
Reports and Summaries

From "Festival '89" to "Methodologies for the Nineties"

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This has been my year for conventions. I attended "Festival'89", my first TESOL convention in three years. Then, within a month, I got to "Methodologies for the Nineties" the annual seminar sponsored by the Regional English Language Center (RELC) in Singapore. In Bangkok terms, it was like shopping at the Central Department Store, then moving to Galleries La Fayette. In terms of Washington D.C., a shopping spree beginning at Garfinkles and ending at a fine Georgetown boutique might be comparable. But whatever the metaphor, there was quality merchandise—in basics or accessories—at both emporiums. And though I might not be ready to buy every idea presented at TESOL or RELC, there was enough there to tempt me to try out.

Within its four day life span, "Festival'89" crammed more than 500 presentations into the San Antonio Convention Hall, not to mention the neighboring hotels. Name a topic in TEFL/TESL—even the most marginal and you will find a paper or workshop dealing with it in the convention catalogue. The same wide coverage of subject matter was true for the Singapore confab. Though only eighty-eight presentations were made

within the five days of the RELC Seminar, they dealt with the same major topic areas while giving an Asian perspective to current theory and practice in the field.

One's interpretation of a convention is necessarily personal and subjective. I attended presentations on topics of current interest to me; consequently both TESOL and RELC seemed rich in presentations on video, the role of grammar, syllabus design, metacognitive strategies and teaching language through literature. Some conference goers attest to the multiplicity of presentations on CALL, classroom—centered research, and process writing; and lo and behold a perusal of the catalogs for both conventions affirms this! But for me the two gatherings focused on the aforementioned.

At "Festival'89", video came of age with its establishment as a new TESOL interest section. A three hour workshop and a symposium highlighted video interactive teaching approaches around the world. Proponents of video in language teaching dazzled audiences with video clips and exciting classroom activities used in L2 classrooms in Finland, Japan, Latin America and the United States.

By contrast, at RELC, only Brunei and the Universitas Sciens Malaysia reported on video in language instruction. Few indigenous video programs for language teaching are being publicized; but the continued popularity of "Follow Me", after ten years on the market, suggests a receptivity for video interactive language learning if quality media and useful viewing guides are available.

With regard to the role of grammar in L2 classrooms, most RELC presentations started with the premise that though grammar is alive, it is indeed ailing; and its current treatment is not making it any better! A plenary by Marianne Celce-Murcia urged teachers to develop activities for the classroom or self study which would raise the grammar consciousness of their students. Using extended discourse as her basis for grammatical description and grammar practice, Celce-Murcia showed how the grammar rules found in textbooks and reference manuals may not be substantiated by actual language use. She cited a master's thesis by one of her students showing how encyclopedia passages give a different picture of article use than the rules given in Quirk and Greenbaum (1974).

Presentations by teachers of Asian languages as L2 cited the need which their students expressed for a grammatical component in their study of the new language. In a 1989 sample of Malaysian students studying Pilipino, more than two thirds cited grammar as the most important factor in giving them access to the target language. But the grammatical component in the Pilipino class was not the traditional sentence based grammar drill. It was situationally based and functionally explicit. Through dialogues and story telling activities, appro-

priate language use could be illustrated within a culturally sensitive context. Students were encouraged to verbalize the rules which they inferred from the text—a method labelled IPE (Integrate Pupils Example) and move on to producing exercises based on the text to be done by other students—PEX (Pupils Exercises.) Pair work is maximized as pupils repeat orally (PRO) what they have done in writing; and a situation is created wherein the students are "showered with language" with grammatical awareness a central feature.

Syllabus design received considerable attention at both TESOL and RELC. Three primary approaches to syllabus design were proposed—content based language learning, task based learning, and affective/development based learning.

Discussing content based language learning, JoAnn Crandall of the Center for Applied Linguistics, drew upon work being done in refugee education. Crandall saw syllabus design as having three points of focus: target language, content area, and thinking skills. The latter cuts across the other two components. Metacognitive strategy training or thinking about the learning process, is a central element in training refugees for a new life in the United States. Students in these programs are taught planning skills to identify strategies to deal with a specific task, then monitor and evaluate their performance in the target language or content field. This approach is being used in bilingual or "sheltered" language programs in the United States. Though it may be more relevant to countries like the Philippines or Singapore where content courses are taught in a second language, the tripartite focus on language, content, and thinking strategies can serve post secondary English language

teaching efforts in countries like Thailand or Indonesia.

Michael Long of the University of Hawaii, endorsed a proficiency based language syllabus linking classroom tasks with speech acts from the real world. In the spirit of ESP, Long sees utilitarian principles guiding syllabus development with all classroom activities based upon a defined task relevant to communication in the real world. Care must be taken in specifying the pedagogical tasks being set for the students. Then teaching strategies must be identified to close the gap between the learner's knowledge and the task to be performed. This may involve controlling the level of difficulty of the language, the ideas, or the format of the task itself. A guided task format involving information transfer, reordering, substitution or completion activities may be required; or shared tasks to be completed in pairs or by small groups of students may narrow the gap between learner knowledge and real world tasks to be performed in the future.

By contrast Robert Blair (Brigham Young University) questioned whether early targeting of proficiency is better than a syllabus which aims at establishing a broader, general basis in the target language. For Blair, it is important to remain cognizant of the learning process; course content should be selected for its ease of learning and for its affective appeal. Blair sees language learning in terms of training for a marathon—the learner undergoes linguistic development and psychological and spiritual growth as well. Blair's syllabus is decidedly anti-ACTFL. It includes rhymes and chants, code switching (diglot weaving) and story telling with a high degree of contextualiza-

tion through pictures and gestures. Mnemonics and metacognitive training are a part of his developmental based syllabus approach. Tasks may or may not be included within the syllabus. To Blair, they are not vital. What is important is to excite a joy of learning; and that may arise through as irrelevant an act as reciting a nursery rhyme or listening to a fairy tale in the target language.

At conventions as large as TESOL or RELC, selecting which workshop or paper to attend hinges upon luck as much as upon good judgement. I was lucky in my choice of RELC workshops. One dealt with metacognitive strategies and English language teaching. Drawing upon the work of Edward De Bono, two specialists from the Ministry of Education, Singapore, presented model lessons which set thinking/learning tasks to enable students to view a text from differing perspectives. Organized around pre-reading, and pre-writing activities, an integrated skills approach to foreign language teaching is linked to a program to foster creative thinking. Different strategies, such as looking at a text to consider the pluses and minuses behind the story line, or raising the question "what if" draws attention to alternatives and possibilities inherent in the text. Actions recorded in the text are considered in relation to their consequences and the impact which they have upon the total context or whole environment. While the poems, prose segments, and short stories utilized in this approach may be traditional classroom material for language exploitation, the integration of these texts with new avenues of thinking points to an exciting learning environment where students and teachers move forward creatively, sparking original thought in L2.

A workshop on "The Reading of Literature" centered upon the process of reading reflectively, wherein students interact with a piece of fiction as well as with one another. Forming an interpretive community, they concretize the characters in a story, forming images, anticipating turns of plot or retrospecting upon the causes underlying the existing situation. As opposed to teaching reading for fast, efficient information gathering, one goal in teaching the reading of literature is to slow down the reading process to allow the students to reflect upon what is happening between themselves and the text. Using the process intervention technique, a short story was broken into episodes which the community of readers reacted to, anticipating, retrospecting forming images, and making judgements...taking a measure of control over the text and communicating original thoughts to one another. The reflective element in teaching literature was enhanced by listening to a taped, dramatized reading of the story while following along in the book. Certainly a different approach to the typical reading strategies stressed in EFL, this aesthetic reading of

text may accord with the developmental level of unskilled readers who still linger over words and chunks of meaning. Perhaps this may be an argument for placing literature earlier in an L2 program rather than reserving it for advanced study or ignoring it entirely.

As "Festival'89" closed, Judy Winn-Bell Olsen and Henry Widdowson did a duet/duel in their closing plenary "Reflections on Riverwalk". With Widdowson speaking as the river of theory and Winn-Bell Olsen for the worldly concerns of the riverwalk of practice, they celebrated the union of theory and application in TEFL.

No final plenary did this at RELC, but in fact, there was no need to do so. The entire conference was a celebration of the link between theory and practice, ideas and techniques. Formatting or design made this possible. RELC Presentations were followed by companion workshop sessions adapting theoretic principles to classroom processes. Theory established the organizational framework; then workshops related it to classroom implementation...a good model to follow.

Bibliography

Significant Papers and Workshops which contributed to the ideas developed in the paper.

I. TESOL Presentations

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“Some Thoughts on Empowerment”

Hanbrook, Joe *et al.*

“Video Across the World”

Stempleski, Susan and Paul Arcario

“Using Video in Language Teaching”

Wenden Anita *et al.*

“Promoting L2 Learner Autonomy Through Learning Strategy Appreciations”

Winn-Bell Olsen, Judy and Henry G. Widdowson

“Reflections on Riverwalk”

II. RELC Presentations

Blair, Robert W.

“A Key Methodological Issue for the 90’s”

Celce-Murcia, Marianne

“What Role for Grammar After the Communicative Revolution”

Crandall JoAnn

“Content-Based Language Instruction in Second and Foreign Languages”

Long, Michael H.

“Task, Group, and Task Group Interactions”

Malcolm, Ian G. and Kay Malcolm

“Literature and Authenticity in Advanced EFL composition”

Nation, I.S.P.

“A System of Tasks for Language Learning”

Rogers, Theodore A.

“After Methods. What”

Roman, Guillerme Q

“Grammar Method: A New Perspective”

Seow, Anthony and Colin Davis

“A Practical Exploration of Thinking Skills in ELT.”

Tian, Goh Soo

“Teaching the Reading of Literature”

Wheeler, James and Eie Ericsson

“Innovation and Creativity in Grammar Teaching and Learning”