

## My KOTESOL Life

Jennifer Booker Young ([jenniferteacher@gmail.com](mailto:jenniferteacher@gmail.com))

Seoul Dosung Elementary School

Since 2004, I have been volunteering with KOTESOL in a variety of roles. For those unfamiliar with the organization, it is the Korean affiliate of TESOL International, a professional organization for ESL teachers around the world. Its mission statement (from the website <http://koreatesol.org>) is

to promote scholarship, disseminate information, and facilitate cross-cultural understanding among persons concerned with teaching and learning of English in Korea. To fulfill the above goals all of us come together in KOTESOL regardless of race, gender, age, nationality, or experience.

Although I had been teaching in Korea for several years, I did not become aware of KOTESOL until I began studying for a Masters of Education in 2003. I was spending the day utilizing the TESOL library at Sookmyung Womens University. As luck would have, when I took a coffee break, I stood in line behind a member of the executive council of the Seoul Chapter. He introduced himself to me and invited me to attend the workshop that afternoon.

The benefits of the organization were tremendous for me. In the years I had been teaching in Korea, I had worked for businesses with few foreign teachers and had not found a group of like-minded individuals interested in professional development. I was studying online, so there was no local community of students to discuss ideas or study with, either. To me, KOTESOL was a lifeline. For the first time in Korea, I was able to enjoy the fellowship of others who truly enjoyed teaching and considered it to be a career, rather than a short-term job.

From that first meeting, I began attending every monthly workshop, and the following year, I joined the chapter executive council as Member-at-Large, when the man who had introduced me to the organization stepped down to spend more time on his research. Having received such tremendous benefits in the form of ongoing professional development, a community of kindred spirits, and a sounding board to discuss the issues I was studying, I felt it was time for me to give back. So, when invited, I jumped at the chance and have never looked back.

At times, the amount of work the positions I have held have been burdensome in terms of the time commitment, but I have always gotten so much out of my membership in KOTESOL, that I have never regretted my ongoing involvement. In the past eight years, my volunteerism has taken a number of different forms, depending on the needs of the organization as well as my available time, as some of the positions I have held required significant amounts of free time in order to be executed properly. Others have required little more than showing up an

hour or so before the monthly workshops to ensure they run smoothly.

The positions I have held include:

- **National Council Secretary** (2009-2011) Duties: to record and disseminate minutes of National Council meetings and the Annual Business Meeting; gather information about the membership; and communicate with the membership to keep them informed of events, such as elections or votes on issues.
- **Seoul Chapter** (2004-present) I have held a variety of positions which have required varying amounts of work outside of the monthly workshops: **Treasurer** (current) Duties: to maintain financial accounts and records of transactions. **Advisor** (2010-2012) Duties: to assist newer members of the executive with questions regarding the running of the chapter. **First Vice President** (2007-2010) Duties: to assist the president in running the chapter and organizing monthly meetings and the annual conference. **Secretary** (2006-2007) Duties: to record and disseminate minutes of executive meetings. **Member-at-Large** (2004-2006) Duties: to welcome new and returning attendees to Seoul Chapter meetings and to prepare refreshments.
- **International Conference Committee** which organizes and oversees the annual KOTESOL International Conference. The positions I have held have ranged from months of work leading up to the conference requiring many hours of work each week to positions which required little more than showing up at the conference ready to lend a helping hand as needed.
  - ◆ Assistant Financial Affairs Director (2012)
  - ◆ Attendee Services Manager (2010-2011)
  - ◆ Registration Chair (2009)
  - ◆ Registration Associate (2008)
  - ◆ Volunteer Manager (2007)
  - ◆ Registration Associate (2006)
  - ◆ Guest Services Coordinator (2005)
- **Presenter** at a variety of KOTESOL chapter conferences and outreach events around the nation. KOTESOL is an all-volunteer organization and depends on educators willing to give back to the community by providing professional development workshops and presentations for attendees including members of the organization.
  - ◆ Seoul Chapter Annual Conference (March 2012)
  - ◆ Jeonju Chapter Annual Conferences (May 2010, May 2011)
  - ◆ Gwangju Chapter Annual Conferences (March 2011, March 2012)
  - ◆ Gangwondo Chapter Outreach (June 2011)
  - ◆ Seoul Chapter Monthly Workshop (September 2008)

Although these positions have all been quite rewarding, they have required improvement of my time management skills. In particular, over the two years I served in the position, my role

as National Council Secretary required significant hours of free time. I have, therefore, occasionally had to scale back my volunteer responsibilities when the demands of my career and continuing education have made it difficult to devote the necessary time and effort to complete the duties of a given position. However, I have always found the work to be incredibly rewarding and motivating.

Not only has my involvement in KOTESOL helped maintain my motivation to constantly strive for improvement as a teacher, it has also provided regular opportunities for me to learn from other professionals in the field. I am able to keep abreast of the latest trends and research in the field as well as broaden my professional horizons by attending workshops held by other educators currently working in the field.

Additionally, KOTESOL meetings and events provide opportunities to meet and spend time with other like-minded professionals. Unfortunately, there are a number of native speaker teachers in Korea who do not consider themselves to be “real” teachers and it can be draining and de-motivating to work and/ or socialize with them. By surrounding myself with dedicated professionals, I am pushed to increase my professionalism and knowledge.

I am now mid-way through my first semester as a public school teacher and my first year as a Treasurer (with Seoul Chapter). I do not know what the future holds for me beyond next summer, but I hope it includes both, as I find both my job as a teacher and my volunteer work as treasurer quite fulfilling.

