

Report on the Panel Discussion on English Teaching in Mexican Public Schools¹

DAYNA HOUSE, USIS ENGLISH TEACHING FELLOW

This year at the National MEXTESOL Convention in Acapulco, I was invited to lead a panel discussion on English Teaching in the Public Schools. The panelists were all public school teachers as well as leaders in SEP (Secretaría de Educación Pública) English programs. The purpose of the round table was threefold: first, this panel was designed for members of the SEP to discuss their experiences and knowledge about teaching English in Mexico's public schools; secondly, it was designed to empower public school employees teaching in difficult conditions and inform non-SEP teachers of the realities of public school teaching conditions; and finally, it was to help strengthen the bridge between MEXTESOL and the SEP and its teachers.

The participation at this panel was composed of a largely mixed group of both private and public school teachers that filled the room, filled in all the standing room and flowed out the doors. I personally expected, as the leader, to have to moderate gripes from SEP teachers to those who represented the SEP on the panel. What transpired, however, was quite a pleasant surprise. After each panel member spoke the floor was opened. As the first two teachers began to respond to what they heard, they recognized the effort the SEP has made in various states towards programs of English in primary schools and updating the curriculum for English in secondary schools. They expressed frustration, nevertheless, for the lack of support from the SEP in the form of scholarships for studies abroad or academic exchanges with English-speaking countries to update their teaching methods and to maintain their own level of English. Immediate response to this came in a very unexpected form. Thayne Bailey, a participant in the room stood up and identified himself as a teacher in a private institute. He then proceeded to offer his support to SEP teachers in the State of Mexico by inviting any SEP teacher of English to the in-house training seminars given at his institute to their own teachers.

¹ The panel discussion took place at the 1995 National MEXTESOL Convention in Acapulco, October, 1995.

Jodi Crandall had spoken that same morning in her plenary session about an open-door policy among teachers in her school. In this system, teachers were welcome to drop in on any class to observe and learn from veteran teachers. This very generous offer by Thayne Bailey gave a new meaning to the open-door policy. Is it possible that teachers here in Mexico can support each other across the division of the public and private sector with this kind of cooperation that allows us to learn from each other? I think it is possible if we are willing to sacrifice a little time to communicate with one another.

The final result of this panel discussion after 1 ½ hours was the following list of people who are ready, able and willing to network within their state and to support English teachers in the art of English teaching. I submit this list so that those who attended can, in their own states, begin to take the initiative to reach out to each other by setting a date and time to meet to discuss needs, problems and solutions. I hope that this is a step towards larger multi-state meetings. I will be making efforts to contact people and organize as much as I can here in the North, but we need to work together.

Those who are willing to join this network of teachers and are not included on the list can reach me (Dayna House) at (8) 373-1781 (telephone) or (8) 373-5340 (fax). Areas with MEXTESOL affiliates: Puebla, Mexico City, Jalisco, Querétaro, Veracruz, Tamaulipas, and Nayarit should get in touch with their leadership (their names were included in the MEXTESOL National Convention Program, pp. 100-101) and request support in organizing dialogue sessions between public and private teachers. We're all English teachers. Let's not let these superficial divisions of "public" and "private" keep us apart.