

IV FORUM on Systems of Certification of the English Language in Mexican Universities

**Helen Huntley
Janet Martinez-Bernal
Fulbright Scholars in Tijuana and Hermosillo
Tijuana, México**

The Facultad de Idiomas in Tijuana recently hosted the IV FORUM on Systems of Certification of the English Language in Mexican Universities. Under the planning and organization of David Toledo Sarracino, Assistant Dean of the Facultad de Idiomas at UABC Tijuana; more than 40 invited participants from public universities all over Mexico came together to discuss international standards in EFL teaching and learning, and the possibility of creating national standards for Mexico. Reports were given of various teacher training projects dating from the early 1990s, which provided internationally-known training qualifications.

In addition, international certifications in the learning of English as a Foreign Language were discussed with specific reference to the Common European Framework and the Association of Language Testers in Europe. The overall aim of these reports and discussions was to consider how these experiences of using existing tests and certifications can be used as springboards to create standards relevant to Mexico.

Speakers known at the national and international level, reported on a variety of important issues that provided both background information and ideas for future planning. Carol Lethaby, from the University of California at Berkeley and a consultant with the British Council; Pat Grounds from the British Council and Rene Ramírez from Trinity College London; all spoke from different points of view about international standards in EFL teaching and learning. The experience of developing standards for language competency and pedagogy north of the border was described and commented upon by Dr. Karen Cadeiro-Kaplan, from

San Diego State University. Héctor Sánchez Lozano and Eric Tejeda Evans discussed their English language programs at Proulex-Universidad de Guadalajara. Andreina Espana, from Cambridge ESOL, provided information about the Teaching Knowledge Test as an international standard for teachers. The conference was concluded with an informative and pertinent speech on standards by Mtro. Guillermo Pablo López, from the Dirección General de Acreditación, Incorporación y Revalidación.

Important components of the Forum were the discussion sessions (mesas de trabajo), which allowed all the participants to express their opinions in an area in which they were primarily interested. Each discussion group came up with a number of recommendations and a plan of action for the coming year to present to the body of participants. Other social events provided opportunities for the participants to meet and talk over issues in informal settings: during a catered lunch at Giuseppe's de Otay, over a glass of wine at the L.A. Cetto winery, and in the UABC Cafeteria.

In attendance at the Forum this year were several professors from the United States, one of whom, Dr. Karen Cadeiro-Kaplan, presented information about her experiences with setting language standards in San Diego, taking into account variables including both teacher and student performance. Helen Huntley, who visited each discussion group to provide an overview of accreditation criteria for Intensive English Programs in the United States, and Janet Ayers Martinez-Bernal, are both Fulbright Scholars with placements at UABC Tijuana and Sonora (Universidad de Sonora and the Secretaría de Educación y Cultura del Estado de Sonora) respectively. What emerged most clearly from their perspective was the evident dominance of the British Council and other British agencies in fulfilling the needs of Mexican English teachers with teacher training certifications and English language certifications. Mexico's nearest neighbor to the north, despite its obvious proximity, has apparently exerted very little influence in English language matters. Moreover, the models

that are currently being reviewed for their applicability to the Mexican situation continue to be those coming from Europe, such as the Common European Framework of Language Standards. While these British and European qualifications are little known and understood by professionals in the TEFL/TESL field in the United States where an entirely different set of credentials is the norm, it is clear that much of Central and South America has been assisted through resources, financial assistance, and training programs by British and European dominance in the language field.