The theme of the conference this year was ‘Innovation, Motivation, Education’. This was the biggest Annual Conference to date, with over 650 people attending and speakers from 26 different nationalities, from as far afield as Germany, the USA, China and the United Arab Emirates.

After everything we have seen on the news about the difficult situation in Greece, it was refreshing to see so many professionals attending this conference. The opening ceremony focused on this, as the President, Dimitris Primalis, praised the professionalism of the people present, saying that 2,500 years ago educators had made a difference to society, and today’s teachers were ideally placed to do so again, serving as role models to create a better society.

The opening plenary, by Dr Thomaï Alexiou and Dr Marina Mattheoudaki, was a presentation of a ten-year programme to introduce a bilingual system into primary education, based in the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, and piloted in an experimental school, specially set up for the purpose in 2006. This was particularly interesting as it provided a direct comparison with the bilingual programmes established here in Spain, and the findings of the Greek project have led to a very similar programme here.

The morning continued with talks by Maurice Claypole, who proposed a radical way forward beyond the communicative approach – the fractal approach, based on a mathematical theory (this is explained further on his webpage, www.fractal-approach.com), and by Elif Soltau and Giti Najafi, from Istanbul, who examined the use of web 2.0 tools for extending student speaking time beyond the classroom, focusing on Voxopop and Moviemaker. To round off the morning, Igor Gavilán gave a talk on ways of improving motivation among students. To a packed room, he demonstrated the use of jokes and puns, quotations and proverbs to pique the students’ interest and stimulate debate.

In the afternoon, Luke Prodromou provided a very entertaining analysis of the theme of education in the work of Charles Dickens, based on a series of dramatised readings, aided by David Gibson, before taking part in a lively debate with David Bish on the pros and cons of ICT in ELT. The closing plenary on Saturday took the form of an interactive session with the speakers from the different plenary sessions taking turns to answer questions from the floor.

On Sunday, Christine Coombe delivered two plenary sessions, beginning the day with ‘10 Characteristics of Highly Effective EF/SL Teachers’, and in the afternoon explaining how to go about setting up a personal strategic plan. At the beginning of the afternoon session, Juliane House examined the subject of English as a Lingua Franca, asking whether it poses a threat to multilingual communication. Other sessions on Sunday included a talk by Vicky Loras on the use of blogging in the classroom, and a presentation by Sophie Mavridi on how to introduce internet safety in the ELT classroom. There was also a presentation by Maria Barberi of a creative writing project she has set up in her school, while Marisa Constantinides proposed a holistic approach.
to foreign language teaching and learning, offering a wide range of resources which give the learner the chance to achieve a tangible outcome in their learning process.

This was a conference which was characterised by the impressive quality of the talks and presentations in a packed programme. However, not everything was work. Both the convention party offered by the Hellenic American Union on Saturday evening and the closing party sponsored by Burlington Books on Sunday provided time for the conference-goers to relax and let their hair down, with the music and dancing going on well into the night on the roof terrace of the Hellenic American Union, with spectacular views across the city to the Acropolis, lit up against the night sky.

I really enjoyed this conference, and I would like to congratulate the board and volunteers of TESOL-Greece for the organisation and smooth running of a convention packed with great talks and thought-provoking ideas. On a personal level, I would like to thank everyone present for the warm welcome received. I look forward to next year’s conference, which promises to be bigger and better still.