

## Review

### **JALT 2007 Conference Report**

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The 33rd JALT International Conference was held in Tokyo November 23-25, 2008. I had never attended a JALT conference before, and so I had assumed that it would be an easy-going affair, with lots of time for introspection and quiet reflection on the art of language education. Therefore, the conference theme “Challenging Assumptions” turned out to be particularly apt, as the conference was nothing like my assumptions at all.

#### **Friday, Nov. 23rd**

Upon arriving at the National Olympics Memorial Youth Centre bright and early Friday morning, I was quickly overwhelmed by the sheer scale of the event. There seemed to be a thousand presentations all leaping out of my Quick Guide schedule, all baying for my attention. I searched desperately for a presentation on “How to Choose Presentations,” to no avail.

I eventually found my way to six presentations on Friday, the highlight being a session by Amanda Gillis-Furutaka. Amanda led a discussion on “Education Choices for Bicultural Kids in Japan”, which challenged my assumption that International Schools are always the best choice if you can afford it. In fact, there are a whole host of benefits to a local Japanese school, such as close proximity to home, curriculum strengths in areas such as socialisation and leadership, excellent school meals and sports teams. Amanda gave some examples using her children, one of whom attended an international school and two of whom attended the local Japanese school. For each child, these educational choices were best.

The CUE SIG AGM was held Friday evening, and gave me a chance to meet face-to-face the good folks that keep our SIG running. There seems to be a whole lot planned for 2008, with heaps of opportunity for people to get involved. Afterward, I retired to my capsule hotel in

Shinjuku that evening for a much needed rest in preparation for the next day. My humidi-crib bed was the perfect environment to peruse the schedule for the next day and plan a course of action.

### **Saturday, Nov. 24th**

Saturday morning brought a plenary lecture from Paul Nation on designing vocabulary tasks, which was full of great advice and bad jokes. The great advice included ways to adapt tasks to increase the chance of vocabulary learning taking place, which I definitely plan on using in my classes; the bad jokes, I won't. There was more great advice being given in the afternoon by David McCullough, who spoke on the topic of making small group discussions work from his doctoral research into small group learning. David ended the session with lots of useful techniques for improving classroom discussion. As I have often run into a wall of silence when attempting to do small group work with my university classes, this presentation was particularly rewarding. After a yakitori dinner in Kabuki-cho and a hot bath back at my capsule hotel, I was all charged-up for a final day of JALT-ing.

### **Sunday, Nov. 25th**

Sunday morning was packed full of more great speakers, but I wasn't sure whether to head home at midday or stay around for the Sunday afternoon sessions. In the end, I decided to stay and was very glad I did. Damian Lucantonio gave a brilliant presentation on pop culture and global issues in a tiny room filled to capacity. Damian uses music videos in his classes as a springboard for launching critical thinking tasks and discussions into global issues such as poverty, war, and child soldiers. The really interesting thing for me was that he doesn't use the lyrics as a text. Instead, he concentrates on the moving image as a way to probe students' understanding and get them motivated to talk about important social and political topics.

As I caught the *shinkansen* home that evening, my mind was buzzing with the sights and sounds of JALT 2007. I think it'll take me the next 12 months just to re-read my notes and digest all that went down over the three days. This year's conference will be held at the same place, and promises to be bigger and grander still. I really appreciate all the help and support given to me by CUE in order to get to the conference. I look forward to seeing you all again in November.



*From left to right: Terry Fellner (Treasurer) and Matt Apple (SIG Coordinator) offer congratulations and a certificate to CUE 2007 Scholar Paul Wicking at the CUE 2007 AGM.*

## **CUE 2007 Scholar Award Recipient: Paul Wicking**

*As the CUE 2007 Scholar, Paul received a grant from the College and University Educators' Special Interest Group to help defray the costs of his attending the JALT International Conference at the Yoyogi Olympic Memorial Youth Center in Tokyo.*

*CUE SIG is planning to sponsor up to two CUE SIG members for the 2008 JALT Conference. Please see page 160 in this issue for a brief list of award benefits and visit the CUE SIG web page at <http://jaltcue-sig.org> for more information about application requirements for the CUE 2008 Scholar Award.*