

Eleventh TEA Conference, Vienna ConneXion, 23-25 April 2010

Teaching English in the Twenty-First Century

By Candy Fresacher

The TEA conference started on Friday afternoon with greetings from Mr. Robert Hugins, Counselor for Public Affairs of the U.S. Embassy, and from Detlef Schaffer who spoke on behalf of Dr. Wilhelm Wolf, from the BMUKK who unfortunately could not attend the conference for personal reasons. After welcoming the guests, Candy Fresacher



also thanked all those involved in making the conference possible – including participants, speakers, TEA board members, student helpers and the staff of the VHS as well as all sponsors. Afterwards, Otto Weihs introduced the first plenary speaker, Professor Widdowson who spoke “On the Subject of English”. He discussed the two ways in which we use English, as a language in use and as a subject we teach and offered up the thoughts that these two “languages” were really quite different from each other. He also offered the idea that translation within the classroom was a necessary connection for students which helped them with the transition from the one language to the other. His plenary was interesting as well as entertaining and a good start to the conference’s theme of Teaching English in the Twenty-First Century.

Then we had the chance to network with colleagues at a sparkling wine reception. Later, the English Drama Club performed Blithe Spirit by Noel Coward.





Saturday's schedule of 45 concurrent sessions started with a plenary by Gabriele Friedl-Lcyshyn on "National Assessments as a motor for educational changes and quality development" and she explained how the new matura system came about and its value. This session was followed by another in which she completed talking about standardized competency testing in Austria.

The many sessions that followed offered the participants varied choices between technology, grammar, English teaching in other countries, poetry writing and assessment possibilities. At lunch, the BGM of TEA was held in order to tell TEA members what had been done in the past year and a half and in order to elect the new board as well as to find out in which direction TEA members would like the association to turn. Unfortunately, because of the small turnout, the last point was not really possible and we hope to send out or have an online questionnaire in order to understand what our members really want from TEA.



And the final plenary by Andrew Wright was a great opportunity to think about stories one could tell a classroom as well as listen to Andrew's own stories as examples.



Then our gala dinner at the Augustinerkeller offered participants another chance to network in a typical Austrian heurigen atmosphere.



Sunday dawned bright and sunny, unusual for Austria and perhaps the reason not as many participants turned up for the last day which consisted of 18 sessions and a plenary by Mark Fletcher. Mark's



session entitled "Brain-friendly learning

and teaching" connected very well to the conference's theme of Teaching English in the Twenty-First Century and one hour was not



enough. That is why we have also asked Mark back to be a summer school trainer and you can find more information about our summer school in another section of the newsletter as well as on our website.

The raffle afterwards made many people happy owners of theatre tickets, movie tickets, magazine or newspaper subscriptions or book vouchers or books themselves. Our grand prize of a two-week teacher trainer course in England donated by NILE was coincidentally won by the last person to buy raffle tickets at all!



In the afternoon there was a reading of Mark Twain's works – tracing his life as well as his stories – read by actors from the International Theatre and for those who had still not had enough, Candy Fresacher went on a Mark Twain's Vienna walking tour with 12 hardy participants.

If you missed the conference, hopefully you will be able to attend our next one. We are already in the planning stages

and will give you information about it as soon as it becomes available so you will have plenty of time to mark it in your calendars. Our conferences are the high points in the life of our association in which we offer our members the chance to network among themselves as well as have international experts from around the globe to share their experiences. This time we had people attending from 22 different countries and that in spite of the volcanic ash cloud that grounded many. We will look forward to seeing a more varied crowd next time as the global community grows closer and closer together. And we hope to see you there as well.