
Conference Review

The 2011 KOTESOL National Conference in Daejeon, South Korea

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On a sunny May weekend, on the beautiful Korea Advanced Institute of Science and Technology (KAIST) campus, hundreds of English language teachers spent their time in Daejeon, learning how to become better at their craft. Over sixty presenters shared their wisdom on a number of topics in the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) field.

Jason Renshaw led off the plenary sessions with “Materials Development for Language Learning: The Next Ten Years.” He reviewed general course book content and design over the past decade, and speculated about the increasing amount of EFL material that will be found online in the not too distant future.

The Korean TESOL (KOTESOL) National Conference also featured two important EFL contributors from Japan, authors Barbara Hoskins Sakamoto and Dr. Rob Waring. They presented via live web-based seminars (webinars), which were similar to an educational Skype discussion. Even though Korea is one of the most wired nations on the planet, I expect this medium to really take off in the next few years as the online community of educational professionals grows.

Sakamoto, author of the *Let's Go* series, shared her experience using Twitter and the Internet to join and build a global network of teachers committed to sharing materials, meeting new people, or working on joint projects. She informed us that her first attempt at using social media for professional development was successful and very fulfilling. Her presentation,

“The Power of Connection: How Twitter (and the Internet) Can Make You a Better Teacher” took the audience through all of the steps necessary to join the online educational community, the pros and cons of Twitter, and the immediate benefits thereafter.

Waring, a highly regarded researcher in the area of Extensive Reading (ER), presented on how reading should be an essential component of any language curriculum and a key element of building fluency. He presented a number of solutions for cases where the implementation of an ER program faces an uphill battle against tightening budgets and unconvinced colleagues.

One of my own personal favorite presenters was Joshua Davies, a former EFL educator who has moved into the private sector. He now trains on behalf of the Leadership and Advanced Management Training (LAM) Institute, training corporate clients in the art of public speaking and message development throughout Asia. Davies’ presentation, “Persuasive Communications in the 21st Century Classroom”, was a very informative three-hour talk aimed at helping teachers work on their classroom presence and engaging students for a lasting effect. Davies also interacted with the audience frequently.

This kind of professional development seminar is something I hope to see more of in the future. Teachers, as well as presenters, occasionally fail to deliver their lesson or message to full effect, leaving a weak imprint in our short-term memory. For us to become better educators, we need to make a deep, memorable impact in the minds of our learners, Davies argues.

Another notable presenter included Dr. Namjoon Kang, director of TESOL programs at Sookmyung University. In his presentation titled “SBLT Is Better Suited than CLIL, CBLT, and Immersion for Korean EFL Students”, he compared and contrasted these above approaches and then presented research on over 150 Korean elementary school children. He discussed the differences between SBLT, CLIL and CBLT approaches, and what he considers best in terms of immersion for Korean EFL students. In addition, he discussed the types of syllabus and curriculum teachers and administrators should consider when implementing a language program.

The conference atmosphere was one of hurried professionals, rushing

to attend the next eye-opening seminar or presentation. The organizers were among those dashing around and doing their best to make sure that everything went smoothly. I'm sure that everyone appreciated all the hard work that went into the planning of the 2011 national conference. The student interns also did a fantastic job assisting the organizers and were always ready to guide a wayward participant in the right direction.

However, like many conferences, some things do not go as entirely as planned, and the KOTESOL National Conference was no exception. I found pre-registration and payment from abroad to be utterly impractical, and this seemed somewhat ironic given the high-tech emphasis of the conference. Unfortunately, the start of the conference was delayed, and the scheduled time slots needed to be pushed back fifteen minutes. Although this presented a scheduling problem, I was able to find the presentation I wanted to attend fairly easily.

This was the tenth annual KOTESOL National Conference. It was a pleasure to see fellow EFL teachers in Korea dedicated to the principles of professional growth, development, and fostering a sharing community between teachers and learners. I expect that the popularity and quality of presentations and workshops to improve with forthcoming conferences as the number of experienced educators expands. It would be well worth your time to expand your network of fellow EFL teachers and see how English is taught in another country. I believe that the organizers did meet their goals of the conference theme, "Advancing Korean TESOL in the 21st Century".

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