

NEW HORIZONS FOR LEARNING CONFERENCE IN GUATEMALA

ICA Guatemala share their learnings in putting together a major educational conference in a third-world country.

To understand why the New Horizons For Learning Conference in Guatemala, October, 26-29, 1987 was such a miraculous event it is necessary to look at the way it developed through five stages: its incubation, the turning point, the ups and downs of preparation, the Conference itself and its follow-up.

I. INCUBATION: The idea that education is a key to ICA strategies in collaboration with the four communities of education, development, economics, and planetary unity began with the planetary event in Chicago in July of 1986 and grew during the Bilbao Meeting in August of 1986. In Latin America, it was decided that we would do a large international conference in education in Caracas in 1988. At first, Caracas was chosen because of Dr. Luis Machado's work there as the first elected Minister for the Development of Intelligence and his five year work in bringing together the best minds in the world to develop programs in learning "how to think" and putting these into practice across the entire society. It was the first time an entire country did this kind of experiment in applying new forms of education. People in Los Angeles and Mexca (Guatemala/Mexico) Primary Units also decided to do a series of regional educational events which would feed into the Caracas conference and be a learning event for the entire Order.

II. TURNING POINT: In March, 1987, several Order members passionate about education attended the two Jean Houston weekend courses in Caracas. Jean suggested that if we wanted to do a large international education conference, it would take at least two years of intense focus. Caracas Primary Unit was swamped with other priorities. Dr. Machado was in the midst of preparations for the 1988 Venezuelan elections. It did not look like it was the time for such an event, particularly if we wanted to keep it clear of political involvement. So, we said, why not do it in another location? We thought, of course, of MEXCA Primary Unit. Two decisions were made: 1) Do a big event at the front end of our 1988 Global Meeting in Mexico City and 2) Make the idea of a regional event in Guatemala a large conference in its own right. Guatemala would become a demonstration of what could be done in this important arena.

III. PREPARATION: The Guatemala House assigned Bill and Barbara Alerding to prepare for the education conference to be held in October 1987. Dee Dickinson of New Horizons For Learning in Seattle, Washington, USA offered to collaborate in this event. She also suggested the names of important presenters she knew well. We contacted them and because they were attracted by the idea of doing something in Guatemala, they were willing to reduce their normally high fees. The dates were set for October 26-29 after long discussion at the local level and the

international presenters were invited.

The objective of the conference was spelled out: to open up different levels of Guatemalan society to the new learning in mind-brain-body research. We had already discovered that few professionals here knew very much about the explosion in this area over the past 20 years. This would be a unique conference for it was meeting an obvious felt need and dealing with some major contradictions.

Once all the presenters were confirmed, Dee Dickinson helped design the flow of the conference. The Institute of Cultural Affairs Board, made up of local Guatemalan businessmen, developers and consultants took full responsibility for this conference. For four to five months, they met weekly for a working breakfast. They were most concerned about the finances and the publicity. A large cocktail party was held introducing 90 people to the objectives of the conference. 3000 brochures were distributed. The Rotary Foundation, FAFIDESS, persuaded Upjohn Company to pay for 4000 large brochures which folded out to poster-size with pictures and a blurb in Spanish on each presenter. The Asociacion de Gerentes de Guatemala, the most prestigious management association in Central America, sent out conference materials to 1700 company managers. An old colleague, Maria Inez de Sandoval of Guatemala's largest and most influential newspaper, PRENSA LIBRE, printed seven different articles on the Conference. After the first article alone, there were 50 inquiries. We spoke at Rotary Club meetings, Universities, business meetings, schools, development agencies, and government offices. The word was spreading and people were getting more and more excited.

We got a number of important organizations to co-sponsor the conference and to put their name as authorization on the fold-out brochure. The Jewish Community, a small but extremely effective organization in Guatemala, backed it. They were especially interested in Dr. Feuerstein from Israel. They sent people to join the organizing committee and financially supported the conference. The New York Primary Unit sent two volunteers, Bertha Sarmina, originally from Mexico, and Dana Pratt, to help us. The team knew that it was crucial to keep following up on all the people who were interested. So, the "mailing mode" became a byword when the team realized that over 11,000 promotion pieces plus many letters had gone into the mail.

Because Guatemalans are accustomed to heavily subsidized seminars with scholarships or very low fees, we worried about what price to charge. Finally we agreed on about \$150US. We offered a group rate of 3 for the price of 2 to educational and development institutions. This was a winner. We had about 70 people who needed full-time scholarships. Because of a huge strike against the government's new tax package for businesses, we couldn't obtain funding for scholarships. Dee told us that when things collapse, it often ends up to be a blessing in the long run. The blessing here was that we asked people wanting scholarships to

pay about \$40US. They did! This showed their seriousness and helped us find some funding for them when companies learned of their personal sacrifice. Our goal was 300 people. More than 375 signed up!

IV. THE CONFERENCE: The Salon Maya in the Conquistador Sheraton Hotel, Guatemala City, was set up with tables in a fish-tail arrangement with a large hand-painted banner in the front of the room. Every table had earphones attached for simultaneous translation. Dee Dickinson, Pat Guild, Bob Samples, Bernice McCarthy, Beatriz De Capdeville, and David Perkins arrived on Saturday, October 24 and Drs. Feuerstein and Machado arrived on Wednesday, October 28th. Elizabeth Benedict, a participant in the Human Capacities Program, came to lead Tai Chi exercises throughout the conference.

The whole conference was audio-taped, 20 tapes in all. The presenters' books we had on hand were sold in a few minutes. The Jewish Community signed up people for an extra five-hour Feuerstein workshop at the end of the Conference.

The conference was designed to present two speakers each day for a three-hour workshop each, one in the morning and one in the afternoon. An attractive, tasty luncheon was included as a part of the conference to encourage participants to share insights with one another. Coffee breaks were scheduled in the middle of the workshops. At the end of each day the participants reflected on their learnings.

On Monday morning people were lined up from the entrance to the Salon de Maya all the way down a long hallway to the street waiting to go through registration. The conference opened with the National Anthem. The President of the ICA Board gave a succinct statement on the purpose of ICA and of this conference. The presenters were introduced and the Mayor's office presented a scroll of welcome from the city to each honored visitor. After the formal opening, Dee Dickinson gave an overview of the whole conference, spoke on the latest cognitive research, the seven intelligences and taught mind-mapping. Her charisma and warmth captured the audience. She set the tone for the conference. The simultaneous translation was excellent and the audience quickly responded to workshop questions. Pat Guild led the afternoon session on different styles of learning. Her humor and clear explanations together with an artful use of an overhead projector held people's rapt interest.

Tuesday began with an early Tai Chi exercise. Much to our surprise, a large number of participants were there early, waiting for it to begin! Next, Bernice McCarthy and Emma de Heiner from Bolivia led the workshop on the 4Mat System. Bernice used slides done in Spanish as well as many humorous illustrations to explain her important research on 4 basic learning styles. In the afternoon, Bob Samples led a workshop on

the open-system approach to learning, using many of his own artistic, professional slides. Bob and Dee led a reflective session at the end of the day. Many people stayed to ask Bob questions. Participants were already button-holing other presenters and asking them for new insights and help. They responded eagerly to the approachability of the presenters.

Throughout the conference, the presenters also accepted 18 different speaking engagements with various university faculties, psychologists, the Ministry of Education, and social workers!

On Wednesday Beatriz De Capdeville gave her workshop entirely in Spanish and talked about the Venezuelan Project in Education. There were many practical exercises on how to think. People couldn't get enough of these exercises. In the afternoon, David Perkins, who also worked on the Venezuelan Project, gave a clear, engaging workshop on how creativity functions in human beings. David took a number of bows before a thunderous applause. The real emotional highpoint occurred in the middle of David's workshop. Drs. Feuerstein and Machado entered the room. When the participants realized who they were, they slowly stood as a body and applauded and applauded. The two great men were overwhelmed at the response. Their presence alone ensured total participation at their presentations the next day.

Thursday after Tai Chi in a packed seminar room set for 400 people, Feuerstein "wowed" the whole audience with his presence. In his inimitable black beret and long white beard, he told people how his research proved that anyone can learn at any age. He highlighted this statement with simple and stirring personal examples. As if this weren't enough, Dr. Machado stepped onto the platform in the afternoon and gave a one hour and 15 minute emotional speech on "It Can Be Done!". The whole audience rose to their feet, applauding and cheering for 10 minutes. Only a Latin American of such stature could have captured their hearts the way Dr. Machado did!

The conference ended with a short workshop evaluating the conference and discussing follow-up possibilities. Most of the participants handed in their evaluations; 100% of the evaluations were positive; the majority of people wanted to volunteer for experimental projects, courses and other conferences. To formally close the conference, the presenters received gifts and representatives of different sectors gave testimonials.

150 participants stayed on that evening and Friday morning for a five-hour workshop with Dr. Feuerstein. He explained his rather complex but successful system. He invited people to attend a three-week workshop in Israel in July, 1988 to train master teachers in his system. This workshop will be in English and Spanish. He does not sell his methods in a bookstore. He keeps strict control by training only master teachers (or "Mediators") who after long training, teach others. These methods now being used in 56 countries are perhaps the most successful in the world.

V. FOLLOW-UP: What does one do after such an exciting and once-in-a-lifetime event? We are clear that this conference was unique. It was designed to open up the possibilities available in education. The role of ICA now is to help in whatever projects the Guatemalans choose to do. Some courses may be offered here to explore these new methods more deeply. It may be possible to send a few people to Venezuela or even to Israel, and it is certainly possible to catalyze pilot projects in the private schools. We already find ourselves in the new role of educational consultants.

We read through the evaluations and discovered many possibilities. Some participants are already working on a program to get trained as master teachers in the Feuerstein methods, others want to start a resource center of new materials that can be distributed throughout Guatemala; others want to start pilot projects in their schools and in rural projects; others want to learn more about the Machado Venezuelan Project and how to apply it across Guatemala. We are calling together 15 key people to talk through the next steps. We have received additional books and are arranging for them to be sold through local bookstores. We are arranging with Xerox to photocopy selected articles, pamphlets and books. A new bibliography will be created with a price list to mail out to all the participants. It is safe to say that the next few months are filled with new possibilities!

The explosion in New Education during the past 20 years is, perhaps, one of the most crucial evolutions of the late 20th century. It is important to all of our strategies. The fact that we had all sectors of society present in this conference indicates that new education is a key to all four communities. Jean Houston has suggested that "we were created as an Order to care for a multi-complex society which is now rapidly coming into being." In the field of New Education, all the sciences and disciplines are now coming together for the first time in human history and giving us the tools we need to carry on our work.

