
Reports and Summaries

A Report on the Fourth Annual Mediterranean Institute 1990

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The Fourth Annual Mediterranean Institute 1990 was held in Barcelona, Spain, from July 2-27. It was hosted by ESADE Idiomas, a department of Escuela Superior de Administracion y Dereccion de Empresas (ESADE), a private school of business administration. In 1987 ESADE Idiomas hosted the first Summer Institute of Teachers of English as a Foreign Language, jointly organized by TESOL and IATEFL. In 1988 and 1989, ESADE again hosted summer institutes, backed by Columbia University Teachers College (New York) and the University of London Institute of Education. This year faculty from these two prestigious institutions combined their efforts with the University of Barcelona and ESADE staff to offer classes attended by an international group of participants. The 1990 program was suitable for both secondary school teachers and those working in adult education who wished either to improve their teaching performance or to obtain further qualifications and earn academic credit.

The Program

Courses were of either 12 or 24 hours duration and ran for two-week periods. There were two such sessions.¹ Most courses used an associated

Reading Pack containing key materials of immediate relevance to the course as well as background reading material. The contents of this pack had been chosen by the course tutor and were offered to participants at the beginning and/or whenever the tutor deemed appropriate along the course.

Midweek Program

On Wednesday mornings there were no scheduled classes but a variety of relevant sessions on the latest trends and developments in ELT conducted by authorities in the field were offered. Besides, participants were also encouraged to lead sessions themselves.

The Courses

Course Directors

John Norrish, Institute of Education, University of London

John Fanselow, Teachers College, Columbia University, New York.

Lecturers

Canada

Fred Genesee, Psychology Department, McGill University, Montreal

Spain

Magi Casanas, English Department, Institute Ferran Casablanças, Sabadell, near Barcelona

Richard Larose, ESADE

Nuria Vidal, English Department, Institute Manuel de Cabanyes, Barcelona

Javier Zanon, University of Barcelona

United Kingdom

Peter Hill, ESOL Department, University of London

John Norrish, ESOL Department, University of London

Antia Pincas, ESOL Department, University of London

United States

Fraida Dubin, University of Southern California

David Eskey, University of Southern California

John Fanselow, Teachers College, Columbia University

Pam Martin, Teachers College, Columbia University

Earl Stevick, Adjunct Professor, University of Maryland

Courses Offered

The program had been designed to be wide ranging and participants were able to make up their own individualized programs by choosing courses which were relevant to their needs and interests.

The areas covered by the program of courses included

- Curriculum and syllabus design
- Fundamentals of language teaching
- Individualization in language learning
- Language policy
- Methodology
- New technologies in ELT classrooms
- Research techniques
- Second language acquisition
- Skills development
- Teacher development and classroom observation
- Testing

Examples of the courses offered were *SLA Research*, *Materials Analysis*, and *Communicative Teaching*.

SLA Research was conducted by *Fred Genesee*. It reviewed the state of theory and research on SLA. Both simultaneous and successive acquisition of two languages were discussed. Examples were drawn from Canada, with its French and English speaking population, and Hawaii, with its various ethnic groups. Barcelona itself offered a rich source of examples--Catalan being the vernacular and an official language besides Spanish in Catalonia. Major current theories of SLA were examined. These included the unitary language system theory of simultaneous bilingual development, Krashen's Monitor Model, Universal Grammar and SLA, Interlanguage theories and Cognitive theories.

In *Materials Analysis*, the relationships between content and tasks in the book we use and the ideas about language teaching advocated in the field were examined. The participants were encouraged to turn classroom disadvantages into advantages. This included creating new simple activities for the existing texts and the use of unsophisticated visual aids such as those from discarded items or those brought in by the students themselves. *John Fanselow* proposed creating new and unconventional approaches in dealing with classroom materials and activities; for example, categorizing items that at first seemed impossible to classify, writing a story based on stimuli, such as slides or pictures, that were totally unrelated to one another. This should trigger communication and spontaneous pair/group work while the students try to achieve the objective. The wealth of examples of activities given to illustrate points being discussed was a rare treat for all participants.

Current practice in communicative methodology stresses the importance of learning through using language and having opportunities for interaction in natural contexts. *John Norrish's* course,

Communicative Teaching, examined these assumptions through the analysis of practical classroom-based examples. This course also developed criteria for adopting, creating and choosing materials for language teaching and learning. John Norrish guided participants expertly in an extremely systematic way through the course. The first sessions dealt with the theoretical side, including discussions on the nature of communication, channels of communication, activities and materials, issues of fluency and accuracy, and syllabi: traditional, procedural, and task-based. The practice sessions at the end of the course required that the participants present materials which they had designed or adapted for a specific group of learners.

The Participants

All participants were professionally involved in English Language Teaching or following a course of study related to the field of ELT in a university or similar institution. The first session which I attended saw participants from the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, Israel, Syria, the United Arab Emirates, Italy and Yugoslavia. There was a strong representation of local teachers and expatriates who were teaching English in Spain at that time. However, there was only one participant from Asia.² This seems to be in keeping with the previous Mediterranean Institutes whose list of Asian participants was quite short.

Conclusion

Throughout the program the learning process received much emphasis. The courses were

well balanced between the more theoretical and the more practical. The participants who benefited most from these courses were those who came equipped with background knowledge. In addition, the participants who chose the courses carefully should have benefited from the reinforcement gained in one course on another.

The venue of the Mediterranean Institute was also an asset. The fact that the Institute was not held in an English-speaking country or a country where English is spoken as a second language emphasized the role of English as an international language of the world. Moreover, as all English teachers are aware, the ELT context in an English-speaking country is totally different from that of a non-English-speaking one. I felt that there was more sympathy and a keener sensitivity of the problems in ELT among participants, non-native as well as native speakers of English. In addition, the participants also tremendously enjoyed the rich cultural experience in the host country during their stay.

Besides the opportunity to share and exchange views on ELT with participants from other countries, I was also brought up to date on the present trend. Moreover, a new project underway at Chulalongkorn University Language Institute (CULI), the Resource Center, found support in a similar project at ESADE, the Self-access Center, which operated along the same concept: that the learning process should be emphasized in ELT.

Notes :

1. The writer of this report attended only the first session which lasted from July 2 to July 13.
2. This participant was, of course, the writer.