

I was asked as a representative of NALA to attend the ISMLA annual conference.

It was indeed a remarkable conference, so well organised and thought out and very well supported by both schools and exhibitors. The venue and catering were superb, and the day just seemed to fly by. There was a packed programme but also ample time to chat and visit the exhibition. The ISMLA team has done a fantastic job pulling all this together. There was an excellent balance between the challenges to language learning and the practical workshops.

I attended-

Workshop 1- Beatrice Parolin: Motivating pupils in the classroom-the role of linguistics and creativity

This was really informative and interesting and offered a practical approach to engaging students in the wider process of language learning. The materials had been trialled effectively and are easily adapted to any school setting.

Workshop 2 – Kate Trafford – Pedagogy for the new GCSE

This was a hands-on session outlining approaches to dictation and reading out loud. It allowed time for discussion and the pooling of ideas on how to tackle these aspects of the new GCSE.

Workshop 3- Simon Leader & Lia Reys – Creating virtual trips to Paris and Madrid

This was an inspiring and revolutionary (for MFL) approach to using technology in the classroom. It was well thought out and explained. It differed from most things I have seen; in that it was bespoke to the school and its learners. It allows learners to be directly involved in developing the materials. The technology could be adapted to suit the needs of individual schools. It would be good to see how this develops further.

The plenary sessions were all outstanding and highlighted vital aspects for all those involved in MFL education to consider.

Plenary 1 -Heather Hilton – The Cognitive Science of Language Learning

I am still thinking through all the issues raised in this session. There was so much to take in. Heather really highlighted the importance of cognitive science when it comes to the teaching of MFL. There were so many practical aspects all MFL teachers should know about. This would inform good teaching and practice. I was able to talk to her extensively over lunch. Heather Hilton is able to offer so much to the MFL teaching profession. More please!

Plenary 2 – Sascha Stollhaus – Diversifying the language classroom informed by linguistics.

This was a very practical session which highlighted much again of what is lacking in MFL teaching. It raised all sorts of questions on language variation and gender-inclusive language which needs to be built into the approach to language teaching and learning. More please!

Plenary 3 – Caroline Conlon -Teacher recruitment and retention

As Caroline pointed out, this is not a heart warming topic at present as the picture is so dire. It was good to hear her calm and reassuring appraisal of the situation. The focus on nurturing new staff was particularly valuable and once again an aspect all MFL teachers should know more about.

This was a more than worthwhile conference. There are many aspects that NALA could learn from both in the way the event is organised and the issues are presented and discussed.

David Moss

NALA executive committee