

KOTESOL to hold conference in Daegu Saturday



English teachers take part in the 2010 KOTESOL National Conference. This year's conference will be held in Daegu Saturday under the theme of "Change in the Classroom: Principled Pragmatism." / Courtesy of KOTESOL

By John Redmond

Hundreds of Korea's English teachers and scholars will meet at the annual Korea TESOL (KOTESOL) National Conference to be held at the Global Plaza at Kyungpook National University in Daegu, Saturday.

The participants will include over 200 teachers, 50 presenters and 10 overseas visitors for 60 presentations and workshops.

KOTESOL stands for Korea Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages.

The organization was founded in 1992, and is the official Korean affiliate of both TESOL International (USA) and the International Association of Teachers of English as a Foreign Language (IATEFL) (United Kingdom), as well as a partner in the Pan Asian Consortium of Language Teaching Associations.

KOTESOL has more than 700 teacher-members: 25 percent are Korean teachers of English and 65 percent are expatriate teachers in Korea. There are 11 local chapters across Korea, from Seoul to Jeju, including Daegu, Daejeon, Gwangju and Busan.

KOTESOL's overseas members are located in more than 20 countries, including Japan, China, the Philippines, Indonesia, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), the U.S., Canada, Australia, New Zealand and Pakistan. They account for roughly 10 percent of the total membership.

The theme of KOTESOL's 2014 National Conference is "Change in the Classroom: Principled Pragmatism."

"Instead of teaching through new-age methodologies or expecting technology to solve all classroom problems, it's time for teachers to wisely select and utilize the most appropriate tools

from the many resources developed over the past 50 years,” KOTESOL President and Conference Chair Peadar Callaghan said.

KOTESOL’s Daegu conference features eight hours of presentations, including plenary sessions by world-renown authors Marc Helgesen and Charles Browne, a webinar by Ken Beatty on authenticity in the classroom and more than 60 other teacher-led sessions.

This conference, unlike many in Korea, recognizes the need to bring classroom realities to the forefront, including busy teachers, limited resources and the fact that not all learners are eager to study.

“Most language-educators in Korea are expected to produce results without expensive technology, or same-level learner groups. Yes, there are a few language-learning programs that use specialized learning approaches for their ideal students, but this is not the norm, and we have to deal with realities,” Callaghan said.

Pragmatic approaches and classroom realities are central elements in most of the day’s 60-plus workshops and practice-based presentations, all delivered in English.

Principled pragmatism is not only the theme of this year’s national conference, but has guided selection of the presentations. Reports of action research became a primary focus, and the conference includes sessions representing a diverse range spanning Korean master’s students to tenured professors in the U.S.

Action research showcases how issues have been addressed in real teaching contexts through reflection on the relevant literature and cyclical research involving all the participants in the classroom setting. This focus compliments some of the more traditional workshops and presentations.

Rob Dickey, conference co-chair, pointed out that teachers want tools they can use in their classrooms. “Our surveys tell us that conference attendees favor sessions that they can use in the very next week of school,” he said.

Korea TESOL is perhaps best known as a multicultural teachers’ society, this aspect is enshrined in the group’s constitution and obvious in all aspects of the society’s activities.

While the current president is Irish and the secretary is South African, the first and second vice-presidents and the treasurer are all Koreans, as is a quarter of the general membership.

“The strength of our organization,” Callaghan said, “is in our diversity — Koreans, Americans, Canadians, Filipinos and more. This diversity broadens the idea pool, which in turn contributes greatly to teacher’s professional development.”

The KOTESOL National Conference rotates across the peninsula, each spring. The annual KOTESOL International Conference is held each year in Seoul, and this year it will be staged at COEX as part of World Teachers’ Day and in collaboration with the Korean Association of Foreign Languages Education. More than 1,200 teachers attend the autumn international conference each year.

Fees for the conference are 20,000 won for current members of KOTESOL, 35,000 won for non-members and 10,000 won for undergraduate students (photo ID and proof of current full-time status, for example a spring course registry, are required).

Registration is from 9:15 –10 a.m. The conference finishes at 6 p.m. For more information, visit <http://www.koreatesol.org/nc2014>.