

TESOL Spain National Convention in Madrid 9-11 March 2018

“The Heart in the Art of Teaching”

Six years ago I represented IATEFL Poland at TESOL Spain Convention in Bilbao. Two years ago I attended a TESOL France colloquium in Paris where some of TESOL Spain members took part in my workshop. They invited me to their Convention. Unfortunately, it was too late to attend in 2017, so I decided to try the following year and my proposal was accepted. Thanks to my mother organization IATEFL Poland, who made it possible for me I attend I managed to spend a few fruitful days in an unusually rainy and cold Madrid.



The Convention was held at the Faculty of Education of the Universidad Complutense in Madrid. The Convention started late in the afternoon with a plenary and five parallel sessions.

The opening ceremony took place in Aula Magna which was big and spacious enough to seat all the attendees. The Convention theme was The Heart in the Art of Teaching - a very broad theme that can hold many aspect of English Language Teaching. Thomas Strasser from Vienna in his opening plenary ‘Learning technologies in the Intercultural ELF Classroom. Digital-Hype or Serious Change of paradigm?’ talked about the modern technologies and how they not only facilitate learning, but enhance new forms of the multisensory learning. Professor Strasser based his talk on pedagogy and contrasted technology use with technology integration at different levels of learning. He skillfully paraphrased a line from Public Enemy’s rap “Don’t believe the hype” into “Don’t believe the swipe”. He suggested for teachers to pro-actively look for solutions including smartphones and other devices in the classrooms.

Out of five I chose to attend Luke Prodromou’s presentation/workshop ‘Ten Types of Misbehavior and Ten Practical Solutions’ where Luke asked many questions e.g. What kind of teachers are better, strict but fun or polite and friendly? Which style of teaching is more effective with misbehaving students? What is misbehaving? By what standards? How do we know that students don’t listen? Together we tried to find answers for some of these questions.

Friday finished with an opening cocktail where we could mingle and network with a glass of wine and very tasty tapas. It was cold and rainy on the way home which was a 15 minute walk.



On Saturday it was even colder and poured buckets. I was completely soaked by the time I reached the conference venue. Even the other pair of shoes which I was carrying in my backpack got wet. I went to listen to Debbie West's talk, which she titled 'The Human Library and other Stories to Tell'. I was intrigued and thought it would be about storytelling for adults. In fact I was not mistaken. Debbie introduced us to the Human Library project which I found absolutely fascinating. An eye opener and a way to find out other people's stories by meeting them face to face. She showed us how the project can be used in teaching EFL and encourage students to speak. The session was very personal and truly emotional. It impressed me deeply and immediately after it I searched the internet to learn more about the human libraries.

There was time for coffee and a gallery walk at the Publishers' Exhibition area where I bumped into some old ELT colleagues and met some new ones. After the morning session and coffee I stayed in the canteen and tried to dry myself to be able to survive till the evening. Luckily, it was warm in the classrooms, especially when they were crowded.

Professor Do Coyle supported her plenary talk 'Plurilliteracies at the Heart of Learning' with slides, excellent in the beginning; however, after a few good ones they became packed with text printed in a very small font - quite illegible even from the first row. The quintessence of the talk was that 'we cannot do what we have always done because our students need to gain new skills like BICS - Basic Intercommunication Skills or CALP - Cognitive Academic Learning Proficiency'. The triangle, which I knew as I THOU IT trio was presented as The Language Triptych: Language of Learning, Language for Learning and Language through

Learning. All teachers are language teachers so all teachers have to be language aware, they should rather mentor learning itself not a learner.

Michelle C. Guerrini explored CLIL assessment and tools with 4 Cs: Content, Communication, Cognition and Culture. Assessment in CLIL can be particularly challenging when teachers are not sure where to focus: on content, language or both. Michelle advocated formative assessment where students feel free and safe and also participate in their own learning process. Collaboration helps learning from each other.

Keynote Imaging Pronunciation by Robin Walker based on his experience of teaching speakers of Spanish helped me to understand even better how images may help students to improve their pronunciation. Especially for more visual students they 'make sense of sound'. There is a whole list of different kinds of images for that: images of articulation, charts and tables, waver, associations and live images.

When I saw a title Forget Methodology, Learners just Need More and Better Practice by Jim Scrivener I thought it was just for me. However, I had some doubts of the open denial of methodology - especially for the beginner teachers. I listened with my whole self while looking at most beautiful slides. The words I had said many times to myself, my colleagues and trainee teachers: 'Teaching hardly matters. Learning matters. The essential learning experience is doing it by yourself' and finally, 'Practice is the process of learning made audible and visible.'

Matt Ledding, whom I met for the first time in Madrid, gave a workshop which title drew my attention: Speaking Games: Improv(e) your CLIL. I have strong interest in speaking games and want to know more about CLIL. Not only was I not disappointed but took part in an informative, engaging and slightly entertaining workshop. Matt is an actor and an experienced teacher who shared a lot of tricks of the trade, both trades 😊 with us impressing me with his knowledge of different subjects taught at schools. He convinced us that we are naturally creative and so are our students. I am sure I am going to use the games while teaching teenagers this summer.

Because at Matt's workshop some teachers and I could not quite understand the instruction (we did not pay enough attention) we could not do the activity properly but instead of getting upset about it we had a lot of fun together. This led some of the participants to my workshop that followed. I shared some activities that were very open to teachers' own creativity and had one aim - to help students retain once gained knowledge. The audience were very active and eagerly participated in the activities, which I hope will help them remember them for a longer time.

I decided to stay in the same classroom because I did not want to intrude on the next speaker who was Daniel Warchulski, a Canadian of Polish origin. Actually, it was a good idea to stay and quickly pack up so that enough time was left for Daniel to set up his presentation. Because of long time spent travelling he didn't feel at his best. However, he

brought snacks for each participant. They were Japanese green tea flavoured KitKat bars. Daniel was giving an account on his research into promoting autonomy in ELT classroom in Japan, where he teaches. It is an issue that particularly interests me. It was good to learn how the others do it. The conclusion of the presentation was that learner self-assessment is the pillar of student's autonomy.

The last but definitely not least presentation was the final plenary by Maria Luisa Pérez Cañado, a professor at the Department of English Philology at the University of JÁEN. She is currently coordinating two governmentally-funded research projects on the effects of CLIL in monolingual contexts and in bilingual education. Maria Luisa went through twenty queries which are at present affecting CLIL at different levels of education in Spain. She discussed the main pedagogical implications which the findings have for different stakeholders. She did it in a lively, often amusing way. With my minimal knowledge of Spanish I sometimes got slightly lost when she quoted Spanish teachers or students and not always translated their utterances into English. No wonder - most of the participants were bilingual! All in all it was 21<sup>st</sup> century presentation strongly based in research findings.

When I look at the programme now I wish I could have participated in so many more sessions. Unfortunately, it is never possible at conferences. Hopefully, we will have a TESOL Spain delegate at IATEFL Poland conference in Wrocław in September.