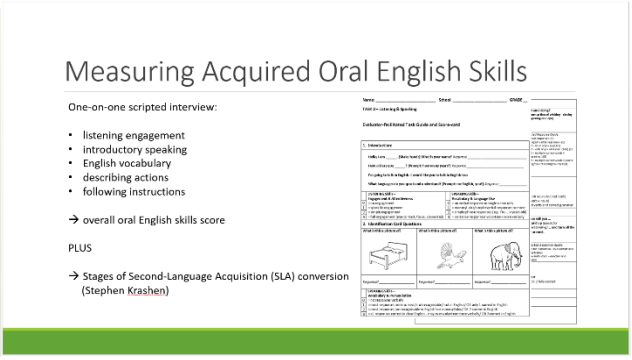
Hlengiwe , preparing to chair the session

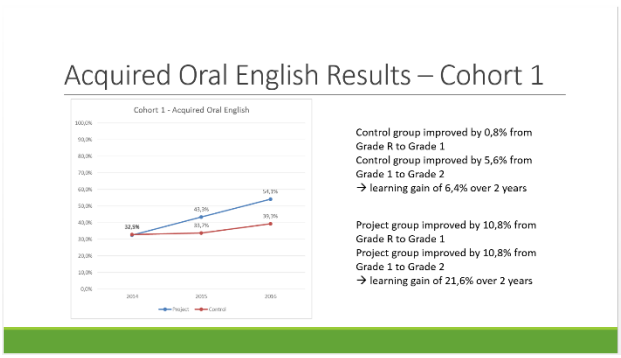
Day 1 – Session 2

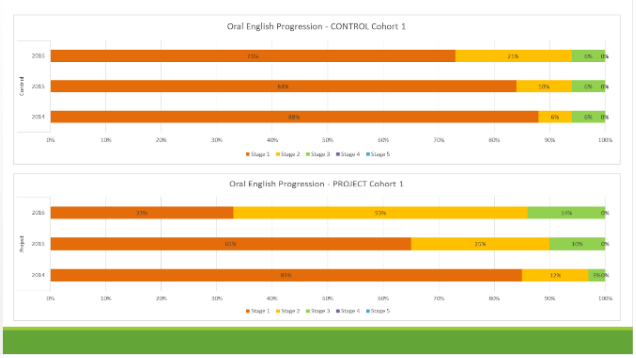
1. ***Game-based Structural Debriefing: A Design Tool for Systems Thinking Curriculum*** by Y. Kim and Oleg Pavlov from Massachusetts Institute of Technology in the **USA**
   This was a fascinating presentation on developing the 21st century skill of systems thinking (of stocks, causality, feedback, delays, structure, unintended consequences and resistance to change). The learners play a digital game and "structural debriefing" is the way the teacher unpacks the game with the class afterwards using teacher-designed curriculum artefacts.

2. ***A Virtual Escape Game for Older Adults' Interaction and Social Engagement: A Report on the Design and Usability*** by A. Doroudian from Simon Fraser University in **Canada**
   This was a different approach of enabling later-life learning through digital games – edtech for elderlies!
3. ***Using Game-based Learning to Improve Second Language English Skills in South Africa*** by Hlengiwe Mfeka and Tracey Butchart from SchoolNet **South Africa**
   Our presentation was well-received – here are highlights from it:









4. ***Digital Game-mediated Second Language Education: Viewing from Teachers' Perspective*** by Sihan Zhou who is based at University of Edinburgh in Scotland, **UK**
   This presentation focused on a commercial app called 'Tornado English' developed for Chinese learners and piloted in different school communities in China.

5. ***Construct: An Educator-orientated Design Studio for Ambient Educational Games*** by E. Potouris from Foundation for Research and Technology, Hellas (FORTH) in **Greece**
   This interesting talk was part of the same project as the first MIT presentation. It showed off educator design studio software to enable teachers to create their own unique learning games.
6. ***Multi-level Adaptation of an Educational Game to Individual Student's Gameplay, Knowledge and Emotions*** by S. Petrovica from Riga Technical University in **Latvia**
   The last presentation of the session considered the emotions learners experience in playing digital games and discussed adaptations that could be made to the game design to include learners' different emotions.

Lunch at 13h45 was an enormous buffet of many different kinds of foods. The highlight was the traditional seafood paella. I spent lunch with Sihan Zhou and learnt a lot about schooling in China and the disparity between the rich eastern seaboard areas and the poor inland villages. Lunch ended at 15h00. After lunch there was a slightly extended set of sessions – seven papers presented at each. I chose to go to the session entitled 'Learning Analytics'.

Day 1 – Session 3

1. ***Big Data: A Revolution that will Change the Education Landscape*** by R. Faizi from Mohammed V University in Rabat, **Morocco**
   This was an interesting overview of what 'big data' could offer in education although it focused mostly on monitoring students on-line. What was odd for me was that it was presented as if 'big data' was still coming to the education arena rather than that it is actually happening.
2. ***Embedded Learning Analytics in Targeted Retention Programs to Enhance the University Experience for Commencing Students*** by S. Kutieleh from Flinders University, **Australia**
   This presentation focusing on the problems of student retention and through-put proposing that understanding students' on-line activities could assist in preventing drop-out from university programmes.
3. ***Extending Learning Analytics with Micro-level Student Engagement Data*** by I. Balasooriya from the local Universitat Oberta de Catalunya, **Spain**
   As the presenter's accent was very strong, I found this presentation quite difficult to follow. I struggled to understand his distinction between micro-level and macro-level engagement data. The focus was on the "micro-level" measures of what a student is doing on-line in the university environment.
4. ***Learning Analytics to Classify Students According to their Activity in Moodle*** by M. Vela-Perez from Universidad Complutense de Madrid, **Spain**
   It seemed as if a lot of effort had been made to gather data from the Moodle platform and analyse this to learn more about university students in one particular course. The researcher's plan is to extend this to larger numbers of students in many courses and to relate this data back to inform on the courses.

5. ***Let's Take a Look at Big Data: Learning Analytics Methods and Tools for Visualisation*** by D. Miteva from Sofia University, **Bulgaria**

This was a very interesting summary of the different tools for data visualisation available. She distinguished clearly between what she called "clickstream analytics" (where a user clicks, how long they visit a page, how many pages they visit and how often etc.) and "NPL – natural language processing" (finding cognitive presence in language analysis – even sentiment analysis e.g. positive or negative forum posts from users' on-line contributions). She discussed the different data diagrams: concept maps, word clouds, speedometers, heat maps, tree maps etc. and the use of skill meters and dashboards – it was an excellent presentation!

6. ***Business Intelligence Approach – A Practical Tool for Competence Based Curriculum Development*** by J. Myliarniemi from Tampere University of Technology, **Finland**
   This was another talk that was very technical and difficult to follow due to the presenters poor English. It was about using data gathered from students' activities on-line in curriculum design.
7. ***Inquiry-Based Learning Meets Learning Analytics and Styles*** by M. Bedek from Graz University of Technology, **Austria**
   This presentation was about an ongoing European Commission funded R&D project called LEA's Box which is developing a data-mining and learning analytics software model. While it sounded exciting in attempting to enable formative assessment, it appears to rely on basic questionnaires limited to declarative knowledge.

Overall this was a really interesting session and sparked much discussion at the end. Most presenters and attending delegates in this session were in higher education institutions and the overriding comment was that learning analytics needs to move beyond measuring student engagement and to measuring student cognition. I wished that Reflective Learning had had an oral presentation slot in this session to provide an example of school-level cognitive learning analytics.

After this I had a look around the poster presentations. Each day there were two poster sessions, each following a particular theme. The morning theme had been 'Emerging Technologies in Education and E-Learning' and the afternoon theme was 'Experiences in Education'. My poster presentation was due to go up the following day so I wanted to see what the others looked like and how they were displayed and manned.

DAY 2 – Tuesday July 4, 2017

Day 2 started with an early coffee and tea spread before the first session kicked off at 08h30. I decided to spend this day in the same venue attending consecutive sessions labelled 'Assessment of Student Learning' 1, 2 and 3. With six papers presented a session, this was a mind-boggling 18 papers in 15 minutes successions!

Day 2 – Session 1

1. ***Exploring the Relationships between the Components of Argumentation Competence and their Relationships with Domain-Specific Knowledge*** by O. Noroozi from Wageningen University in **The Netherlands**
   This was an interesting presentation on the value of argumentation skills and how to develop and measure these at university level.
2. ***Universal Design for Learning Approach and Schoolwide Enrichment Model: A Critical Perspective*** by C Sorrentino from the University of Salento in **Italy**
   This presentation promoted a Total Talent Portfolio which, rather than focusing on learners' weaknesses for remediation, focuses only on their strengths to meet all learners' needs.
3. ***Peer Review: Improving Intrinsic Motivation*** by N. Stumpel from VU Amsterdam in **The Netherlands**
   This was a great presentation by an enthusiastic practising school teacher on how she uses peer review as a strategy with her learners. She accomplishes this with the help of the on-line tool, Peermark, which is one of the Turnitin products. She then assesses the feedback given to peers.
4. ***Adults and Children Engaging with E-Portfolios in an Early Childhood Education Setting*** by Tracey Hooker from Waikato Institute of Technology in **New Zealand**
   Tracey trains teachers and what was interesting about this work was that she is evaluating the use E-Portfolios with very young children (ECD level).
5. ***Developing an E-Portfolio as a Capstone Experience for Graduate Studies in Information Science*** by P. Wang from University of Tennessee in the **USA**
   It was a great contrast to hear about the use of E-Portfolios at a university level after the talk beforehand.
6. ***Teacher Students involved in Writing Parts of their Own Textbook*** by A. R Jenssen from Norwegian University of Science and technology in **Norway**
   In Norway all classes have to cover five basic skills (oral skills, reading, writing, numeracy and digital skills) no matter what subject is being taught. This was an interesting response to this requirement by a Physical Education teacher trainer who had her students write their own textbooks explaining the rules of playing specific sports. Although she had some sceptics questioning the value of the activity after her presentation, I thought it was a good example of the new idea of learners generating their own content.

Tea was at 10h00 and afterwards I returned to the same venue for the second session of the same topic.

Day 2 – Session 2

1. ***So, Students Have Been Given Feedback, Now What?*** By T.M. Thorseth from Norwegian University of Science and technology in **Norway**
   This was a disappointing presentation despite the engaging title. The presenter's English was poor and there wasn't anything new or unexpected in his talk.

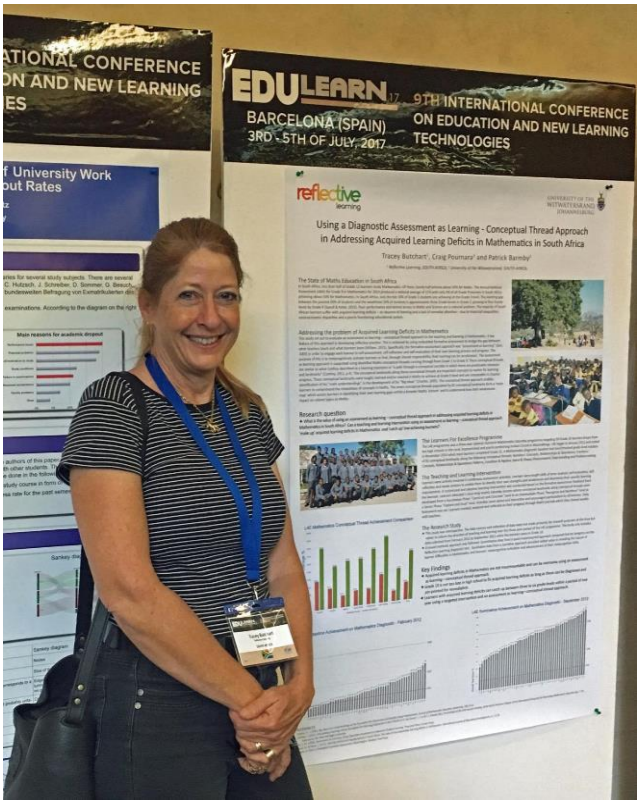
2. ***Supporting Written Communication in Statistics Courses*** by B. Tasic from Ryerson University in **Canada**
   This presentation focused on the development of writing skills in university statistics students.
3. ***Revisiting Evaluation and Assessment in STEM Education: A Multi-dimensional Model of Student Active Engagement*** by P. Papadopoulou from The American College of Greece, **Greece**
   This was quite a broad view on assessment in STEM course using a spiral model design.
4. ***Assessing Motivation and Learning*** by N.M. Bizim from Sabanci University in Istanbul, **Turkey**
   This was an engaging talk on how we bribe with 'A's and threaten with 'F's and how we should rather focus on assessment for learning.
5. ***High School Chemistry Teachers' Self-Reported Versus Real Practices of Classroom Assessment*** by K. Izci from Necmettin Erbakan University in **Turkey**
   I found this interesting. They asked high school Chemistry teachers to identify the assessment practices that they were using in their classrooms and then the researchers observed their classes and did the same. What they found was that what teachers thought was formative assessment practice actually was not!
6. ***Ways of Encouraging and Evaluating Reflective Thinking in Primary and Secondary School Students*** by Martina Kuvalja from Cambridge Assessment in the **UK**
   This was really interesting as she focused on ways of encouraging reflective thinking in the classroom for the purpose of advancing metacognitive skills. I spoke with Martina after her presentation as she was excited to read my name tag with the name of my workplace listed as 'Reflective Learning'. I told her about how I had determined the point of metacognitive activation in the Learners for Excellence project. We had just 15 minutes before the third session on this topic began.

Day 2 – Session 3

1. ***The Development of Knowledge Tests When Studying Academic Texts in Higher Education*** by E. De Bruyne and K. Aesaert from Ghent University in **Belgium**
   This was an interesting presentation of all of the different ways that validity and reliability can and should be established when developing tests. I got really excited when they started talking about a metacognition test but it turned out that the test didn't measure actual metacognition only the student's knowledge about the concept of metacognition.
2. ***Is Continuous Assessment an Adequate Instrument to Help Students with Difficulties in Large Groups?*** By J.A. Ramirez Massferrer from Madrid Technical University in **Spain**
   This was a presentation of work being done to identify university students with difficulties in earlier assessments in order to intervene before they fail on final semester tests.
3. ***Student Contributions in Group Projects: The Impact of Peer Assessment, based on Belbin's Roles, on Work Input, Study Assessment and Learning Processes*** by G. Oskarsson from University of Iceland, **Iceland**
   This presentation tested Belbin's nine team roles for students working in group projects.

4. ***Personality's Effect on Peer Assessment Ability in Case Method Context*** by T. Mahlamaki from Tampere University of Technology in **Finland**
   Unfortunately this presenter was absent and so we sat and chatted for the 15 minute duration so as to avoid disrupting the programme schedule.
5. ***Where and How are the Students Now? A Case-Study Looking at Students through Belbin Team Roles Test, Peer Evaluation and Self-Assessment*** by J.F. Johannsson from Bifrost University in **Iceland**
   This presenter was a colleague of the earlier presenter and he also focused on the Belbin team roles test in his work at his university. His conclusion was to reject the use of the test as not being as useful as he had hoped for.
6. ***Google Forms and Smartphones: Evaluation of an Alternative to Clicker Systems for Collecting Feedback from Students*** by G. Bubas from the University of Zagreb in **Croatia**
   This was an exciting talk on how Google forms can save the costs of investing in expensive clicker systems by providing instant feedback from students who respond on their cell phones in lectures to prepared questions.

We finished at 13h30 for another lavish buffet lunch which continued until 15h00. While there was a further two sessions in the afternoon, I spent the time attending to my poster presentation. I met many interested and interesting people from The Netherlands, Germany, Canada, South Korea, Japan, Zambia and South Africa. Although there were not many South Africans in total at the conference, I seem to have met most of them at my poster.



While supporting my poster presentation, Hlengiwe was persuaded to give an interview about her experience at the conference which was filmed for television.

After the last oral presentation of the last session, we took down our posters and joined the delegates heading out to the Fairmont Hotel adjacent where a cocktail party with a live entertainment inspired many to let their hair down and dance the night away. Hlengiwe and I had a wonderful late night walk past the most extraordinarily impressive and beautiful buildings through the streets of Barcelona to our hotel, Abba Garden, about a kilometre away.

DAY 3 – Wednesday July 5, 2017

With the closing of the Edulearn17 Conference the night before, Day 3 was a guided city tour for all delegates which included driving up to the lookout at Montjuic Hill, passing the Olympic Ring and the Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya. We then descended to the Columbus Monument and the Port, passing Gaudi's La Pedrera to explore his masterpiece, Sagrada Familia (still in progress). After walking all around this extraordinary creation, we drove past the Arc de Triomf where we were dropped at La Rambla to explore on our own. I am most grateful to Janet Thomson and Hlengiwe Mfeka for this amazing opportunity and the wonderful learning experience.