

The Territory Chapters Begin The Australian Capital Territory Chapter

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It is in the chapters that members most commonly experience the fellowship that the College aims to provide, and it is at chapter level that the involvement of members in educational projects has most commonly occurred.

G. W. Bassett¹

Following the foundation of the (then) Australian College of Education (ACE) in May 1959, the Founders' Convention issued an invitation for the formation of Chapters in the States and the Australian Capital Territory (ACT). By the time the ACT was ready to form its Chapter late in 1961, the mainland States had Chapters and Tasmania was also in the process of forming one. While a full set of the early documentation is not in the College Archive, there is enough in the way of minutes of general and committee meetings from 1962 and 1963 to show how the new Chapter very quickly established itself alongside those of the states despite its relatively small education population and the lack of any central education bodies through which it could work.

The Archive also holds a letter, dated 22 November 1960, from Dr J. R. Darling to Prime Minister Menzies which seems to refer to such lacks². Darling was seeking the Prime Minister's support for the newly inaugurated College of Education and he went on to say 'Now we are presently poorly represented in Canberra, but as you know, the educational world in Canberra is difficult to deal with. We do, however, have the enthusiastic support of Archbishop (Eris) O'Brien at least'. It was O'Brien and a small number of equally enthusiastic College members who went on to form the ACT Chapter.

The inaugural meeting of the Chapter was held on 28 November 1961 at the Australian National University (ANU) with twenty four members of the College present. Professor C. E. Moorhouse, a Vice-President of the College, took the Chair for what began as a meeting of the Australian College of Education being held in the ACT.³ After outlining the aims and objectives of the College together with some of the activities being carried on by State Chapters, he emphasized how valuable the College was in bringing together educators from different fields. The Rev. Mr T. H. Timpson, the Secretary of the College, explained the criteria for membership and the method of admittance to the College.

It was then moved and carried unanimously that the members present should constitute themselves a Chapter of the Australian College of Education. Professor H. Burton was elected as Chairman of the new Chapter and on his taking the Chair, the meeting became the inaugural meeting of the ACT Chapter. Miss G. E. Pendred and Archbishop E. M. O'Brien were elected as Vice-Chairmen, Mr P. J. McKeon as Honorary Secretary, Mr C. G. Meckiff as Honorary Treasurer and Mr T. J. O'Connell, Br N. Landener, Mr G. F. Wynn and Professor T. A. Sutherland as Committee members. The discussion moved to possible activities for the Chapter, and Mr Timpson outlined the College Project on the Teaching Profession which was to be the theme of the next Annual Conference in

Melbourne in 1962. He explained that each mainland Chapter had already agreed to take responsibility for coordinating one of five topics dealing with teachers in schools, with further research to be shared by all Chapters.

The first committee meeting quickly identified the four main issues that were to dominate the beginning years. It was clear that the Chapter would have to begin building up membership within the ACT, engage immediately in the College Project and look to other projects of particular significance within the Territory. In addition, the College Council had requested that the 1964 Annual Conference should be held in Canberra so preparation for that significant event became an increasingly urgent matter for the new Chapter.

Membership

An early discussion on membership indicated that the ACT should soon be able to produce some fifty members and the Chapter was encouraged to look to nominating those within the Territory with the necessary qualifications and background. In an early discussion on the election of Fellows, there was general agreement that greater emphasis should be placed upon practising school teachers being on the list of Fellows. Measures were taken to promote the activities of the Chapter through a Chapter Bulletin, first published in March 1962, detailing the College Project, and what other Chapters were doing, together with news from the College Council. In order to attract wider interest and to promote fellowship amongst Territory educators, a number of the general meetings were preceded by a dinner and a visiting speaker, and members were encouraged to bring a guest.

Numbers grew slowly however, and in his report to the Annual General Meeting (AGM) at the end of 1963, the Chairman spoke of the need for more members. He suggested that the Chapter should possibly undertake 'some research activity that was potent to the ACT', an idea that was later to lead to a number of significant local investigations that were enhanced by the great advantage the Chapter had of its accessibility to federal politicians, government and administrative leaders and personnel, and to senior education administrators. By July 1964 the Chapter had 42 members.

The College Project

After collecting details of what the State Chapters were already doing, the ACT Chapter set up steering committees into four of the nominated sections in order to come up with suitable aspects for detailed investigation. Eventually, however, it was decided, most likely because of the small Chapter membership, to proceed with just two topics and that the Territory's contribution to the Project would be concerned with 'The quality of teachers' and 'The special objectives of the education of teachers'. In due course the Chapter also assisted in getting Canberra schools involved in the national statistical survey of the number and quality of teachers that formed part of the College Project.

The Secretary attended the 1962 Annual Conference to report on what the Chapter was proposing to do regarding the College Project. Several other members also attended and comments in the subsequent minutes reveal something of the size of the Project and the difficulties involved in it. It was reported that the discussions about the College Project were 'considered chaotic... Objectivity was not over obvious and too often the parochial view was thrust forward...' and concluded with the hope that 'when the findings of the Project Committee are published, they will be in the form of good summaries, or at least with the mountains of material cut down to a reasonable size'.

Local Projects

The first opportunity for the Chapter to become involved in a local educational issue arose early in 1962 when Miss Gladys Pendred drew attention to the proposal for the establishment of the Canberra Teachers College which had been presented to the Prime Minister's Department by a committee appointed by a public meeting, a matter which the minutes note attracted 'much discussion'. Chapter representatives entered into discussions on this issue with the planning committee, the ANU and the Committee on Tertiary Education, to further the establishment of such an institution and in due course Miss Pendred chaired a sub-committee to 'arrange exploratory talks with the Prime Minister' on the issue.

The list of possible activities for 1963 included investigations into new educational equipment, the use of television and teaching machines, requirements for the teaching of poetry in secondary schools, the importance of teaching English and new applications in mathematics and science education. In preparing the program for 1964 the committee was directed to consider examining education at all levels in Canberra, a proposal that was later to lead, for example, to such a significant aspect as the examination of possibility of the junior college as an alternative to existing six-year high schools.

The 1964 Annual Conference

From the beginning of 1963, planning for the Annual Conference of the College became a major issue. By March, the Committee had arranged for Rev. J. C. Tyrrel to be the Conference Secretary and tentative bookings for accommodation and meeting rooms were in hand. Now the Chapter needed to know from Council about the theme and 'the speakers to adorn it' so that the Chapter's responsibilities might be finalised. By September, the theme 'Australia and Its Neighbours' had been decided upon and the committee's suggestion that the Rt Hon. P. M. C. Hasluck, Commonwealth Minister of External Affairs, should be asked to deliver the Buntine Oration was accepted. By the AGM in November, four tours had been arranged as had church services, the reception, the College dinner and a number of local educational book and equipment displays.

At the beginning of 1964, much of the local side of affairs was in readiness for the Chapter's hosting of this major College event. In thanking the ACT Chapter for its part in organising the Conference, the College President, Dr H. S. Wyndham added 'From many quarters, comments had been received that this was the best Conference the College had yet had.'⁴

This conference was also seen to be of considerable national significance on account of the topic. The College published the addresses in a book titled *Australia And Its Neighbours – An Educational Aspect*,⁵ the foreword to which noted:

When the conference was over, most of its members realized how little we do know of the educational aspects of Australia's relationship to its Asian neighbours. The difficulties which we face in providing the best education for all our students are great enough, but they are insignificant when compared with those faced by countries whose efforts to make adults and children even literate are overwhelmed by over-increasing populations who cannot be reached by any formal education. Australia's dilemma is that it has a responsibility to its own citizens and to citizens of the world to make

its education system the best it possibly can, and yet, at the same time, it feels a sense of obligation to give help to its neighbours in desperate need.

As is now known, Australia has continued to examine what part it has to play and what contribution it can and should make towards assisting its Asian neighbours in aspects of education. The Australian College of Education has taken a particular interest in this matter, especially in relation to the Territory of Papua New Guinea where it was later to establish firstly a Division, and in due course, a Chapter.

It is clear from the events of the first few years that the ACT Chapter was well fulfilling the role of a Chapter of the Australian College of Education both within the ACT where it provided an educational focus and at the wider national level.

References

1. Jecks D.A. (ed), 1974, p.226, *Influences in Australian Education*, Carrol's, Perth.
2. Australian College of Educators Official Archives (ACEOA) Box 901-01
3. All references to meetings of the ACT Chapter are to be found in ACEOA Boxes 901-01 and 901-02
4. Australian College of Education – Proceedings of the 1964 Annual Conference And the Fifth Annual Report, 1964, p.11
5. The Australian College of Education, *Australia And Its Neighbours – An Educational Aspect*, 1965, F. W. Cheshire, Melbourne, Canberra, Sydney

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