

philippine studies

Ateneo de Manila University • Loyola Heights, Quezon City • 1108 Philippines

The Tenth World Congress of the International Reading Association

Patria G. Arañas

Philippine Studies vol. 33, no. 1 (1985) 93–95

Copyright © Ateneo de Manila University

Philippine Studies is published by the Ateneo de Manila University. Contents may not be copied or sent via email or other means to multiple sites and posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's written permission. Users may download and print articles for individual, noncommercial use only. However, unless prior permission has been obtained, you may not download an entire issue of a journal, or download multiple copies of articles.

Please contact the publisher for any further use of this work at philstudies@admu.edu.ph.

<http://www.philippinestudies.net>
Fri June 27 13:30:20 2008

The Tenth World Congress of the International Reading Association

PATRIA G. ARAÑAS

The Tenth World Congress of the International Reading Association was held at the Shangri-La Hotel in Hong Kong from 30 July to 2 August 1984. Representing 22 countries, 1,200 Reading experts, administrators, consultants, researchers and teachers attended and participated in pre-congress institutes, workshops, symposia and various sessions, all of which aimed at bringing out the theme of the Congress, "Making Connections Through Reading." The Congress reflected an acceptance of the influences of culture on reading in English and a realization that high technology in the form of computers in addition to low technology in the form of newspapers, library materials, humor, folklore and poetry in the hands of dynamic teachers will provide the "connections."

The Hong Kong IRA Congress also reaffirmed the need for developing reading skills within the context of the learner's native language and culture and maximizing whatever technology is available, at the same time acknowledging the vital role of a teacher who is armed not only with methodology, but more importantly, with an appreciation of the human-aspect of the learner. As an illustration of this theme Dr. Jaap Tuinman, a school administrator from Canada shared the following insight: "Literacy is situational. It is not primarily utilitarian." It is affected by the complexity of information, the supply and demand of reading skills and the specific needs at a particular time in the context of a situation. He cited his own mastery of reading, yet he delegates his lawyer to read and interpret legal materials for him. He also pointed to the weakness in UNESCO literacy projects because

they are based on economic needs. It is an insight that demands consideration in a Third World nation like the Philippines.

Three of the sessions at the Hong Kong IRA Congress, among many others, were of particular interest to Philippine educators.

A pre-congress institute, Reading English in Asia, conducted by the Literacy and Languages in Asia (LLA), a Special Interest group, dealt with the issue of proficiency in English of non-native speakers in countries where English is a second language, a medium of instruction or one of the official languages. The papers showed that while English is learned as a second or third language, and reading skills are acquired, the non-native students, speakers and writers of English are influenced by various factors. Among these are their first language, their sex, motivations, and culture. A question that was raised was "What kind of English should be taught in schools? Should the non-native students be penalized for using nativized English?" Evidently, English in Asia has been infused with native words, calquing and even with the syntax of the native language, and the nativized English has passed the criteria of intelligibility and acceptability. Proficiency in a first language has been shown to affect the degree and pace of learning a second language. Motivation and study skills, especially for Asians reading English in the United States, have played a major role in the development of reading skills. Reports on further studies on Reading English in Asia are expected to be given at the convention of the LLA scheduled in Korea in 1985.

Jennie Ingham of England described a project for the collection of contemporary retellings of stories and reminiscences from ethnic groups in three outer boroughs of London. The project resulted from studies and observations of the performance in school of non-native students. The teachers and the communities acknowledged the importance of basic proficiency in the mother tongue on the part of the students and a positive attitude on the part of the teachers toward the languages and culture of the ethnic groups. The project has produced dual-language materials, attractive books in English and in the language of the ethnic group concerned, namely, Hindi, Bengali, Gujarati, Punjabi, Urdu, Greek, Turkish and Italian. Over 100 of the 200 or more stories have been published and now form part of materials for educational, performance and entertainment purposes. The project, which was initially funded by a church group is expected to obtain

additional funding in order to become the basis of a National Community Folktale Center. Ms. Ingham conducted an after-dinner story-telling session on the second day of the Congress. She highlighted the report with the procedure used in the collection of oral literature which involved taping the stories, notably reminiscences of monolingual grandparents; transcribing; translating; illustrating and lay-outing by various groups of people which generated cooperation and removed racial barriers.

Susan B. Neuman of the United States and Vincent Greaney of Ireland presented a study on the functions of literacy and reading involving twenty-one countries, the Philippines among them. Eight-, ten- and thirteen-year-old students were asked to write essays on "Why I Like to Read" in their own languages. Groups of translators, one in the native country and one in the US, translated the essays and drew up a list of reasons for reading given by the children. Some of them were as follows: for information, as a source of life, for learning, for enjoyment, for stimulation, as an escape from immediate environment, relief from boredom, for moral teaching, and self-respect. A notable function from the developing countries was that books were a key to success. The results seem to show that the younger children read to enjoy while the older ones read to learn. It was noted that in the US, the children included in the study did not seem to enjoy reading, but read mostly because of boredom. To counter check the results, a list of 50 Likert-style statements was drawn up and sent to the countries participating in the study. Although not all the results have been submitted, a pattern has been discerned from the results submitted so far which tallies with priorities categorized from the essays.

While providing much in the way of technical expertise, awareness of developments in reading throughout the world, and inspiration, the Hong Kong IRA Convention once again underlined the differences between developed and emerging nations—differences of goals, approaches, resources and problems.