

Five Decades of Professional Achievement – ACE South Australian Branch 1959–2009

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Introduction

It is fascinating, gratifying and professionally stimulating to peruse the archival records of the South Australian Chapter of the College and to see how the enthusiasm of the original members has been passed on to and maintained by their successors. Despite some gaps in the records, there is ample evidence of an enthusiastic, even vibrant, fledgling professional group responding to the educational needs of its members, of its institutions and of society.

Early years

When a large group of senior educators from across Australia met in Geelong, Victoria, in May 1959 it contained eleven representatives from South Australia. The meeting, known variously as the Corio Convention or the Founders Convention, resulted in the formation of the Australian College of Education.

On their return home the South Australian Founders group held a series of unofficial meetings in preparation for the establishment of a South Australian (SA) Chapter of the College. Great enthusiasm existed among the group which contained a number of influential people in the State, independent, Catholic and tertiary education fields, including the Vice-Chancellor of the University of Adelaide, the State Director of Education, the Director of Catholic Education and the headmasters of some prestigious schools such as Adelaide High School, Scotch College and St Peters College.

Later that same year the SA Chapter was formed and held its first meeting on 20 November 1959. The first Chapter Committee contained seven Founder members, thus ensuring that the ideals of the Founders Convention would be kept to the fore. Rev. Michael Scott SJ became the first President, with Albert (Alby) Jones as Secretary and Ruth Gibson as Treasurer. While recruitment and expansion of membership remained key elements of Chapter planning in the early 1960s, they were far from the dominating concerns of meetings, discussions and activities.

Among the issues before members was the Matriculation debate relating to changes proposed for the University of Adelaide. This was an ongoing and controversial matter which had the potential to polarise members of the embryonic Chapter from such diverse backgrounds. At the same time members had a national task on their hands. This was to provide major input to the College project entitled, 'Teachers in Australian Schools'.

An important stimulus to the cohesion and professional growth of the local group was the decision to seek and be granted the role of hosting the Second Annual National Conference of the College, held in May 1961. Minutes of meetings and annual reports of the Chapter give a sense of excitement, involvement and achievement in that project.

During the 1960s the Chapter Committee endeavoured to schedule up to five Chapter meetings per year. These were extremely well attended, with numbers ranging from 50 to 90. Meetings featured prominent overseas educators visiting

Australia, interstate education identities and local educators returning from overseas educational tours and assignments. A newsletter was also launched, especially to keep country members abreast of ideas and activities.

This decade saw the opening of the new building of the Adelaide Teachers College and the establishment of Flinders University. At the national level it also witnessed a major innovation in Australian education with the commencement of substantial funding for science laboratories and libraries in secondary schools. Local Chapter members had been heavily and fruitfully involved in the preliminary work on these projects, particularly in the preparation of submissions and research data on the state of science facilities and staffing in schools.

1970s

It would be gratifying to be able to state that the euphoria of the early few years continued into the following decade. However, in the eleventh Annual Report, the Chapter President expressed veiled disappointment at the lack of activity by members on issues suggested by Council for consideration:

There has however been little debate or penetrating discussion of the kind that might be expected of such a body of distinguished educators ... The quest for identity must be pursued with resolution.

It is difficult to see the reasons for such pessimism. At the beginning of the decade members were involved in two major local projects – Migrant Education and The Disadvantaged Child. At the same time a number of senior members of the Chapter were heavily committed in implementing, evaluating and assessing the science and libraries programs so strongly funded by the Commonwealth.

There is little doubt that the establishment of the Schools Commission in 1973 had an enormous impact not only on schools and their communities but also on education administrators, many of whom were very active in Chapter activities. The virtual revolution in educational funding, resource provision and practice had to affect the very foundations of educational service.

Sadly, this period in the Chapter's history is not well documented. There is a large gap in archival material relevant to the years 1975–1978. Nevertheless, it is clear from anecdotal evidence and from references in the then College publication, *Unicorn*, that the period was not bereft of stimulating professional activity. A real highlight of 1975 was a well-attended and significant residential weekend conference held at the Raywood Inservice Centre in March. The purpose of the conference was to outline and discuss the role of the College in all its facets. Papers were presented by various experts outlining the historical background and aims of the College and its role in South Australia – in general, in education, in Colleges of Advanced Education, in TAFE and in universities.

Much of the professional activity of 1976 and 1977 was geared to the preparation and presentation of the 1977 ACE National Conference in Adelaide, with the theme 'Community Education'. It is also clear from the 1979–1980 Annual Report that some concerted efforts were made to cater for the needs of country members by holding meetings in a variety of rural centres. Mention is also made of providing meetings at various types of educational institutions to allow members to hear directly from those involved in different educational endeavours. These included discussions on health and welfare and religious education.

1980s

By the early 1980s SA Chapter membership had grown to over 500 and activities were following a reasonably consistent annual pattern. These included holding up to five meetings per year; allocations of financial grants to members or groups of members undertaking significant research projects; involving a wide range of members in preparing submissions to State and national research and educational enquiries; and encouragement for country members by supporting regional cluster groups not only financially but also by providing significant interstate and overseas speakers.

On this last matter, the Chapter Committee put much time and effort into regional support. Two formal regional groups were established – one for Whyalla/Port Augusta/Port Pirie and the other for the South East. A cluster interest group was also formed for the Riverland, while Murray Bridge and other rural centres were at times used as locations for an annual conference for members in these areas.

The 1980s saw an enormous range of local and national issues and enquiries requiring input from various sectors of the College. These issues included Women in Education; Education of Girls; Single Sex Schools (and Single Sex Classes in Coeducational Schools); Two-year Matriculation in South Australian Schools; Raywood Inservice Centre Review; Tertiary Education Review; Post-compulsory Education; and a National Plan of Action for Women in Tertiary Education. All of these were treated seriously by the Chapter Committee, with the result that many members provided significant input in the preparation of submissions and reports and in personal appearances before various commissions of enquiry.

A highlight of 1986 was the ACE National Conference held in Adelaide. This was significant in that the year was the sesquicentenary of the founding of South Australia. It was also innovative in that it became a joint conference with the Australian Council for Educational Administration (ACEA). This type of co-operative activity was the subject of further experimentation in the following year by holding joint meetings (even an Annual General Meeting) with the ACEA and the World Education Fellowship.

The move of the College Secretariat from Melbourne to Canberra in April 1988 received the enthusiastic support of the SA Chapter, which also expressed high praise for the sound contribution of Dr Robert Broadbent, the long-standing Executive Director of the College, who relinquished the position on the move to Canberra. On the local level there was a further innovation at this time, with the establishment of a part-time secretariat for the Chapter. In association with this, the TAFE National Centre for Research and Development provided space and facilities at its Leabrook premises for use by the secretariat. Additional staffing for the project was provided by retired Fellows. Although the service was not a long-term venture, it was considered a 'unique period in the history of the South Australian Chapter'.

In the area of innovation, mention must be made of the sponsorship by the Chapter of the 'Plain English Speaking Award'. While this was an ongoing national project aimed at encouraging public debate by youth, its success at the local level owed much to the commitment and organisational support of the Chapter Secretary, Peter Davies, over many years. This project also used the services of a large number of Chapter members in its preparation, presentation and judging. The activity was but one example of the outstanding contribution of Peter Davies as Chapter Secretary over eighteen years.

It is fitting that the final year of the decade saw the inauguration of one of the most important and successful ventures of the Chapter – the biennial A W Jones Oration (originally known as the A W Jones Lecture). This was established to honour the contribution of Dr A W (Alby) Jones, the first Honorary Secretary of the Chapter, a Founder member, and recipient of an Honorary Fellowship and the College Medal. The inaugural oration was presented by Professor Hedley Beare in 1989 and the enduring practice has seen further contributions by outstanding persons in education and related fields.

1990s

Mention has been made of frequent references in SA Chapter Annual Reports to the efforts of the Chapter hierarchy to ensure that country members were included in College activities and ongoing professional development. It appears from the 1990 report that the effectiveness of these efforts had not been sustained. The reason given for the decline was the transfer of key personnel from country to city postings. Nevertheless, efforts continued to involve country members through regional seminars (notably at Whyalla, Penola and Berri) and seeking input from them to Chapter responses to the many national projects and discussion papers.

A feature of the early 1990s was a range of activities emphasising the relationship between education and the business/industry sector. One of these was an Education–Industry Forum in 1992. Two years later, in cooperation with the Employers Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the Chapter formed an Education and Business Forum. One of this Forum's initiatives was to sponsor a seminar entitled 'Education and Training – The New Agenda'. The impetus for strengthening the ties between education, industry and training can be attributed largely to Chapter stalwart Lyall Fricker. A former member of the ACT Chapter, Lyall became Director of TAFE in South Australia, President of the South Australian Chapter, a College Medallist and a tireless contributor to the Chapter's activities long after his retirement. He was a strong advocate of bringing Chapter activities to country members.

At about this same time the Chapter reconstituted its defunct Current Issues Committee to cover the spectrum of education in the State. This committee's purpose was to identify crucial current topics and to develop seminars and professional development activities related to those topics more readily. In similar vein, a Council of Education Associations of South Australia was formed. The Chapter became a member of this group so as to 'maintain the professional expertise of its members and also to raise the standard of the profession wherever possible'.

The year 1993 saw an exciting new initiative, in a project entitled 'The Wisdom of the Elders', undertaken in association with Radio 5UV. The project involved a series of interviews, hosted by Chapter member Tony Ryan, with educators of note. The first 'wise elder' interviewed was Dr Alby Jones. The scheme has proved to be an outstanding success and has continued to this time, generating much national interest. Soon after its commencement the program, in conjunction with the Oral History Unit of the National Library of Australia, was expanded, again under the direction of Tony Ryan, to become a National Oral History Project (Conversations) with a twofold purpose. One was 'to capture ... the reminiscences of key people in education in Australia; the other ... to compile an oral history of the origins and development of the College'.

This period also saw the inauguration of the 'Tappa Manninendi Award' (a medal). The process of awarding the medal involved liaison between the Chapter and the University of South Australia in the selection of an Indigenous education trainee and

presentation of the medal at the Annual General Meeting of the Chapter. The award continued until 2006.

Throughout the 1990s, as in previous years, the Chapter Committee accepted the responsibility of coordinating responses to the many and varied projects and discussion papers initiated at national level of the College or by Commonwealth authorities. These included School Development Planning; Excellence in Teaching Studies awards; Senate Enquiry into the Status of Teaching; Order of Australia Association's project 'Australia – my Vision'; and Whereas the People, a project of the Civic Experts Group established by the Prime Minister.

Meanwhile the Program Committee of the Chapter maintained the trend of presenting professional activities which were challenging, diverse and successful. Of special significance were the sessions on Potentials of Youth; Putting Technology to Use; Self-managed Schools; Community Involvement in Schools; Status of Teaching; Electronic Knowledge and Education; Education and the World of Work; and Indigenous Education. Another highlight was the presentation of the A W Jones Oration by Dr Lois (now Lowitja) O'Donoghue, who spoke on the subject, 'Towards a New Understanding of Indigenous Australia'.

In the midst of these many activities the Chapter again managed to host the very successful ACE National Conference in 1995. All of these tasks were aided by the production of a *Policies and Procedures Handbook* which had been prepared to assist committees with meeting procedures, the orientation of new committee members and the organisation and generation of responses to the many demands made on the Chapter.

2000 onwards

Appropriately, the beginning of the new century saw the Chapter Committee develop a Strategic Plan for 2000–2002, with the mission of the College becoming 'the arbiter of quality in (South) Australian education'. This plan was prepared as a template for the development of a strong and vibrant educational group to promote and practise the highest ideals in educational thought and practice.

From the late 1990s Chapter members had been involved, along with all College and Council members, in serious debate on replacing the ACE Memorandum and Articles of Association with a College Constitution. A Draft Constitution was accepted by a meeting of College members during the national conference in July 2000. By October 2001, the ACE National Council resolved to approve the Draft Constitution in principle and to consult with College members up to February 2002. At the April 2002 Annual General Meeting of the College the new Constitution was adopted.

Effectively the new Constitution updated the objects and purposes of the College, amended membership categories and revised processes concerning National Council operations. Of special significance, of course, was the change of name to The Australian College of Educators. One other significant change in nomenclature was that Chapters were to be named as Branches. A further amendment in 2008 brought regional groups under the control of the national body.

This latest period of the SA Branch's history has had a number of highlights, not only in terms of educational significance but also of more general social outcomes. One was the 2003 A W Jones Oration given by Professor Graham Martin of Queensland University. Entitled 'Rhetoric and Reality – Developing and Maintaining Mental Health in Young People', it led to an important research project, 'Developing mentally

healthy children', carried out by Branch Committee members. This project, which involved a survey of principals and a sample of teachers in all SA primary schools, was partly funded by the ACE Foundation, with additional support from the Australian Principals Association Professional Development Council and the ACE SA Branch. The next of these orations, in 2005, was given by Professor Freda Briggs of the University of Adelaide and related to child sexual abuse. This was particularly significant in the context of the major enquiry on that matter initiated by the State Government.

As in previous decades, the SA Branch Committee continued to show its willingness to broaden the base of activities for members. In 2006 it embarked on a Jury Education project. This undertaking was funded by the Law Foundation of South Australia, a sub-group of the Law Society of South Australia. In the same year South Australia again hosted the National Conference of the College.

One of the most significant activities involving South Australian ACE members was initiated in 2003. Loosely termed the 'Archives Project', it stemmed from an agreement that the Archives of the College would be housed and managed in South Australia on behalf of National Council. Since that date, premises have been leased at the Lutheran Archives in Bowden and the project has been directed and organised by Tony Ryan. Apart from being a repository for material relating to the College, the collection has also been accessed by members from other States as well as from SA, and also by a small group of Fellows acting as a reference group to prepare briefing papers and documents of historical significance.

A further initiative of the Branch, commemorating the contribution to South Australian education of Blessed Mary MacKillop, is the MacKillop Medal, launched in 2004 and presented biennially, which recognises an outstanding South Australian educator who is also a member of the College. The inaugural medal was presented in 2004 to Professor Alan Reid of the University of South Australia. The 2006 medal was awarded to Pam Ronan, Principal of Tenison College, Mount Gambier, followed in 2008 by Louise Bywaters, Education Consultant. Medallists present a public oration on a topic of their choice.

As the decade moves towards its conclusion, the SA Branch Committee has continued to ensure that SA members are appropriately catered for through meetings, addresses, discussion groups and projects of variety and importance, as well as opportunities to socialise.

Conclusion

In any endeavour, a golden anniversary is generally an occasion for celebrating achievement. As a State group of the Australian College of Educators, the South Australian Branch has good cause for celebration. Many changes have occurred in the fifty years of existence of the Chapter/Branch. Those changes have honoured, reflected and broadened the vision, enthusiasm and professionalism of the Founders, even in ways the Founder members could not have envisaged.

This summary of fifty years of existence and growth has referred to names of a few of the outstanding contributors who have led the South Australian Branch in its quest for professional excellence. At the risk of causing offence by non-inclusion, a few additional names need to be added by virtue of contribution and/or position.

The first is that of Ruth Rogers, the third of the South Australian recipients of the College Medal. (As mentioned earlier, Alby Jones and Lyall Fricker were the other

two.) Then there are the four local members who have served with distinction as National President of the College – Dr A W Jones, Professor Jonathan Anderson, Professor Jillian Maling and Professor Denise Bradley. Two further distinguished members who have spent part of their careers in South Australia are Professor Paul Hughes and Dr Jean Blackburn.

To this list could be added the names of office holders, SA Chapter/Branch Committee members, Fellows, project coordinators, seminar leaders, conference contributors, researchers and members of innumerable working parties over the five decades. All have cause to rejoice and celebrate the giant strides made in achieving the goals of the College by:

- providing a strong voice for the profession
- promoting professional standards
- recognising excellence in professional practice
- fostering the professional learning of educators
- enhancing the status of the profession.

Reference Notes

The main bases for the information in this article are the Annual Reports of the many Presidents of the SA Chapter/Branch Committee. On occasion, verification of detail has been obtained from various issues of *Unicorn*, the now defunct journal of the College. The College Archivist, Tony Ryan, has also been a valuable source of information. In a few cases opinions and conclusions are based on the memory of the author who had professional membership and close involvement in the SA Branch for forty of the fifty years under consideration.

All direct references are from the relevant Annual Reports, all of which are contained in the Australian College of Educators Official Archive, Box 504.

Following an early career in education, James Dwyer undertook studies in librarianship and worked at the National Library of Australia and subsequently as Chief Librarian of the Canberra Public Library Service. He returned to education as Superintendent of Curriculum (Libraries) in the Education Department of South Australia for 25 years and later as Executive Director of the South Australian Institute for Catholic Teacher Education, retiring in 1997. He was a member of the Libraries Committee of the Australian Schools Commission, Chairman of the Australian Schools Catalogue Information Service, Chairman of the Australian Bibliographic Network Committee, and President of the Australian Library and Information Association. He was elected Fellow of the Australian Library and Information Association in 1982 and Fellow of the Australian College of Educators in 1981.