

ELT Bulletin title: IATEFL 2018

I feel quite fortunate to have had the opportunity to attend IATEFL thanks to ELT Ireland's travel grant. Although I have attended international teaching conferences over the past 10 years, none compare in size, expertise and excitement.

### **Talks for the EAP practitioner**

One talk I attended was John Hughes' talk on *Making critical thinking part of your everyday teacher toolkit*. Somewhat new to the EAP field, I found this talk very informative in the types of activities, and even the types of words teachers can use, to get learners to engage more critically with class materials. He began by presenting lower and higher orders of thinking and emphasized that course books typically jump from lower orders of thinking such as describing, to higher orders of thinking such as creating, often skipping the important middle level which would require learners to perform activities to analyze or evaluate. He went on the outline how instructions such "choose the best idea in your group", "work in groups and read the list of ideas. Which do you like and why?" and "work in pairs to plan a trip using the phrases from the listening" can activate critical thinking in learners. Attending this talk has informed my practice, as I imagine it has for most of the practitioners in the room.

Having learned a great deal about critical analysis, I sought to attend a talk related to speaking activities for EAP learners. I found this in *To debate or not to debate in an EAP classroom*, a talk given by N. Mehvar Ergun Turkkan from Bilkent University. Her talk began by outlining the benefits of holding debates from an institutional, teacher and learner perspective. She explained she had often felt frustrated when planning class debates because of the need to micro-manage for success unlike her colleagues who were able to relax (and even enjoy) class debates. Her feelings mirrored my own and I was excited to learn how she structures her debates. As such she detailed three essentials for a debate: one, the need for a minimum of four teams (two to debate, two to observe/judge); two, allowing teams for research time on both sides of the debate; and three, the incorporation of specific roles per team like the 'refuter', 'opener/closer'. Her talk concluded with highlighting how debates inspire autonomy and boost learners' confidence in the language.

### **'Big names, Normal teachers'**

For the 'veterans' in the field, you may remember those first few years of your practice when you spent hours reading about learner motivation, grammar usage, and how to teach English as a second language. You thought 'I'd love to meet and talk with this teacher in more depth', though perhaps never imagining the chance would arrive. Then you hear about IATEFL. Walking the halls of the conference centre, I passed 'big names' from my MA TESOL who greeted me warmly. It is then that you realize these 'big names' are still just teachers with the same goal as you at IATEFL: the learn about what other practitioners do and to better inform our practice. The most memorable moment was watching a nervous presenter give a charismatic presentation about project based learning in Malaysia and see Scott Thornbury in the audience. Afterward, he met, congratulated and took photos with the presenter who called him 'his mentor'. These ELT 'MVPs' are personable and encouraging of the industry's new practitioners. Next year, I hope to have the courage to ask my teaching idols about their practice, get their thoughts about my research (and possibly get a photo). ELT Ireland has helped to make this possible.