

From the President

Tessa Woodward, IATEFL President, writes on Teachers' Associations associated with IATEFL.



Tessa Woodward

I have, in front of me, a list of the 70 or so teachers' associations around the world that are associated with IATEFL. The list reads like a grand gazetteer, ranging from Argentina, Australia, and Austria through Bangladesh and

Bulgaria, on through Estonia and Germany, past Korea and Latvia to arrive finally at USA, Uzbekistan and Yugoslavia, with many a whistle stop between those destinations.

It is a major part of IATEFL's work, 'linking, developing and supporting' ELT professionals world wide to create and maintain contacts with these language teachers' associations (TAs) around the world

For me the list springs into life at the Associates Day and dinner held each year at our annual conference. I attended the events at the Liverpool 2004 and Cardiff 2005 conferences and am really looking forward to the one in Harrogate next year.

On those days, 40 or 50 representatives of different TAs meet—often presidents or central committee members. They bring with them their own newsletters, all different shapes, sizes and colours, DVDs of their conferences, local artefacts and most importantly, the experience they have gained from all the hard work they do as voluntary unpaid leaders. Their co-ordinator is Margit Szesztay, until recently President of IATEFL Hungary, who plans a

useful, friendly and inclusive day on issues such as 'What makes a TA successful' or 'What does research tell us about why people join TAs?'

I had a chance to work with this wonderful group of voluntary leaders at the Cardiff conference. I asked them three questions. They were to jot down their answers onto orange paper triangles. I got 44 triangles back.

The first question I asked was:

What do you TAs value in your relationship with IATEFL?

Things that came up again and again in the answers were: the chance to network, make connections, experience intercultural exchange, a feeling of belonging to a wider community, the chance to share common interests, information and experience. People also mentioned opportunities to attend IATEFL's annual conference, and 'Developing personally and professionally in ELT'. 'It provides a platform', said others. The overall feeling was then, that those connected with IATEFL enjoyed the contact and access to a wider professional community, feeling that it boosted confidence and gave respect and recognition to their work

Question two was:

What would you like to get from IATEFL in future?

One might expect people would mention material benefits here ... cheap flights, free legal advice or cheap books, none of which IATEFL provides at present. But no! Again people wanted more of a chance to gain a broader view, gain new ideas on running their TAs well and friendship from other teachers and

TAs regionally as well as internationally. They mentioned administrative support and access to international speakers for their own conferences too.

Question three was:

What would you like to give to IATEFL in future?

Again as educators and voluntary leaders, the priority was not on material things or money. It was again on those most valuable of commodities ... time, enthusiasm, help to extend membership, ideas, experiences, cultural diversity and 'Different perspectives and other ways of doing things'.

To come clean, I had actually had a hunch that this might be the case, although I was careful not to suggest it when I asked the questions. For teachers around the world are used to drawing on their own time, energy and imagination, and on each other as colleagues in order to create a little magic in their classrooms. And those who find fulfilment in stepping forward to join and then to help run a local or national teachers associations, know how much can be achieved with a few people, good will and the use of a room. So we shouldn't be surprised really to find that they put value on people, the sense of belonging to a professional community and the chance to develop personally and professionally through giving and getting time and effort.

What a marvellous basis for a continuing relationship between individual TAs and IATEFL! Thanks to you all!

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IATEFL Voices appears six times a year and contributions are welcome.

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