

Conference Report: Thailand TESOL 2012

Teacher Collaboration: Shaping the classroom of the future

Being able to escape the harsh Korean winter in January is always a pleasure. Being able to spend it as KOTESOL's representative to Thailand TESOL is even better. This year's theme was all about teacher collaboration – something the Thai Minister for Education suggested is very much lacking in the world of the teacher. We sometimes act as a 'lone ranger', he added, neither sharing teaching ideas with our colleagues nor sharing the teaching process with our students. Of course, the teachers that need to hear this message the loudest are generally not the sort that attends conferences anyway.

Thailand TESOL gets going at a mind-bogglingly early 7.30am. Needless to say, I was up and ready with my stand to show off KOTESOL's wares. As many representatives have found, if there's no table to use as a display, find one and hold onto it until someone comes to tell you otherwise. As usual, the vast number of TECs, Proceedings and KOTESOL flyers were gone before the plenary even started.

Following the Thai Minister of Education, the first plenary speaker was Christine Coombe who is based in the Middle East and is the President of TESOL international. She described her 10 traits of highly effective teachers, which drew on her research and personal experience. Although any good teacher would not be surprised by the list she produced, it is always worth remembering that we can do better and there are areas we can work on to improve our ability in the classroom. The one I need to work on is 'having a life outside teaching'.

After lunch, Jeremy Harmer was his usual effusive self. He focused on focus. How can we retain the attention of students, and what methods are most effective. He admitted that there were no answers yet, but his illuminating and wide-ranging talk left most people thinking.

The Imperial Queen's Park Hotel is a great venue for a conference. Numerous coffee breaks were built into the schedule together with a sit-down lunch for all participants. Any technical issues were dealt with by attentive and knowledgeable hotel staff, leaving the conference organisers able to mingle with the attendees and deal with issues as they arose – as always with a smile! This combination left most participants with the feeling of a relaxed and relaxing conference with several excellent plenary and featured speakers and concurrent presentations on a wide-range of topics.

Not being a rich country, the conference organisers depend on support from the American, Australian and British embassies – all of whom sent representatives to address the conference during the opening ceremony. There was also a wide variety of publishers displaying the new and forthcoming titles in their stables.

The first day reception dinner was, as usual, excellent. The variety of food and the quality made it worth the long day and your correspondent was dutiful in trying each and every dish.

The second day passed much like the first. A relaxing mix of presentations, plenaries, featured speakers, coffee and lunch. Rose Senior gave a typically understated, but important, performance about the importance of developing classroom rapport. Good teachers are able to meet the social and learning needs of their students in the classroom.

At the end of the day, participants were sad to say goodbye to the people they had met, and exchanged cards with a promise of further contact. Conferences need to serve many purposes – as professional development, as value for money, as an escape from the workplace and as a chance to meet new people. As usual, Thailand TESOL was able to meet all of these needs – and more.

I would like to thank KOTESOL for funding my flight to Bangkok, and Thailand TESOL for putting me up in a fantastic 5-star hotel for the duration of the conference.

Tim Dalby holds an M.A. (with distinction) in English Language Teaching from The University of Reading in the UK. Originally from Portsmouth, England, Tim has been teaching English since the summer of 2000. He has taught in Korea, New Zealand and the Czech Republic in a variety of contexts including business English, general English, EAP, FCE, CAE, IELTS, TOEIC and TOEFL. He has been a head teacher and a teacher trainer and was Korea TESOL's National 1st Vice-President in 2008-9. He currently teaches at Korea University in Seoul. Contact: professor.tim.dalby@gmail.com.