

1. Preface

Picture books improve the imaginative and linguistic abilities of readers, motivate them and infuse them with a zest for living, give them wisdom, and enrich their minds. Children enhance their ability to express themselves by listening to stories and by reading books themselves. At home, books also serve as a communication tool between parents and their children. Readers can turn the pages at their own pace and enjoy seeing the wonderful pictures created by illustrators laid out before them. Children can indeed develop their emotional, expressive, and imaginative abilities by enjoying the words and pictures to be found in books. Perhaps it would be another strength of picture books that enable us to take the time to devise a method to enjoy picture books in an even more creative manner.

In accordance with the development of various technologies, the use of digital media – such as the Internet, TV games, and cell phones – has rapidly expanded and now almost everyone has easy access to such media. Digital animations and games that are fast-paced and characterized by rapid changes of scenes might well be quite absorbing and thrilling; however, one cannot develop imaginative and expressive abilities through such digital media in the way that one does through picture books. There are now growing concerns about the poor linguistic and expressive abilities of the younger generations, who tend not to read so many books or print media. In response, activities to encourage people, particularly children, to read more books are now being conducted by a range of institutions, and parents and teachers are seeking to teach children just how enjoyable, interesting, and exciting it is to read picture books.

But out in the wider world, some countries are facing a different problem regarding picture books. Books often introduce the cultures of different countries and help readers deepen their understanding of the people and cultures of other nations. This represents one of the great appeals of picture books. There are, however, countries where children have limited access to picture books – either at school or at home, notably in some Asia-Pacific, African, and Latin American regions. In some countries, it is difficult to publish picture books because of the lack of resources, and it is also hard for illustrators to devote themselves to creating their works due to poverty or conflicts.

The Asia/Pacific Cultural Centre for UNESCO (ACCU) has been engaged in the joint publication of children's books and picture books for 30 years, and has already published 30 works in a series of books for children. Under the Asia/Pacific Copublication Programme (ACP), we publish a master version in English, and then cooperate with UNESCO member states in the Asian-Pacific region to publish versions in their own languages. Also, in order to support artists in creative activities, we have been holding a competition for picture book illustrators (Noma Concours for Picture Book Illustrations) since 1978. In 2008, we began putting more emphasis on programmes for contemporary culture to ensure cultural diversity, and have been committed to conducting educational activities and building Asia-Pacific networks so that diverse cultures can be protected and maintained around the globe.

In the thirty years of ACCU activities, we have witnessed the efforts made by artists and picture book creators in Asia, Africa, and Latin America, who were striving to deliver picture books to local children despite the difficult situations in their respective countries. We have had, however, few chances to listen directly to the opinions of such people. For this reason, we decided to hold a symposium. We invited those engaged in the creation of books from all over the world to be panellists who could talk about the present situation surrounding the creation of picture books, reading environments for children, and about the power of picture books to those attending. We would like to provide all participants with opportunities to see and hear about the environment surrounding picture books for children in Asia, Africa, and Latin America through the presentations of the panellists using images and photographs.

Picture book creators, illustrators, and editors are all dedicating themselves to the creation of picture books, and their strong commitment gives a special power to these books, regardless of where they live or what cultural and other backgrounds they have. ACCU would like to examine the future possibilities of picture books together with all of you, the participants of this symposium.

ACCU is to publish a manual especially for fathers about reading books to their children with the aim of contributing to UNESCO member states in the Asia-Pacific region. The manual, which also includes summaries of the presentations made for this symposium, will be distributed to each country in the region. The manual was written by Mr. Tanaka Naoto, who is one of the panellists at the symposium, and it gives tips to fathers about choosing and reading books for their children. This symposium is to be filmed and recorded and will be partially broadcast on the ACCU Web site. It is our sincere hope that the results of this symposium will be effectively utilized for the development of books and the encouragement of reading for the benefit of children in many countries.

Finally, we would like to express our heartfelt gratitude to the panellists who gave us great support in the organization of this symposium; to Ms. Hayami Yu, who kindly agreed to our request to read books in front of the audience; and to all the other supporting organizations and attendants of the symposium.

Asia/Pacific Centre for UNESCO (ACCU)

ACCU Web site: <http://www.accu.or.jp/en/>

ACCU's Programmes for contemporary culture: <http://www.accu.or.jp/en/culture/cul02.shtml>

Noma Concours for Picture Book Illustrations: <http://www.accu.or.jp/noma/english/e-index.html>