

IATEFL conference report for The English Connection
Simon G. Gillett



The Conference Venues - The Scottish Exhibition and Conference Centre (below) and online.





KOTESOL at the Teaching Associates stand

This year's 46th annual IATEFL event was held in Glasgow, Scotland, from March 19th to March 23rd, with over two thousand delegates in attendance; and online, with over fifty thousand online viewers! IATEFL is the International Association of Teachers of English as a Foreign Language whose mission is to link, develop and support English Language Teaching Professionals worldwide. The venue was the Scottish Exhibition and Conference Centre on the banks of the bonnie river Clyde, with additional sessions in a neighbouring hotel, the Crowne Plaza. It was an excellent venue, so I was privileged to attend as KOTESOL rep.

My conference started on Sunday evening at a Sponsors' Volunteers' and Associates' (SVA) dinner, held at the Crowne Plaza Hotel, for a buffet meal and a chance to meet teaching association representatives around the world, or to gather tips on the upcoming conference from IATEFL volunteers. IATEFL's Patron David Crystal entertained guests with an after-dinner speech about language. The event was sponsored by Cambridge ESOL.

The following day was officially the pre-conference event for Special Interest Group members to attend sessions on a special interest, but for Teaching Association (TA) reps, we gathered to network and listen to sage advice from IATEFL speakers including the association's President, Eric Baber, about how to grow and manage a TA. IATEFL has around 100 TA members who have entered into a mutually beneficial relationship, linking up to a network of language educators from all over the world that also represents around 100,000 English language teachers. A particularly intriguing venture is IATEFL's initiative to link TAs and teachers through its website in a social network.

Conference proper started on Tuesday with the opening ceremony and a plenary from Adrian Underhill entitled "Mess and Progress: no one in charge." A past president of IATEFL, he intoned about systems thinking and post-heroic leadership, to laud what seems intuitively to be avoided - mess. During this day and for the rest of the week the conference centre was full of dozens of concurrent sessions. Largely situated around a central hall, there was something for everyone.

Plenty and plentiful was the order of the days, with over five hundred workshops, presentations, talks, symposia, and panels filling the conference venue. Some of the most memorable sessions were sessions on "Creating a language learning app," by Kim Ashmore and Graham Bradford; "English Language Teachers and their Work: changing trends?" by Sarah Hannam; "Challenging monolithic conceptions of English," by Christopher Hall; and "Life as an in-house corporate trainer," by Chris Bowie.

In addition to these day-time events, every evening provided a host of opportunities to meet delegates, from the opening night's event at Glasgow Science Museum, to publishers' parties, to the Extensive Reading Foundation's awards ceremony and receptions from sponsors, there was constant academic commotion from dawn to dusk.

A plenary by Diana Laurillard "Supporting the Teacher as innovative learning designer" started well. She has been instrumental at governmental levels to improve the use of IT in education, this former mathematics lecturer reminded delegates of the relationship between teacher and learner that is at the heart of education. Her presentation started from the premise that only teachers have the knowledge, experience and appropriate context for developing the new forms of pedagogy made possible by digital learning methods. Unfortunately her presentation of a piece of software left many wondering whether she really meant it.

Perhaps the best plenaries were held on the last day. Friday morning started with James E. Zull's presentation on "The Art of Changing the Brain: enriching teaching by studying the biology of learning" in which he spoke venerably about how learning creates physical change in the brain. His research question has been "how does teaching create learning?" and his posited answer was that use or disuse *and* emotion makes change. Put simply we might say that good things happen when people feel ownership of what they're doing, according to Prof. Zull.

The closing session came from Derek Dick, better known as Fish, of musical fame and the former lead-singer of progressive rock-band Marillion, to speak about lyricism and being a self-designated "wordsmith". Fish, whose lyrics have been translated into a dozen languages and have been the subject of doctoral dissertations, amusingly confessed his nervousness of speaking in front of so many teachers, who he would normally avoid. Delegates enjoyed his

performance of songs from his millions-selling albums to finish a memorable conference in Scotland.

For those KOTESOLers who want to experience the IATEFL event, I would like to fully recommend the online event at the British Council's IATEFL conference site (<http://iatefl.britishcouncil.org/2012>). My interview promoting KOTESOL and its events and publications (together with representatives from the Netherlands and Greece) is also online at the site. Next year perhaps Korea will have the most number of visitors to IATEFL to be held in Liverpool and online.

I would like to thank KOTESOL and the International Outreach Committee for enabling me to attend the IATEFL conference.

Biodata



Simon G. Gillett is an English language teacher with language teaching experience in England, Scotland, China, Australia and Korea. Prior to Korea he studied education at Cambridge University, specializing in modern foreign languages. He has taught English, French and German at primary and secondary levels and has sympathy or fluency in many more languages.

Currently teaching at Sookmyung Women's University and a doctoral candidate in the University of Exeter's Graduate School of Education, he is interested in teaching and researching TESOL and reading. His research interests include ethics, international schools, extensive reading and Christian English teaching.