The 1989 IALL Conference: Retrospectives

The following retrospective of the 1989 IALL Conference is a composite of reports written by Liliane Aziz, Director of the Media Center at San Jose State University; Read Gilgen, Director of Learning Support Services at the University of Wisconsin-Madison; and, Karen Landahl, Academic Director, and Joseph Toth, Technical Supervisor, at the University of Chicago. It was compiled and edited by Robert A. Jones, Director of the Language Resource Center at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee and Secretary of the International Association for Learning Laboratories (IALL).

Report on the 1989 Conference of the International Association for Learning Laboratories: "Designing, Managing, and Using the Language Learning Center"

The evening of July 5 was hot and muggy, but the get-acquainted dinner was delightful, the welcome from MIT was sincere, and the keynote address by Wilga Rivers was inspiring. But then, it was time for business.

The work sessions of the Conference took place on the three succeeding days. Scheduled from nine in the morning till five in the afternoon, the sessions covered a rich diversity of topics, and by the end of the last session, everyone felt that the Conference had been a success and that the information garnered from presentations and discussions with colleagues would stand us in good stead for some time to come.

The theme of the first day of the conference sessions was "Designing or Re-designing a Language Learning Center." Victor Aulestia, Director of Instructional Media Technology, at the University of Maryland-Baltimore County, took up most of the morning with his talk on the process of purchasing equipment. Repeatedly he stressed the need to involve the faculty at every stage of planning.

Beth Ganister of Ganister Fields, Architects, was the afternoon speaker. She offered a step-by-step tour through the construction or renovation of a language laboratory—everything from bubble diagrams to carpet to furniture placement to building code reviews to contracts to color schemes. She was a delightful tour guide, and provided a wealth of information in record time.

Peter Liddell of the University of Victoria (British Columbia) rounded out the first day's program with some ideas on "needs assessment." He made the important point that the laboratory is a place of experimentation. There is much work to be done on the issue of how students learn with media, and the focus should more frequently be shifted from the basic production of courseware to studying the impact of course-ware on the learning process of the students.

The first-day jitters were well out of the way by the time the conference moved along into Day Two. Robin Lawrason (Temple University), Treasurer of IALL, presented the results of the IALL '88 Survey. One of the more significant trends is the transition of the language lab into a more diversified, multi-media, multi-disciplinary learning center. More women are serving as lab directors, and many more labs are beginning to use the newer technologies (video, microcomputer, etc.).

The main morning session was devoted to the issue of copyright. The panel was chaired by Bruce Parkhurst (Boston University), and included Todd Klipp (General Counsel, Boston University) and attorney Kathleen Farrell. These panelists clarified just what the copyright law is, how it applies to the idea of "fair use" and the

limitations that exist even in an academic setting, how it applies to media (public performance rights, etc.) and finally, how to avoid illegal uses of media and possible litigation. The general sense of the session was to make the audience realize that ignorance of the law is no excuse, and that part of directors' responsibility is to educate their clientele, the faculty. Noting that even though it is not a matter to be taken lightly, Ms. Parkhurst furnished everyone with a "copyright police" button to help remind them of their role once they returned home.

Two brief presentations preceded the lunch break. Suzanne Lord (California State Polytechnic Institute) described how a very small lab could expand its resources by establishing cooperative efforts with other campus facilities. Marta Lipski from Brandeis University described the Foundation Center, as well as other resources for extramural funding.

The first afternoon session featured two different approaches to managing a lab circulation system. Read Gilgen of the University of Wisconsin-Madison described and demonstrated a PC-based system which currently handles over 50,000 checkouts per year. David Herren from Butler University demonstrated a Macintosh-based system which uses a custom-written hypercard stack to efficiently handle a much smaller number of transactions. Both presenters raised the issue of keeping tabs on individual students: One favored the approach, while the other avoided it because of potential right-to-privacy conflicts. It was clear that this complicated issue would need to be addressed at a future conference.

Nina Garrett and Robert Hart, both from the University of Illinois, Champaign-Urbana, presented the last afternoon session which focused on the lab as a research center where research can be conducted on the nature of learning, especially as this relates to the language laboratory setting, and the learning process as mediated by the various media. The thrust of this session was that we often proceed with our labs and media centers with little empirical basis or understanding for the effectiveness or usefulness of such labs. The dearth of empirical studies on foreign language learning increases the respon-

sibility of laboratory/media center directors to facilitate such studies.

Interspersed between the various presentations were several "shop talks," brief vignettes of successful lab operations from a variety of institutions all over the country. A number of entertaining video "tours" were shown and made available for viewing, allowing Conference participants to see what other facilities look like and how they operate. That evening (and it had been a long day!), groups from various regions met over dinner at local restaurants to get acquainted and to begin to organize formal regional organizations. Everyone should be hearing more about and from these groups.

Day Three focused on the use of new technologies in the Language Learning Center and included a demonstration of the Brown University Demosthenes project, presented by Frank Ryan, and Judith Frommer's (Harvard) MacLang Authoring System. After lunch, Janet Murray from MIT and Jim Pusack from the University of Iowa gave demonstrations of interactive videodisc programs, the one ("A la Rencontre de Philippe" and "No Recuerdo") produced and under development through the Athena Project at MIT, the other, a readily available PICS materials developed at Iowa. The final panel dealt with the "Learning Lab as Earth Station" and featured the variety of materials and modes currently available utilizing satellite receiving technology. More "shop talks" and a Conference wrap-up brought the day to a close.

No report can substitute for having been there! Virtually everyone left with a feeling of having made contact with colleagues previously unknown and having been enriched with information that had earlier been lacking. More could hardly have been packed into three days. There could be little doubt that language classrooms are changing, that foreign language instructors are reaching out to seek non-traditional means to enrich the activities of their students, and that the push is on to utilize what evolving technology places readily at our collective disposal. While the classroom teacher remains at the core of instruction, laboratory and media center directors must find ways to facilitate

their faculty's instructional tasks and their students' learning responsibilities. There is much work to be done, and a great need for communication between everyone involved. To that end, we can all look forward to the next IALL Conference to take us over ground as yet uncovered and to mark the progress made between now and the future bearing down upon us.