

IATEFL conference Liverpool 2013

By Katie Quartano

The Disabled Access Friendly campaign had the honour to win the first Julia Tanner Memorial Scholarship co-sponsored by TESOL Macedonia-Thrace, N. Greece and Burlington books. The scholarship gave us the opportunity to make a presentation at one of the major events on the international ELT calendar, the annual IATEFL conference, which this year was held in Liverpool, U.K. www.iatefl.org



This event attracts approximately 3,000 delegates from all over the world, and if you visit IATEFL's website www.iatefl.org you can find a copy of the conference programme. We were given this as a hard copy, and it was the fattest, fullest and heaviest programme we have ever seen!

TESOL Macedonia-Thrace, N. Greece, is an affiliate member of IATEFL, and I had the pleasure of representing them at the dinner on the Sunday evening, which was organized for affiliates, staff and volunteers, at which David Crystal, the patron of IATEFL, Eric Baber, the outgoing president of IATEFL and others gave speeches. It was a great delight to find myself sitting at the same table with people whose names I recognized as the authors of most of the course books I used when studying for the CELTA qualification, and I tried hard not to make any grammatical mistakes in conversation.

On Monday, Paul gave a presentation to the Global Interests Special Interest Group (GISIG) Pre-Conference event entitled "Stepping into unknown shoes", focusing on how firstly teachers need to feel and understand, not assume, what it means to have a mobility disability, before they can raise awareness in their classrooms about such issues. The talk also highlighted the fact that when students are exposed to an interesting idea their thoughts are stimulated, and this creates a real desire to express themselves, and subsequently a need for grammar and language.

While Paul was at the GISIG event, I attended the Affiliates Day event, where I represented TESOL Macedonia-Thrace, N. Greece. This was an opportunity for networking and to hear examples of best practice and innovative ideas from teaching associations from all over the world. The overwhelming message I got was that virtual conferences, joint events and collaborations are the way to go. There were representatives from associations with more than 3000 members, representatives from newly established associations in Africa, and experts who offer support to teaching associations such as the British Council.



The British Council also works together with IATEFL to provide an Online Conference so that people not able to attend the event in person can still benefit. <http://iatefl.britishcouncil.org/2013/>. Paul and I were interviewed on the very first day of the main conference about our work with the Disabled Access Friendly campaign, and you can watch this online <http://iatefl.britishcouncil.org/2013/sessions/2013-04-09/interview-katie-quartano-paul-shaw>. That same afternoon, we gave our presentation “Lessons in Life that Matter” and this was also filmed, although unfortunately there were some dreaded technical problems so there is a chunk missing, but you can still watch it here <http://iatefl.britishcouncil.org/2013/sessions/2013-04-09/lessons-life-matter>. The talk was very practical, and showed how teachers can use our free teaching material with students at all levels, and whilst still teaching English, at the same time open their eyes to issues of mobility disability.

The room we were allocated was quite small, and because of Britain’s all-involving “health and safety” regulations, people were not allowed to stand at the back, and whereas on the one hand it was very pleasing to find that our room was completely full, on the other it was a pity to have to turn people away at the door. The feedback we got after our talk was very encouraging, and we are proud that our work is so well received by the ELT community and that it is having such a wide impact. We now get visitors to our site from over 120 countries worldwide, and average 10,000 page hits a month.

Disabled Access Friendly also had a huge poster on display in the exhibition hall, and this attracted a lot of attention.



The fact that people are so interested in the work of the Disabled Access Friendly campaign and seek us out to talk to us meant that we were also easily able to network with colleagues on behalf of TESOL Macedonia-Thrace, N. Greece. We spoke to many experienced and well-

known presenters, who not only expressed an interest in speaking at next year's conference, but also in visiting Thessaloniki.

As a Londoner going by the anything north of Watford rule, I was really surprised to find that Liverpool is a beautiful city, and it was a great pity that we were so busy at the conference that we did not really have any time to explore it. However, we did manage to go to the Albert Docks, which were right by our hotel. This is where the Beatles museum is located, and the Tate Gallery. No giro or souvlaki, but some truly excellent fish and chips.

Thank you once again to TESOL Macedonia-Thrace, N. Greece and Burlington Books for this wonderful opportunity. As friends of Julia's it was an honour to win the scholarship, an honour to represent TESOL Macedonia-Thrace, N. Greece, and wonderful to have the opportunity to promote the Disabled Access Friendly campaign in its efforts to use EFL to put something good back into the world. Just in case you haven't already visited our site with free teaching material, please have a look here www.disabled-accessfriendly.com.