

The post-conference report

by Magdalena Kondro, IATEFL Poland Representative

The 4th Annual Conference organized by ELT Ireland was held at Griffith College, Dublin on 17th and 18th February, 2018. The theme was *Developing Outcomes in ELT*. The conference addressed a vast variety of topics related to the main theme, including reflective practice for educators, student reflection, critical thinking, improving communication and overcoming fossilization in second language acquisition.

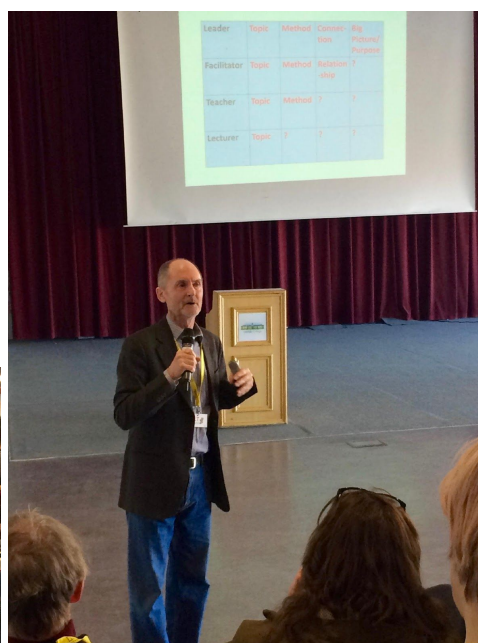
The conference attracted a large number of participants based in Ireland, but there were also attendees and speakers from the UK, Canada and other countries from around the globe. The speakers were teachers, educational consultants, researchers, Managers and Directors of Studies of various ELT institutions as well as internationally acclaimed authors and trainers.

The conference programme was very interesting and relevant to educators and researchers working in various educational, geographical and cultural contexts. Simultaneously, through discussions and presentations of the local professional development opportunities, projects, research and lessons learnt from practice the conference aimed to strengthen collaboration between teachers working in Ireland.

Saturday started with registration, conference packs we all love, welcome coffee and exhibition of ELT courses and literature by renowned publishers and local book distributors. The event participants were able to exchange the first hellos with colleagues from various countries.

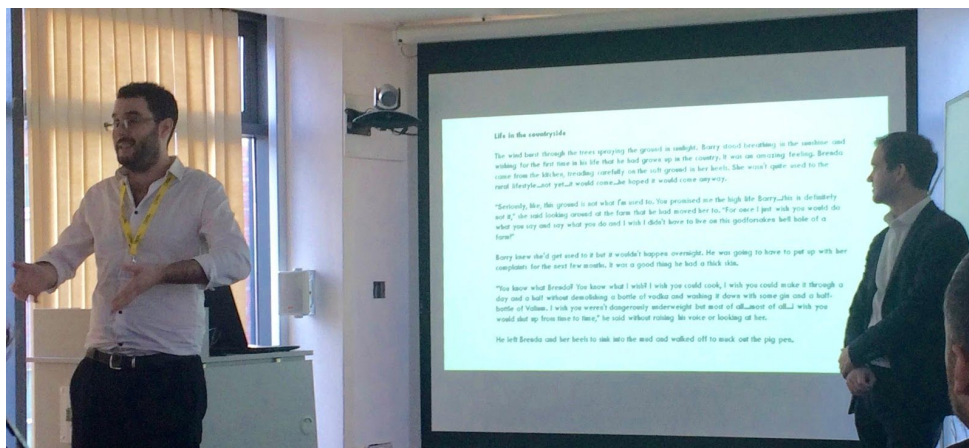


The Opening Address and Welcome were conducted by Lou McLaughlin, the President of ELT Ireland. The first plenary talk was given by the world-famous author and educator Adrian Underhill on *Teaching and New Leadership*, with the key message being that modern leadership, also in relation to teaching, means focus on shared values and achieving goals through people acting together.



The plenary talk was followed by six sessions with three concurrent presentations at each one. I was able to attend six presentations that were all very informative and contained just the right ratio of theory and practical tips.

I am definitely going to explore further the techniques for creativity and critical thinking presented by Ben Dobbs (*Creativity, Critical Thinking and Communication for Greater Training Outcomes*), ask my students 'Why?' more in relation to grammar as encouraged by Danny Norrington-Davies (*From rules to reasons and other little tweaks*), incorporate extensive student reflection using Aileen Donegan's questions (*Noticing outcomes through student reflection*), experiment with project-based learning, drawing upon the experience of Adam O'Regan, David Morgan and Matthew Watson (*Project-based learning – Reflective practice, constraints and learner outcomes*), use *Affect for better effect* as inspired by Angelos Bolas (and I will certainly find a way to insert the quote 'No man is your enemy, no man is your friend, every man is your teacher' from the video into a lesson) and finally explore the myriad of short texts and teaching ideas from David Byrne and Mark Heffernan's webpage (*Textploitation: Getting more from a text*).



The busy conference day finished with Sue Hackett's plenary session QA, QM, QI ... *what does it all mean for the language school?* on the benefits and risks of language schools cooperating with external agencies.

I had the immense pleasure of meeting Sue and other plenary speakers as well as the ELT Ireland founders and conference organisers at the dinner Lou invited me to on Saturday evening. I am happy to report that privately they are as inspiring and fun as they are professionally.





The Sunday schedule was nearly as packed as the Saturday one, with five sessions and three parallel presentations at each one. The day started with a very entertaining, research-based plenary session on *Reflective Practice for Language Teachers* by Thomas Farrell. Not only will I use a lot of Tom's ideas for reflection, but I shall never again refer to teacher observation in any other way than 'drive-by shooting'.



It should have been difficult for the subsequent speakers to keep up with the quality of Tom's presentations, but they did not disappoint. From Keith Murdiffe (*Facebook, Edmodo, or your personal blog?*) I learnt how to give students writing practice through Facebook, Francis Eales (*The Challenge of Chunks*) – the author of the highly successful *Speakout* series – taught me how to make students responsible for noticing and using language chunks, Stephen Burke (*Nuclear Stress – can it improve intelligibility*) shared the experience of collaborative research into nuclear stress that turned out to be a valuable lesson, Tony Preston (*Pre-reading: Is there another way?*) presented fun and effective pre-reading ideas using the Irish language as a means thus expanding my vocabulary beyond the very inappropriate phrases I had been taught on my first trip to Ireland in my high school years, and Laura Edwards

(Fighting Fossilisation with strategy training) gave us hope that fossilisation in SLA could be reversible or failing that, at least learners can appreciate it as a form of protecting their non-native speaker identity.



The conference ended with a raffle that was enthusiastically accepted by the attendees and nearly everyone won a prize. Then it was announced that Lou

McLaughlin was stepping down from her role as ELT Ireland President. She received flowers from her colleagues and a well-deserved standing ovation from the audience for the wonderful job she has done over the five years. Thankfully I was promised she would remain actively involved with the organization.



The conference was a major success and I enjoyed every moment of it. I only wish I had been able to clone myself and participate in the concurrent sessions. Apart from the academic content, the conference provided a great opportunity for a social interaction and networking among participants.

Everything was professionally organized, from coffee, lunches to time-keeping, and the quality of the talks was amazing. I would like to wholeheartedly thank Lou, Peter and the rest of the ELT Ireland conference organisers for inviting me and making me feel welcome.

I cannot recommend the conference enough to anyone considering attending next year and if I lived in Ireland, my first post-conference steps would be to the ELT Ireland website to become a member of this vibrant organization.

I would also like to take this opportunity to invite everyone to the 27th annual IATEFL Poland conference on 21st -23rd September. This year the event is held at Wrocław University of Science and Technology in the city of Wrocław, which was the European Capital of Culture in 2016 and has just won the title of European Best Destination 2018. For more information on the conference please go to: <https://iatefl.org.pl/en/iatefl-poland-conference-news.html>