

FLEAT—One...Two...Three

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At the beginning of a race, the starter's cry of "One...two...three..." before the crack of the pistol is often smooth and accurate. In contrast, the timing of the FLEAT (Foreign Language Education and Technology) I, FLEAT II, and FLEAT III gatherings was less predictable.

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In particular, the road between FLEAT I and FLEAT II was long and steep. The first international FLEAT conference was held August 18 – 21, 1981, in Tokyo, Japan, jointly organized by the LLA (Language Laboratory Association of Japan) and NALLD (National Association of Learning Laboratory Directors, U.S.A.). It took place at the gorgeous Hotel Okura in Tokyo and had the benefit of a very generous budget. The Minister of Education opened the proceedings. Among the distinguished guests present were Wilga Rivers, James Alatis, Joseph H. Sheehan, and Norman Davies. The late Peter Strevens presented "Old Myths, New Technology and Better Management of Language Learning."

In all, FLEAT I ended on a very successful note and the meeting chairman Sutesaburo Kohmoto closed by saying, "We hope to hold the second international conference in the U.S.A. in a few years." However, ten years passed and no mention of FLEAT II was made. Soon after I became President of LLA, on the advice of Mr. White (Kansai Chapter), I participated in the Seventh International Conference on Technology and Education, which took place in Brussels, Belgium in 1990, with a slight hope of meeting IALL members (the new name for NALLD). Surprisingly three presidents of IALL, Ruth Trometer, LeeAnn Stone (then President-Elect), and Sue Otto (Past President) were waiting for me. Immediately we agreed to have a close relationship between our organizations. I remember saying then, "If only we could have another international conference in Japan some day!" The general reaction to my wish was very encouraging, and Ms. Stone especially was very enthusiastic about the idea. When I returned to Japan and reported this enthusiasm at the Chubu

Chapter Regular Committee Meeting there was a sudden cry "Let's hold FLEAT III!" I had not expected this response, but when I heard it, I was determined to see it through.

We were confronted by two initial hurdles. First, it would be necessary for the IALL Board to accept the proposal, and the LLA Board would also have to be agreeable. Fortunately Ms. Trometer, who was still President of IALL at that time, quickly sent me a letter of acceptance. The LLA Board concurred, after I proposed a very modest budget for the conference. ("To have a long, if humble life" has always been my motto.)

FLEAT II took place at Chubu University and the Nagoya International Center, August 4 – 7, 1992. We did not spend much money, but yet we registered a total of 400 participants each day, including 50 representatives from IALL.

The conference benefitted LLA members in numerous ways. First, we managed to learn about new computer technology available overseas. Many of our young researchers were educated during the meeting and this has been in some cases the stepping stone toward better careers. Thirdly, we realized how truly difficult a foreign language was, particularly in the context of a foreign culture. And although there were many cultural differences between LLA and IALL members, we were nonetheless able to forge deep and solid friendships—memories of which we keep to this day.

I hear that 100 Japanese participants are expected for FLEAT III and that many of the presenters are from Japan. I believe that the "race" mentioned at the beginning of this article will have fewer, if any, hurdles hereafter. I see both associations working closely with each other, with each reaping the benefits of this mutual cooperation. ■

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