

The 1980 TESOL Convention

by Lynne Hansen

The 1980 Fourteenth Annual TESOL Convention was held April 4-9 in San Francisco. The cosmopolitan city by the bay formed an appropriate backdrop for a conference with a decidedly international flavor as speakers from every continent presented hundreds of offerings appealing to the broad spectrum of interests of TESOL's far flung membership. Delegations from Chile (initiators this year of a new TESOL affiliate organization) and the People's Republic of China (often in the limelight at the convention as several presentations dealt with TEFL in the PRC) mingled with those from Provo and Pittsburgh as they attended demonstrations, workshops, mini-courses, papers, displays, colloquia, panels and round-table discussions on such varied topics as teaching techniques, teacher training, curriculum and course planning, testing and second language acquisition research. Selecting from among the available sessions was not an easy task.

There were special meetings for administrators, for teachers of all levels, for members of the organization's Special Interest Groups, for officers of the affiliate organizations of TESOL and for graduate students to talk informally with leaders in the field at breakfast seminars. Book exhibits and workshops presented by publishers representatives and experienced teachers in the use of published materials as well as unpublished teacher-made materials were important offerings for those interested in curriculum development.

Among the highlights of the convention were the plenary sessions which featured prominent leaders in the field: James Alatis (Georgetown University), Virginia French Allen (Temple University), Charles A. Ferguson (Stanford University) and Shirley Brice Heath (University of Pennsylvania), Evelyn Hatch (University of California at Los Angeles), Larry Smith (The East-West Center) and Mayuri Sukwiwat (University of Hawaii) and Henry G. Widowson (University of London).

A recurring theme in San Francisco was the strengthening of the bridge between

second language teaching practice and the second language learning theory that has grown out of the phenomenal mushrooming of inquiry into the language acquisition process during the past decade. Teachers were introduced to the theoretical goals, the experimental designs and the statistical techniques which are being used in current L2 investigations. Classroom problems were demonstrated as potential starting points for research of both practical and theoretical interest.

The trends seen at this convention were away from linguistics as the basis for the organization of classroom teaching; away from teacher-centered classrooms toward student-centered ones. The considerable influence of sociolinguistics on TESOL was apparent in more than a score of convention papers dealing with pragmatics, classroom interaction and communication strategies. There was continued promotion of the Notional-Functional Syllabus, a statement of course content, sequence, and teaching techniques based on semantic notions and their functions. As emphasis for the classroom fell on the participation of second language learners in communicative interaction activities, the teacher was cast in such roles as dramatist, puppeteer and initiator of multifarious classroom games. A holistic approach to teaching seems to be the overall trend, with teachers no longer limited to a single learning theory, but rather choosing from a wide variety of procedures and methods to provide meaningful language experiences.

From what I could see, the intensive academic and social exchange afforded in San Francisco was extremely profitable and enjoyable for those in attendance. Won't you join me in making plans to participate in next year's convention in Detroit?

Ed. note: *Forthcoming will be a publication of selected papers given at the 1980 convention (On TESOL 1980) which will be available from the TESOL Central Office, 455 Nevils Building, Georgetown University, Washington, D.C. 20057*