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The Eight World Congress of the International Reading Association

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Notes and Comments

The Eighth World Congress of the International Reading Association

PATRIA G. ARAÑAS

The Eighth World Congress of the International Reading Association (IRA) was held at the Philippine Plaza Hotel in Manila on 5-7 August 1980. The IRA numbers over 70,000 from over 70 nations, and some 650 Filipino and 300 foreign reading experts, teachers, and administrators, and more than 100 observers gathered for three days of talks, seminars, and workshops. The foreign delegates represented 23 countries. Dr. Aurora H. Roldan was in charge of local arrangements and her gift for organization and her ability to gather a superb committee of local members contributed much to the success of the congress.

A unique feature of the congress was the pre-congress session on 4 August to which parents were invited. The talks, delivered by local experts, Dr. Lourdes Carandang, Miss Isabel Tablante, Miss Estude de Jesus, and Mrs. Patricia S. Koppman, Chairman of the IRA Parents' Committee, centered on the needs of children and their unconventional manner of communicating them to adults. The parents were enthusiastic over the unusual sharing of convention experts. Such a session with parents could well be built into many a local educational convention.

Chaos threatened on the opening day of the congress, when, in typical fashion, some 500 delegates and observers from the Metro Manila area arrived for late registration. But the local staff was equal to the challenge, and all latecomers were accommodated. Dr. Olive S. Niles of Connecticut State and the Department of

Education, Hartford, Connecticut, President of the IRA, presided at the first plenary session and outlined the theme of the congress: The 1980's Problems and Promises. Dr. Onofre D. Corpus, Minister of Education and Culture, in his keynote address, enunciated the urgent need for humanism and humanistic values, for democratization, and for equalization of opportunity, all of which come with reading.

Filipino speakers during the congress included Philippine National Artist Jose Garcia Villa, who was present through an inspired reading of his poems by American poet and publisher, John E. Cowen; Dr. Aurora H. Roldan of Reading Dynamics; Bro. Andrew B. Gonzales, President of De La Salle University, whose paper was read by Dr. Teresita C. Rafael; Dr. Doreen G. Fernandez of the Ateneo de Manila University; Dr. Natividad Santos and Dr. Basilisa Manhit of the University of the Philippines; Dr. Bonifacio P. Sibayan, Dr. Edilberto Dagot, and Mrs. Araceli Villamin of Philippine Normal College; and Dr. Pacita Habana of the SEAMEO Regional Center for Educational Innovation and Technology (INNOTECH).

The foreign speakers constituted a cross-section of experts from all over the world, including Canada, Finland, Nigeria, Germany, Australia, India, Japan, Thailand, New Zealand, Singapore, Malaysia, and the United States. Especially well attended were the sessions dealing with current issues of particular interest to the more than 750 Philippine participants, like approaches in bilingual education; integration of the Language Arts; effective methods of developing reading skills, habits, and interests in students; ways of developing vocabulary; experimentations on various types of reading programs and concept development in reading materials; writing for children in Asia; and adult literacy. Several papers presented studies on the use of various methods in beginning reading among non-English speakers, particularly among the Japanese, Finns, Koreans, Singaporeans, the disadvantaged black children in the United States, and the aboriginal children in Australia. There were reports on miscue research, the reading habits of Singaporean children and Thai students, analyses of reading materials, the relationship between reading and the language process, factors in reading success and achievement, and the effects of reading instruction.

A Philippine panel presented reports on various experiments

such as the Experimental Elementary Program of the Bureau of Elementary Education, the IMPACT experiment of INNOTECH, the Reading curriculum for gifted readers at the Philippine High School for the Arts, the Individually Paced Reading Program at St. Scholastica's College, and concept development within the Children's Reading Laboratory Framework.

The Philippine teachers among the participants gravitated towards the sessions dealing with approaches and methods of teaching in a bilingual set-up — an indication of the need they felt for more expert knowledge and technique in this area. They came away with a half dozen helpful insights: (1) In the United States, four different models of bilingual education have been designed to meet the specific literacy needs of various groups of immigrants. Should a similar pattern be adapted in the Philippines with its variety of languages? (2) Beginning reading requires approaches that would involve as many senses as possible and elicit the most oral language from children. (3) A creative and ingenious teacher can develop skills and promote interest in reading with the use of ordinary classroom materials. Should greater attention be paid to this technique in the budget-poor Filipino educational system? (4) Exposure of children to meaningful situations serves as a broad base in the development of a dynamic vocabulary, elementary in reading comprehension. (5) Children of various cultures generally exhibit similar reactions to attractive scenery, colors, and covers of books. (6) Reading and writing play mutually supportive roles. Therefore reading materials that utilize patterns that are expected to be learned for writing should be selected or developed.

Surprisingly, many participants, especially the Filipinos, showed great interest in writing for publication. The present Philippine trend of developing instructional reading materials and textbooks seems to answer a need, for what could be more appropriate than teachers writing the books and reading materials needed for the various programs in school? The papers on children's literature and publishing books for Asian children and the different reading programs were therefore well received.

In sharp contrast to the local speakers, almost all the foreign speakers made use of audio-visual equipment and projected slides that they themselves had produced. In some instances, the speakers used sophisticated equipment which no Philippine school, especial-

ly in the face of limited income, would be able to afford. This contrast emphasized how far behind Philippine education is in the use of sophisticated teaching aids.

Despite the variety of problems in reading education which have been intensified by the language problem in the Philippines, most Filipino participants in the Eighth IRA World Congress seemed to agree that with the humanistic approach and the collaborative efforts of parents, educators, administrators, and teachers in various disciplines, appropriate measures could be drawn up, experimented on, and, hopefully, implemented according to the specific needs of readers of all ages. Filipino teachers, faced with this challenge, can and should do something about it in their own way in their own field. For the ordinary teacher who learned of a variety of approaches not only in teaching but also in reading, and who met and exchanged notes with local and foreign reading experts, the congress was a tremendous success.