

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Dateline: (Seoul) May 19, 2014

Hundreds of Korea's English teachers and scholars will meet in Wonju (Gangwon-do) May 28th for the annual KOTESOL National Conference, held this year at Sangji University.

Our Provinces

A teachers' conference with practical applications, useful experiences, and fresh ideas for teachers of English.

The theme of KOTESOL's 2016 National Conference is "Our Provinces." According to Conference Chair Michael Free (Gangneung-Wonju National University), provinces is more than just the geography, but includes "the many domains of ELT, such as motivation and assessment, as well as interdisciplinary fields such as the use of art, film, and music, and new concerns, such as an increased awareness of the importance of social justice in education."

KOTESOL's Wonju conference features 8 hours of presentations, including a plenary session by emerging scholar Theron Muller, and more than 35 other teacher-led sessions.

This conference, unlike many in Korea, recognizes the reality that not all Korean students are the same, nor are their teachers or classroom settings. It's not just "one-size fits all."

As plenary speaker Theron Muller (University of Toyama, Japan) explains, "the act of teaching is deeply personal and also context dependent. One example of this is that almost every time I ask students questions about their interests regarding the direction a class should go in, there is almost never a clear consensus. Given a choice between three equally viable options, I'll often get pretty even splits in student interest and preference across the three. It's the same with teaching methods. One thing works in one classroom, but not in another. I think it comes down to the teacher and the particular students in the classroom with them, along with the curriculum and institutional cultures in which that classroom is situated."

Muller evidences this history through his own teaching experience. "About five years ago, I moved from teaching part-time at a number of different private language schools, in addition to adjunct work at colleges and universities, to working full time as an associate professor at the University of Toyama. I often joke that when I was in Nagano, I taught farmers, and they would give me fresh fruit and vegetables as gifts, but now that I teach

university students, my typical student gift is power drinks. That said, I approach my current classes no differently from how I approached my classes when I was teaching in Nagano; I view them as places for both me and my students to learn, and I see part of my responsibility as a teacher to think about how to explore the boundaries of what it's possible for me to teach and for my students to learn given the particular environments we're working in and perspectives we're coming from."

Free notes that the "Our" in the title is a powerful statement as well. "The inclusive Our relates to KOTESOL's motto of "Teachers helping Teachers," the profession of ELT in general, and of course, our being situated in Korea. It speaks to the building of communities of practice that are so vital to the success of our work."

KOTESOL's own communities of practice are also known as SIGs (special interest groups), many of which are also meeting at the conference. KOTESOL President Lindsay Herron (Gwangju National University of Education) points out that a new SIG is being kicked off at the national conference: the Social Justice SIG, "which embraces diversity and seeks to empower the powerless, with an aim of promoting inclusion, equity, critical inquiry, and positive social change."

Recent surveys of teachers in Korea indicate that the traditional conferencing model doesn't suit many teachers, and KOTESOL is addressing these concerns. Michael Free notes that "Teachers have indicated they want more time to discuss what they hear, they want to share with others on the day, they don't want hours of lectures. Our conference timetable reflects this, with longer breaks, shorter and longer sessions to fit individual preferences, and more socialization. In the same way, we mix some research sessions alongside highly-practical workshops – there's really something for everyone."

Korea TESOL is perhaps best known as a multicultural teachers' society, this aspect is enshrined in the group's constitution and obvious in all aspects of the society's activities. Nearly one-third of all members are Korean.

An interview with Plenary Speaker Theron Muller is available on the website at <https://koreatesol.org/nc2016Interview>

The KOTESOL National Conference rotates across the peninsula, each spring in a different location. The annual KOTESOL International Conference is held each year in Seoul. More than 1200 teachers are expected to attend the autumn international conference this Fall.

QUICK FACTS

Event title: KOTESOL National Conference

Date: May 28, 2016 (Saturday)

Venue: Sangji University, Wonju

Participants: 200+ teachers, 40 presenters, 10 overseas visitors for 38 presentations and workshops

Korea TESOL (KOTESOL, Korea Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages, 대한영어교육학회) was founded in 1992, and is the official Korean affiliate of both TESOL International (USA) and IATEFL (United Kingdom) as well as a partner in the Pan Asian Consortium of Language Teaching Associations.

KOTESOL has more than 600 teacher-members: 30% are Korean teachers of English and 70% are expatriate teachers in Korea. There are 10 local chapters across the Republic of Korea, from Seoul to Jeju, including Daegu, Daejeon, Gwangju, Gangwon, and Busan. KOTESOL's overseas members are located in more than 20 countries, from Japan and China to the Philippines and Indonesia, Saudi Arabia and the UAE, the United States and Canada, Australia and New Zealand, Pakistan, Qatar, and more, encompassing roughly 10% of the membership.

KOTESOL website: <http://koreatesol.org>

Learn more about the conference at <http://koreatesol.org/nc2016>

A High-Resolution photo of Theon Muller (Plenary Speaker) is available at <http://www.koreatesol.org/media/confs/Muller2016-1460x1510.jpg> (a low-resolution version is below).

Media kits and Photos, along with extensive background information on the organization, is available at: <http://koreatesol.org/media>

* IATEFL – The International Association of Teachers of English as a Foreign Language (based in the United Kingdom) includes more than 4,000 members across the globe. <http://www.iatefl.org/iatefl/welcome>

** TESOL International (Alexandria Virginia USA) hosts over 12,000 members in more than 180 countries. <http://www.tesol.org>

Information on earlier conferences is available upon request.

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Theron Muller

high-resolution image at

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