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READING AROUND THE WORLD

Wilhelmina Faunce

Several years ago while driving through Scotland, I saw boys and girls neatly dressed in their school uniforms with book-bags over their shoulders, obviously on their way to school. The thought occurred to me that it would be very interesting to know how children in other parts of the world were being taught. This year when my husband was invited to direct an alumni world tour during the spring term, I decided this was the chance of a lifetime to incorporate into the trip a study in comparative education.

Acting on the advice of Dr. Dorothy McGinnis, I wrote to Dr. Dorothy Kendall Bracken of the International Reading Association, for names of persons interested in reading, whom I could contact in the countries included on our trip. The replies from most of the people I wrote to were prompt and enthusiastic, dates were set and final arrangements for interpreters were completed.

Armed with eight basic questions regarding the teaching of reading, and a new camera, I started out for my first visitation in Tokyo, Japan. Through the courtesy of Mr. Takahiko Sakamoto, Director of the Department of Reading Science of the Noma Institute of Educational Research, I was met at the hotel by his associate Miss Kazuko Takagi, who was to be my hostess and interpreter for the day. Racing through the crowded streets of Tokyo in a taxi is an unforgettable experience. After the initial shock of innumerable close calls, I was able to collect my thoughts and ply Miss Takagi with questions I had about education in Japan.

Today the elementary schools of Japan are much like those in the United States with the exception that more time is spent learning to read and write because the language is far more difficult. Children are required to attend school for at least nine years and the government pays most of the cost of their education. Six years are spent in elementary school and three years in junior high. After this period they are required to take examinations to enter high school. Senior high school is a three year course of study. The percentage of students going to junior and senior high schools is second only to the United States.

The school year begins in April and there are three "main vacations." In most schools children attend classes five and a half days a week. During summer vacations they are expected to do homework assignments. Another interesting fact is that both boys and girls are required to take domestic science in the fourth grade. Children enter

school at the age of six, however some have gone to private kindergarten before entering public school. Many children can read before entering school because Japanese parents place a high value on education and they feel that it is their obligation to prepare their children for the school experience.

The taxi stopped in front of the Den-en-chofu Elementary School, a large building with an enrollment of 1200 students and thirty classrooms with about forty children in each room. We were met at the front entrance by Mr. Sakamoto, my host, and Mr. Usui, the principal of the school, and ushered into the front hall where we removed our shoes and put on woven grass slippers. All of the children follow the same procedure except that they put on white rubber-soled slippers with a strap over the instep and their outdoor shoes are placed in lockers by the door. I could not help thinking how much our school custodians would appreciate this custom.

Mr. Sakamoto had preceded us to the school so that he could arrange with the teachers a time schedule for visiting the rooms in order that I might see reading classes in session. We were shown into the principal's conference room where we were served tea until the exact time arrived to visit the first classroom. Mr. Usui, the principal, did not speak English so any questions that I wished to direct to him had to be interpreted by Mr. Sakamoto.

As we walked into the second grade classroom we were greeted by the teacher and introduced to the forty children, who had risen to their feet when we walked in. They remained standing until we were properly seated at the rear of the room. The classroom was equipped with wooden desks and chairs, a television set to be used with their educational television programs, and a public address system. Hanging on the back of each chair was a large book-bag. The man teacher was preparing to introduce the story of "Five Chinese Brothers," and each two children shared a large paper-back copy of the book. The second grades have five sets of storybooks similar to this one. The teacher was using an excellent set of chart pictures to accompany the story for purpose of analyzing the plot and the characters. Reading is always taught to the class as a whole, on the theory that the slow readers learn from class discussion.

Japanese books are printed, as we would say "from back to front," their front cover would be our back cover. Writing and printing is in vertical columns from right to left. The children use ballpoint pens and pencils for writing, but for handwriting class they use a brush and

powdered ink mixed with water for practice in the formation of formal characters.

We visited a third grade where the teacher was using a portable chalkboard which she set over the stationary chalkboard so that she could preserve the experience story for the next reading lesson.

We observed a fifth grade where the teacher's aim was to help the children understand in depth the main idea of the author and how he developed the characters in the story. The children read fluently and all of them seemed eager to participate in the discussion. When the teacher asked a question many hands went up and the children said something that sounded like a chorus of "Hi-hi-hi." This was rather unexpected in a highly structured classroom atmosphere but it was explained that they were saying "I know the answer."

There are no retentions and a child always remains with his own age group. In early elementary grades the girls learn the reading skills more quickly than boys, but in grades four, five and six, the boys seem to catch up. In upper elementary, girls excel in handwriting and this, according to Mr. Sakamoto, is attributed to the fact that girls like to do artistic things, while boys at this age are more interested in physical activity. At the end of the year standardized tests are used for comprehension. Mr. Sakamoto is very interested in this phase of education and the tests used in the Den-en-chofu School are a product of the Noma Institute, of which he is Director of Reading Science.

Mr. Sakamoto's father Dr. Ichiro Sakamoto is a professor of educational psychology and children's culture at Japan Women's University and president of the Japanese Society for the Science of Reading. Dr. Sakamoto presented a paper on "The Scope of Reading in Japan," at the First World Congress on Reading in Paris in 1966.

Hong Kong—Kowloon

Mr. Ng from the Department of Education in Hong Kong was my host and interpreter for the visitation to the Fuk Wing Government School in Kowloon. As we drove from the hotel to the school he had many interesting facts to help brief me for the visit.

Twenty percent of the students receive free tuition. This is provided by the government for children whose parents cannot afford to pay the \$8.00 a year for tuition. There are one-half million primary school children in the Hong Kong-Kowloon area between the ages of six and twelve and the government finances tuition for approximately 100,000 of them. Many of these children come from the floating sampan population of Aberdeen and the families are very poor. There are 102 school units and most of the schools are operated on double

sessions, with two sets of children, two sets of teachers, and two heads of school. The morning session goes from 8:00 to 1:00, and the afternoon session from 1:30 to 6:30. School starts in September and there are two hundred days of school, with seven weeks of vacation. There are many Mission Schools supported by religious groups and some schools are built by non-profit organizations which are subsidized by government agencies. These are called "Subsidized Schools."

We went to the office of the Head Teacher, Mrs. Tai, who spoke English very well. There she served us tea while making arrangements for us to visit the classrooms.

The forty-five second grade children stood as we came in but as soon as we were seated they became so involved in their reading lesson that they forgot we were there. All of the children were dressed in white blouses, dark short pants and skirts. Mrs. Tai explained that the parents do their best to provide the children with these uniforms but many children are so poor that they have only one outfit and it gets very dirty. The parents of some of the children are illiterate hawkers selling their wares on the streets.

The Chinese characters are logograms with one sign for each word. There is no alphabet as each character is an entity in itself. The children write beautifully but their reading is very laborious at the second grade level. They are taught to read first and to recognize characters later. Reading is in vertical columns from right to left. It is interesting to note that when advanced students are taught English, they recognize the whole word as they have learned the Chinese language.

Early elementary is called Junior 1-2-3. The children are not allowed to take books home because they are so eager to have "a book" that they would never return them. Many homes do not have a single book. As in Japan, there is no grouping in the teaching of reading—it is taught to the whole class.

The buildings are not heated and sometimes get quite cold as the temperature gets down as low as 40 degrees. The average temperature is 60 degrees in winter and 83 degrees in summer.

Bangkok, Thailand

Unfortunately school did not open in Bangkok until the week following my visit, so I was unable to see the children in school, however, through the courtesy of Dr. Leo Fay of Indiana University, I had the pleasure of visiting a friend of his, Dr. Seela Chayanayodhin, a professor of Education at Prasarn Mitr in Bangkok, Bangkok. Dr.

Seela has written a curriculum for the language arts in Thailand and is particularly interested in the field of reading.

The law, in effect since 1921, states that education is compulsory for children from age seven to fourteen, although some children do not start until age eight. The lower elementary is from the first to the fourth pratom and the upper elementary is from the fifth to the seventh pratom. The law making the fifth to seventh pratom compulsory is not yet in effect in the entire country, but has been expanding since 1966.

The Thai language is complex in alphabetic structure and also in the fact that, other than in the very beginning stages, all of the words are connected in writing. As a result of these complexities there is a high failure rate in the first year of school. There are 44 letters in the Thai alphabet, of which 27 are vowels. Children learn to write their own name first, and in the new type of schools the whole word and meaning is taught, whereas in the old days children learned the alphabet first. There is a great need for remedial reading, but as yet the need has not been recognized. Reading from the fifth pratom on is directed toward a study of literature.

Children are considered literate after lower elementary is completed, at about age eleven. The literacy rate as of 1965, is about 67.7 percent. The school year goes from about May 17 to August 17, and August 27th to the King's birthday on December 5, then from the middle of December to March, which is the time for annual exams.

New Delhi, India

Through a chance meeting on the plane to New Delhi, a well-educated Indian industrialist provided me with some very interesting facts about education in India. At the present time education in India is not compulsory, but on the new five-year plan which will start in 1969, it is hoped that this will be included. Many children go to private kindergarten at ages three, four and five, and they start public school at the age of six. The children who have had the advantage of kindergarten are usually able to read by the time they start the first grade. There is no readiness program in the public schools and the children start to read as soon as they enter the first grade.

Many big business firms invest in private schools for the children of their staff. The elementary and middle schools are set up like the American schools but the 10th class is called High School. College specialization follows in the 11th and 12th years, which are called Intermediate and the 13th and 14th years are called Graduation. Then

the 15th and 16th years are called Post-graduation when one specializes by studying one subject six days a week.

I had a short interview with a reading consultant at the International School in New Delhi. The children who attend this school are primarily from families of diplomats, the military and government employees. English is the number one language spoken in this school but many of the children are not from English speaking families so the remedial reading teachers are faced with problems much different than ours. Hindii is required for all third graders as a second language and continued until it can be spoken fluently.

Istanbul, Turkey

Mr. Abdulla On from the Ministry of Education arranged for a visit to the Bayazit Elementary School which serves as an experimental school for Bayazit University. Mr. On called for me at the hotel and was a most gracious host and interpreter throughout the day.

There are seven hundred elementary schools in Istanbul, twenty-nine kindergartens connected with the government schools and about one hundred private kindergartens. The children are required to go to school two hundred days a year with about the same school calendar as we have in the United States. School is in session five and a half days a week. Some of the public schools are on a double session with two sets of children and two sets of teachers. The morning hours are from 8:30 to 1:00 and the afternoon hours from 1:00 to 5:30. The Bayazit School is slightly different because it is an experimental school, so the children are there a full day.

Mr. Altan, the principal, did not speak English but he had many questions to be interpreted, about our elementary schools in the United States. Bayazit School has four hundred and forty-six children, eleven classrooms and eleven teachers. We were there just in time to observe the second grade class of forty-five children begin their reading lesson. Again I was surprised to see the children being taught in one large group. The speed of reading seems to be an important factor and each teacher I met proudly showed me the record of progress from the beginning of the year to the month of May. The children were seated at wooden tables covered with white tablecloths. There were about eight or ten children at each table. Each child had his own book-bag hanging on the back of his chair and the bag served a dual purpose of holding pencils, paper and books, as well as a means of carrying homework. The third graders were reading their weekly newspaper called "Sinix Belgisi."

I learned that the Turkish language consists of twenty-nine letters,

of which eight are vowels. Words are completely phonetic and reading is taught by the "new system," which is the whole word approach. The education system is patterned after the French plan, with elementary being five years, secondary is three years, and lycee is three years. In the sixth grade there is a choice of a second language, usually English, French or German, which is then studied for three years.

After lunch we visited a fourth grade where I was invited to play a little game with the children. They pronounced a Turkish word which I wrote phonetically on the board (and because the language is phonetic, the word was usually right). They watched me carefully to see if I would make a mistake, and if I did, they had great fun laughing at me. Then they in turn learned the English word meaning the same thing. I think this might have gone on for the rest of the afternoon had not Mr. On rescued me.

The literacy rate in Turkey is about fifty percent as many of the children drop out at the end of the primary school and for this reason primary education is basic and vital to the citizenship of the future of the Turkish people.

Before taking this trip I asked a friend who had spent a year in Turkey at what age children started school. He laughed and repeated the method the back-country people use to test the child's readiness for school. These people are often just too busy to get around to register the birth of their children, so they are not exactly sure of the age of their children—but if a child can reach over the top of his head with his right arm and touch his left ear, he is old enough to go to school. I haven't tested out the theory, but it will be interesting to know whether it is valid.

Comparative education forces us to look objectively at our own system of education. We may be justly proud of the progress of public education in the last half-century. We are richly endowed with good school buildings, libraries and text books but someplace along the way, our elementary students have adopted a passive attitude toward learning. Education has become a duty rather than a privilege and we face the problem of impressing upon them that "Knowledge makes for better living."

It may be that we need to establish better communication between home and school by involving parents in the teaching methods and enlisting their help to praise and encourage their children. We might borrow from the Japanese who have educated their parents to assume the responsibility of providing a rich background of experiences before the children start school. It is the opinion of the writer that individual-

izing education is a step in the right direction, but we are still looking for practical teaching methods for the classroom teacher to meet these needs.