

Meet the Speaker: An Interview with Kalyan Chattopadhyay

Kalyan Chattopadhyay is a featured speaker for the International Conference this year. The following is an interview that he gave to *The English Connection*.

TEC: Hello, Kalyan. Could you tell us a little about yourself and how you became involved in English language education?

Kalyan Chattopadhyay: I work as an associate professor and the director of the English Language Centre at Bankim Sardar College, University of Calcutta. I've been involved in English language teaching for over 20 years, working as a lecturer, teacher trainer, researcher, and consultant in a range of national and international contexts. I have given plenary and invited talks in Cambodia, China, Japan, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Taiwan, Thailand, the UK, and Vietnam. I write coursebooks and train teachers both in the private and state sectors. I'm currently a committee member of IATEFL's Teacher Training and Education SIG, which I will represent this year. I represented IATEFL's Young Learners and Teenagers SIG (UK) as its coordinator in 2014 and 2015. I'm also one of the vice presidents of AsiaCALL.

However, my stint as an English teacher in school was very brief. Soon I got appointed as a lecturer in a college. There, I faced an uphill task as a teacher to work on their English language proficiency. These learners were mostly



first-generation learners who received their initial training in English in rural schools. Their proficiency in English was very limited though they had been studying English for 7–8 years. I was then teaching a general English course to a group of undergraduates

who couldn't spell the names of the months correctly, frame sentences grammatically, or sustain a conversation. Since I didn't have any formal training in how to develop language skills, I was always on my toes, trying to locate appropriate techniques and strategies for teaching these students.

I realized that English language teaching (ELT) was a separate discipline and that my knowledge of English literature and language was inadequate to deal with my teaching scenario, and I needed training. While I was reading up on ELT methodology and activity books on my own to develop my knowledge and understanding, I was also looking for opportunities for training in ELT. I was finally selected for a Hornby Trust scholarship to do an MA TESOL & ICT at the University of Leeds, UK. The whole journey revealed to me the importance of training and commitment to one's own professional development.

TEC: What is the focus of your presentation, and how will it be useful to the EFL teacher new to Korea as well as to



My involvement in English language education all started with my first appointment as an English teacher in a vernacular medium higher secondary (10+2) school in India after successfully completing an honors and master's program in English literature and language. I didn't have any training in how to teach English, neither did I have any prior teaching experience. However, I noticed that my learners had very low proficiency in English, but they were very eager to learn. That made my job easy. I didn't need to do much to motivate them to learn English. I think I was fortunate to have groups of learners like that in the first year of my teaching career because I haven't always gotten learners like them. But I could sense that training in English language teaching could have helped me a lot.

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the veteran practitioner?

Chattopadhyay: Technology today is bringing new opportunities for teachers, and for learners as well. Management expects teachers to inspire and support their learners to learn effectively with digital resources and tools. There are some digital frameworks already available that describe some key competencies for teaching effectively with technology. There are plenty of resources available online to help one decide the direction for one's own digital professional development. Teachers are increasingly embracing the digital way, and so teacher training should focus on enhancement of digital literacies for teachers and teaching digitally. However, a review of both in-service and pre-service teacher training programs reveals that the focus is on the "analogue" (i.e., face-to-face and print-based) teacher training with a negligible amount of content related to technology-enhanced language learning and teaching.

This year, my presentation is going to deal with what teachers think about these training programs, how effective they are in inspiring and helping teachers to teach effectively with technology, and what these teachers do after receiving training? In this way, I want to critique the whole trajectory of teacher training, which is primarily non-digital/analogue though expected to be digital. Those who are new to teaching in Korea are expected to be "digitally fit" by the administration at their institutions; whereas, they may be lacking in skills and competencies to teach digitally, direct their professional development, and follow digital frameworks. Veteran teachers are looking for professional development opportunities to "stay fit" in teaching effectively with technology. I hope to leave some recommendations for both groups that they can use for their development.

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TEC: Of all the ELT-related activities that you are involved in, which of them provide you with the most satisfaction?

Chattopadhyay: I have never given much serious thought to this. I think I enjoy writing materials for the print and digital formats, and designing courses for both formats. I enjoy them because I can draw on my years of experience in designing courses and writing materials.

TEC: What skills – teacher skills and/or learner skills – do you think are needed to best prepare our English language students for their future?

Chattopadhyay: I think that 21st century learners need the 4Cs: creativity, critical thinking, communication, and collaboration, and teachers need continuous up-skilling to promote the 4Cs and prepare 21st century learners.

TEC: Would you share with us a little about your life outside of ELT?

Chattopadhyay: I have some training in instrumental music, and I enjoy playing and listening to instrumental as well as classical vocal music when I am not teaching, training, or writing. I often do landscape and portrait photography in my spare time.



TEC: How do you plan to spend your time at KOTESOL 2017?

Chattopadhyay: This is going to be my third KOTESOL conference, and I'm already looking forward to representing IATEFL again. This year, I'd definitely like to attend some paper presentations and workshops besides the plenaries. I am also looking forward to some exciting learning conversations while hanging out with my friends and colleagues there.

TEC: If you could change anything about ELT – in the classroom, outside the classroom, even ELT conferences – what would it be?

Chattopadhyay: I primarily teach and train in state-run institutions in India, where I have very limited freedom to make changes in the curriculum and teaching materials. So if I had the chance to change anything, I would do needs analyses and prepare materials specifically for my learners, and never use published materials. This may sound very rude to coursebook writers, but I think that a coursebook alone cannot exactly address the needs of a specific group of learners.

TEC: You have spoken at several KOTESOL conferences in the past. What is it that lures you back to our conference?

Chattopadhyay: KOTESOL is a great conference with great people, and a great atmosphere. I always enjoy it and so love coming back.