

REPORT to the National Council of KOTESOL
Attendance at PALT 2017, University of Santo Tomas, Manila, Phillipines.

Dates: December 7 to 9, 2017

Attendee: Leonie Overbeek

The theme of the conference was 'Language Education in Asia in the Context of Asean.' Three plenary speakers and three featured speakers had been invited, and 62 papers had been accepted for the parallel sessions.

The plenaries and keynote addresses each had an hour, while the parallel sessions had 30 minutes each. The first two days covered nine hours, and the final day five hours.

The first day started with registration from 7.30 to 9.00 am, followed by an opening ceremony where the chorus from the faculty of Arts and Letters at the university presented the Doxology, and the Phillipine National Anthem. This was followed by the first plenary from Dr. Maria Bautista, who presented some of the problems faced by converting the imagined community of ASEAN into an actual trade entity, most notably the lack of agreement on what constitutes valid qualifications. which then prohibits free movement of people across borders.

After a refreshment break of 15 minutes, the parallel sessions kicked off, and these were followed by a lunch break lasting 45 minutes. After lunch the first featured speaker, Matt Keener of the US Embassy, spoke about the support the US lends to language education. Some more parallel sessions followed, and another tea break, then a campus tour.

The second day started with a recap of the previous day as regards plenary and featured speakers main points, and then the second plenary speaker, Dr. Anne Pakir presented about the Singapore situation with regards to language diversity having disappeared as 'English-knowing' took over. I was the second keynote speaker after lunch, and presented a more practical classroom oriented talk about what would work, and what doesn't. In between the usual breaks and parallel sessions covered a wide array of ideas.

The third day saw another recap of the previous day, and then the final plenary by Dr. Ahmar Mahboob who spoke about the need for language teachers to think about empowering students to be able to understand the complex texts they will face in their chosen subjects. He was followed by Shirley Ando of JALT, who presented an example of what reflective practice entails. There were no parallel sessions on this day, and no tea break. Instead, after Ms Ando's presentation we had the closing ceremonies and lunch.

The area for registration was a small foyer in front of the main hall, and there was no provision for a table where KOTESOL or JALT could display and network, so I used the opportunity to network in the parallel sessions with the delegates, passing out KOTESOL pamphlets where I could. There was a lot of interest shown. On the second day I did display our publications at one side of the registration desk, and on the final day we held a raffle and passed these out as prizes, all of which were very gratefully received.

Things that I felt went very well:

Since the conference was a small one, the refreshments and lunches were provided for all delegates and speakers in the form of buffet tables.

The recap of the previous day was a very useful tool, allowing people who arrived late or missed a plenary to catch up.

The campus tour was a lovely chance to explore the venue.

Limiting all the parallel sessions to 30 minutes made for a more seamless movement from one session to another.

Things that could have done with improvement:

Allowing only 15 minutes for a tea break did not match the logistics of many people crowding around a buffet, and then talking to each other rather than attending the parallel sessions.

The early starts (8.30) meant many people arrived late, given Manila's traffic situation.

Suggestions for KOTESOL conferences:

Considering grouping the parallel sessions according to time – all 1 hour sessions together, etc.

Considering a couple of networking sessions – that's what people really do want to do.

My grateful thanks to the committee for giving me this opportunity to attend the conference.

Leonie Overbeek
December 2017.