

“Inspiring Global Learning” 22nd APPI Conference Aveiro, Portugal 1st-3rd May 2008

At the beginning of May I had the good fortune to attend the APPI Conference as a guest of the organisers. APPI, the Portuguese Association for English Teachers, held their 22nd National Conference in Aveiro, a charming coastal town an hour’s drive south of Oporto, with the theme “Inspiring Global Learning”.

One of the important outcomes of the Teacher Association meeting hosted by the British Council in January (see the last issue of the newsletter for a report) was the importance of keeping in contact with each other in order to strengthen the role of teacher associations, learn from each other and share examples of best practice. It was gratifying to meet up with representatives of APAC (Cataluña), APIGA (Galicia) and BETEA (Basque Country) as well as the members of APPI and staff of the British Council in Portugal, some of whom attended the TESOL-SPAIN Convention in March.

I was anxious to experience the conference firsthand – apart from attending talks, meeting people and browsing the exhibition, this would provide a good opportunity to compare national conventions. APPI is a very active association and I knew I could learn a lot from them. One immediate difference was that a large number of conference goers were teachers at state schools. (TESOL-SPAIN public sector membership is around 30%). This may be due to the fact that in the past, state school teachers were given time off to attend teacher development events – sadly that is no longer the case. Despite this, it was a very well-attended event. Without knowing the attendance statistics, I would estimate the number at around 600-700, comparable with attendance at TESOL-SPAIN conventions in spite of the difference in size and population of the two countries. Very impressive!

The Conference took place at the ultra-modern Hotel Melia Rio, a short walk from the town centre. Recent TESOL-SPAIN Conventions have been held on University campuses and, whilst centres of learning offer plenty of advantages for a conference, I must say I appreciated the fact that I only had to take the lift in order to attend talks!

The organisation was impeccable and the hospitality generous. It was good to see some familiar faces and to have the pleasure of making new friends. As for the talks, there was certainly a lot on offer: a total of 97 presentations in the form of opening and closing plenary sessions, workshops and seminars by 125 speakers covering a broad range of topics aimed at teachers of pre-school and school-age learners. The Saturday sessions had a strong focus on the teaching of young learners.

The opening plenary by Amos Paran, “*Critical necessities: which reading texts should we use in language teaching?*” argued the case for using literary texts in class with learners of all ages, and this was followed up by a practical workshop on the same theme on Saturday morning. Between this and the final session on Saturday afternoon I attended some excellent presentations by speakers from all over Portugal, as well as international speakers

such as Mark Almond, Sheelagh Dellar, Maria Heron, George Pickering, and Viljo Kohonen. The final plenary by Susan Hillyard urged the development of critical and creative thinking in teaching English “as a global language in a globalised world.”

In addition to the presentations, the publishers’ exhibition provided opportunities for those attending to catch up on the latest publications, and there was plenty of time to socialise at the opening cocktail on Thursday evening and the splendid Friday evening dinner.

My thanks and congratulations to APPI’s President, Alberto Gaspar, to Isabel Brites, Vice-President and Convention Co-ordinator, and to all those who worked so hard to make the Conference such a worthwhile event.