CONFERENCE REPORTS

AECT '93 REPORT

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The 1993 convention of the Association for Educational Communications and Technology (AECT) was held January 13 – 17 in New Orleans. The convention theme was "Gateways to Learning." Over 3000 people attended the gathering, which featured 400 sessions, seminars and workshops plus 350 exhibits at the concurrently-held INFOCOMM International Exposition.

IALL sponsored four sessions at this year's meeting. Robin Lawrason, of Temple University; LeeAnn Stone, of the University of California, Irvine; and John Huy, of the University of Kansas spoke on "Recruiting, training and retaining productive student workers." Forty people attended this session, which was cosponsored by AECT's Division of Educational Media Management (DEMM).

LeeAnn Stone began the presentation by listing recruitment difficulties such as wage competition with better funded departments, the fixed wage scale of many universities and work-study programs, and the absence of students during the summer, with the consequent rush to hire people in the fall. To solve these problems, LeeAnn proposed making the job description more interesting than those of higher-paying positions. She pointed out that recruiting must go on year-round; one should try to have next year's workers identified in the spring to avoid the autumn rush. Once people are hired, the problem is training. LeeAnn admitted that on-the-job trial by fire is often the main way this is handled because of time constraints. She proposed scheduling new employees with experienced peers, and she stressed the importance of written documentation: a policy and procedures manual, a training manual, and a task checklist. LeeAnn stated that retaining workers is largely a matter of making the work rewarding and of inculcating an *esprit de corps* through such things as birthday parties, secret Santas and Valentines, etc.

Robin Lawrason focused on training student workers. He stressed a point raised by LeeAnn; namely, the importance of written policies and procedures. He suggested that staff members should be involved in writing these. Robin also encouraged staff participation in the writing of student training manuals and in the training of new workers. Those who do a job every day are best

equipped to describe it, and—as LeeAnn pointed out—peer training is less stressful than training given by the director. Robin recommended one-on-one training whenever possible. Moreover, he cautioned against trying to impart too much information at once. After the training is complete, the trainee should be observed doing the task(s), and his or her feedback should be sought on how to make the training better. Robin said that revision of training materials is an ongoing task—both because new insights into the training process are gained and because jobs change with new equipment or policies.

John Huy served as the moderator for the question-and-answer session. There was a very good exchange between the audience and the panelists. It was evident from the problems raised and the solutions proffered that people all around the country and in all sizes and types of institutions share the same personnel challenges and overcome them in similar fashions. [A tape of this session is available from InfoMedix at 800-367-9286. The number to request is F104-13.]

Kathleen James of the Foreign Service Institute and Dick Kuettner of Washington and Lee University spoke on "Language laboratories of the future: In search of a definition." Dick began by tracing the history of the language lab. Although he mentioned equipment, his focus was on the associated pedagogy, such as the behavioristic drill-and-kill approach, which provided the initial rationale for the use of the hardware. Kathleen followed along this line of machinery and methodology. She brought the discussion up to the present with an emphasis on interactive videodisc technology. While granting that a videodisc workstation is costly and that it takes time to develop the courseware, she demonstrated that the expense and effort can be justified. Videodiscs can deliver high-quality video

in any order desired—a welcome departure from linear videotape. The dual audio channels allow for bilingual or bilevel (i.e., elementary or advanced) soundtracks. The computer driver permits learners to segment and decode chunks of language at their own pace. A well-designed lesson can simulate being in the target country. As an example, she described the Athena Project's "A la rencontre de Philippe." (See review in Vol. 26., No.1, Winter 1993, p. 47 – 48 of the *IALL Journal*.) Such activities engage learners and constitute virtual interaction. She distributed a handout which listed quality software and videodisc programs for several languages. Dick wrapped up the session, tantalizing the audience by mentioning the possibility and probability of implanting silicon neuron microprocessor chips in the brain that could infuse linguistic knowledge and ability. This is an area in which he is currently doing research. [See *Mirrorshades: The Cyperpund Anthology*, edited by Bruce Sterling. New York: Arbor House. 1986.] Thus, the session lived up to its name by ending on a very futuristic note. [The InfoMedix number for this session is F104-70.]

Michele Godar-Londono also spoke on Friday. Her topic was "Ten steps toward the complete renovation of a university language laboratory." She detailed her experience updating the facility at the University of Miami. She emphasized that administrative support is essential before one even begins to plan such an undertaking. The next step is to poll the current labs users (that is, the students and faculty) to find out what they like and dislike, and what they wish to have in the future. Nearby labs should be visited and the directors of out-of-town labs can be contacted to ascertain what equipment and functions they have. All of the above information must be combined so that one can start making up a list of *desiderata*. An approximate dollar amount can be figured for this list, and the

fundraising then begins in earnest. This process can take as much time as several years, and the money may come in installments; but, in the meanwhile, there is much other work to do. Enthusiasm for the new lab must be generated. A good way to do this is by demonstration projects; that is, small-scale "proofs of concept." These give faculty and students a taste for the possibilities of the new facility. Michele also stressed the importance of tapping on-campus expertise—such as the physical plant personnel, computer center staff, and in-house architects—in the design process. When the new lab is installed, adequate time must be allowed to train, or—as the case may be—retrain, the faculty and staff.

On Sunday morning Warren Roby described research he had conducted on the use of dictionaries while reading. This session was co-sponsored by AECT's International Division. Warren examined dictionary and gloss usage by 93 American university students, native speakers of American English, who were taking fourth-semester Spanish. Their task was to read a 425-word biographical sketch taken from a Spanish language feature magazine. A 2 (presentation mode) x 2 (semantic support) experimental design was used. The presentation modes were paper and computer. The two types of semantic support were dictionary alone and dictionary + glosses. The four treatment groups, to which subjects were randomly assigned, were:

1) Paper text + Paper Dictionary,

2) Paper text + Paper Dictionary + Paper Glosses,

3) On-line text + On-line Dictionary, and

4) On-line text + On-line Dictionary + On-line Glosses.

The dependent measures were reading time, number of consultations, and comprehension. He found that the dictionary + glossary semantic support groups read the passage in significantly less time than the dictionary alone groups. Although the difference was not significant, the dictionary + glossary groups did appear to understand more. Subjects in the computer conditions looked up significantly more words than subjects in the paper conditions. Qualitative data from the post-experimental questionnaire indicated that the subjects in the computer treatments were more satisfied with the semantic support available to them than were subjects in the paper conditions. Warren concluded that since it is likely that much reading in the future will be done on scholar's workstations in which online dictionaries and glossaries will be standard software equipment, this study provides some support for the speculation that such on-line aids can be beneficial. He noted that the positive effects of glosses in this study corroborated what others have recently found. [F104-141 is the InfoMedix number for this session.]

IALL had an information booth in the convention hall lobby that also served as a *rendez-vous* for the members in attendance. A formal meeting was held on Thursday afternoon for IALL members. The discussion centered on preparations for IALL '93. Also discussed were ways in which the IALL presence could be made more prominent at the conferences of other organizations with which IALL is affiliated (i.e., ACTFL, AECT, NEC, CALICO & TESOL). It was proposed that a banner be made which could be put up at the IALL information booth, and it was proposed that a list of IALL-sponsored presentations could be distributed to members and selected vendors before the conference. There was also discussion of the job definitions of the Program Director and the Business Manager. Regarding the second position, it was noted that IALL, unlike many organizations, no longer

has an Executive Director; many of the functions of this former position have been shifted to the Business Manager.

The concurrent sessions covered a wide range of technology issues: distance education, corporate training, media center management, multimedia design, teleconferencing, media literacy, the Internet, and numerous research topics such as learner control, the proper use of feedback, and metacognitive learning strategies. This reporter attended a session entitled "The knowledge base of instructional technology: A critical examination." The history of the field was sketched, with special attention given to the different philosophical paradigms, such as Behaviorism, Cognitivism, and Constructivism, that have shaped research and practice. [InfoMedix F104-24].

In addition to these sessions and the exhibition there were three general sessions. On Wednesday the 13th, Ernest Boyer, President of the Carnegie Foundation, outlined a seven-step strategy to ensure that by the year 2000 all children will begin school ready to learn. On Thursday, Andrew Lippman, Associate Director of the Media Lab at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, demonstrated and discussed cutting edge digital television technology. The Saturday general session consisted of a demonstration by AutoDesk, Inc. of the virtual reality technology of CyberSpace, a computer-generated environment that completely envelopes the user in a responsive, three-dimensional space.

AECT has over 5000 members drawn from 50 countries, from most levels of academia, and from business and government. The IALL presence, which some attendees told me they greatly appreciate, adds to the already international and diverse makeup of this large organization. AECT is the oldest professional association devoted to the pedagogical use of technology. Besides holding its annual convention, it publishes a scholarly journal, *Educational Technology Review and Development*, and the *TechTrends* magazine (which details the latest developments in the field), as well as monographs. This last category includes fifteen titles on copyright issues.

Attending the AECT convention allows one to interact with a wide variety of educators and learn about the latest in instructional technology, practice and equipment. The April-May issue of *TechTrends* (Vol. 38, No. 3) contains a summary of this year's convention.

The 1994 AECT convention is slated for February 16 – 20 at the Opryland Hotel in Nashville. AECT will sponsor its own vendor fair: InCITE '94 (International Computing & Instructional Technology Exposition) the 17th through the 19th. Another first will be the concurrent meetings of ISTE (International Society for Technology in Education) and ADCIS (Association for the Development of Computer-Based Instructional Systems). It is anticipated that 7000 to 9000 people will attend. IALL is guaranteed slots in next year's program. Anyone interested in obtaining more information may contact his or her IALL regional leader, the AECT head office or Warren Roby, ROBY@WSUVM1.BITNET.

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