

LiLT SIG events

Simon Bibby – *Kobe Shoin Women's University*

Kevin Stein – *Clark Memorial International High School*

Gregg McNabb – *Shizuoka Institute of Science & Technology*

The 41st JALT Conference took place in Shizuoka, over the long weekend of Friday 20 November to Monday 23 November, 2015. The chosen venue was a good one -- spacious and airy, with plenty of natural light. A particular boon was the view of Mt. Fuji from large windows on the higher floors -- truly glorious to behold! We were further blessed with unseasonably warm weather, and so the kiosks set up outside selling assorted foods and beers were welcome and popular, and enabled participants to get some welcome fresh air.

LiLT Forum

For us in the Literature in Language Teaching SIG, our main focus was the well-attended SIG Forum held on Saturday evening, where Kevin Stein had arranged for five seasoned professionals to discuss literary matters in the context of language teaching. The panel consisted of LiLT-sponsored guest speaker Jane Spiro, John Fanselow, Marcos Benevides, Jill Hadfield and Jane Joritz-Nakagawa. Discussion was provocative and lively, covering such topics as whether graded readers are truly authentic literature (Benevides argued that they can be); the value of boilerplate, transactional, “textbook” English versus literature (Professor Fanselow questioned their utility); and the role for poetry outside the classroom. For example, Professor Fanselow informed us that for Somalis, having an excellent working command of poetry demonstrates that one has been well educated.

Jane Spiro: Writing mirrors: teacher-writers and learner-writers

In her poetry workshop, LiLT-invited speaker Professor Spiro repeatedly stressed and exemplified the value of adopting patterns and imposing constraints (limiting the field parameters) on poetry to produce better results, where “better results” meant putting pen to paper

to start the writing process versus waiting for inspiration to write a so-called “important” poem. She referred to appreciating the moment, finding poetry in everyday moments and events and writing about them. She shared lovely work from her childhood notebook. She talked about congruence and need for language mindfulness on the part of the writing teacher and the teacher of writing. She suggested we could practice mindfulness by assuming new voices (child, adult, male, female, animal, object). For Spiro (and no doubt many others), teacher and learner enter into a writing partnership. She views the classroom as a community of writing practice in a shared endeavour to make writing a meaningful activity capturing real experiences and more.

Neil Conway of Musashino University discussed the types of poetry to use with students, suggested various poets and poems to use (and also noted those to not use, notably to avoid Jabberwocky!), and explained approaches to have students focus on aspects of poetic language and form. Among these, he particularly advocated having students read the poetry aloud to help them more fully appreciate tone and rhythm. Editor’s note: This ties in nicely with Husson Isozaki’s biliteracy review on page 57.