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GEMS Write-up – Ocean Science Meeting (OSM) 2014
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The opportunity to attend and speak at the Ocean Sciences Meeting was excellent. It was refreshing for me and my former student, who presented a poster, to get out of the tunnel vision of school for a couple of days. I was really thankful to the C-MORE staff who funded the GEMS grant for my participation. They not only enabled me, a former student, and her current teacher to attend the conference but answered many questions and provided lots of feedback regarding conference attendance as well as improvements to my student's poster and my PowerPoint presentation. Unfortunately, after all the help and support, I embarrassingly uploaded my very rough draft of the presentation. I didn't double check the upload because I was convinced that I double checked it on the desktop. It was quite embarrassing to present such a PowerPoint to an intimidating audience such as those in attendance at OSM. But, regardless of that huge mess-up, I was glad that I pushed myself to speak to an audience other than 8th graders.

My favorite talk had to have been the plenary on Tuesday. I was really pleased how the speaker tried to capture the local and non-local audience with his metaphor of the SPAM musubi. I was fascinated with and appreciative of his work with Pacific Island nations towards sustaining their local fisheries and ecosystems. It was refreshing to me to see scientists working side-by-side with those with traditional ecological knowledge versus an entirely Western-science and Western-cultural approach. I also enjoyed browsing all the posters so I could get ideas for mentors for students as well as curriculum ideas. I felt like a science teacher in a science candy store in that big hall of posters.

During the session in which I gave I talk one of the other speakers mentioned that she felt like she was preaching to the choir. That comment resonated with me because although we were at a huge meeting of scientists, the audience was mostly educators or scientists with educational components to their programs. It was disheartening to think that the same was likely occurring in other sessions. Likely, people attended sessions that interested them (as my student and I did), not necessarily ones that will challenge the ways they think or expose them to new and different types of science or education. That's not to say they didn't gain great knowledge and experience from those sessions. It just would be great if we could all step out of our comfort zones or our boxes and think about something we don't typically think about. Realizing that made me wish I had one more day at the conference so I could have picked sessions I normally would not have picked.

My student and I tried to attend talks about plankton and coral reefs. I think some of those talks were over our heads and noticed that she would get a little fidgety. She mentioned she had done "worse" things with her days and I thought I had lost her until the youth poster session. After the youth poster session my student was on cloud nine with excitement about the event. The opportunity to present her poster (8th grade science fair project about micro-plastics) allowed her to participate more fully and, looking back, that component of the OSM was more important than I realized. While I knew it would be a good experience for her to participate and it took a lot of coordinating and arm twisting to get her to attend, I think the way the poster session was set up helped my student to gain confidence in herself and have a stake in the OSM. Knowing that adults were interested in what she had done and that she was set up with a mentor to make her feel comfortable were conducive to her seeing the benefit of her participation in the OSM.

