

## **ACE National Conferences in Adelaide**

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The Australian College of Educators (ACE) has held an Annual National Conference in an Australian State or Territory in each of the past fifty years. Each national conference focused on an educational issue of significance and the Australian College of Educators Official Archives (ACEOA) holds records of programs, reports and publications containing major addresses and papers of significance for each of these occasions. The South Australian Chapter of the ACE has hosted six of these national conferences in Adelaide, the first of which was in 1961, shortly after the formation of the Chapter, and the most recent was in 2006. The details below give an indication of the importance of the national conferences for raising public awareness of educational issues, for providing an opportunity for members of all Chapters to meet for discussion and fellowship and for honouring members through the awarding of Fellowships, Honorary Fellowships and the College Medal.

### **1961: Focus on challenges for teaching in the next 20 years**

The second ACE National Conference was held at the University of Adelaide in May 1961.<sup>1</sup> This was a very significant occasion for both the ACE and the newly formed Chapter as, after a reception by the Lord Mayor of Adelaide and the opening of proceedings by His Excellency, Sir Edwin Bastyan, Governor of South Australia, the Rt Hon. Robert Menzies, then Prime Minister of Australia, gave the Inaugural Address on the conference theme, 'The Challenge to Education in Australia Today'. This was followed by the admission of twenty-one members, including prominent South Australian educators Evan Mander-Jones, Vita Macghey, Fr Michael Scott SJ, Wybert Symonds, Professor John Bishop and Alan Rendell, to the rank of Fellow.

The presence of the Prime Minister was something of a coup for the President, Dr James Darling, who had written to Menzies, 'We would like you to speak on the theme of Australia in the next twenty years and what you, as leader of the country, expect or desire of us, the teachers'.<sup>2</sup> In his address, Menzies made it clear that he was there, not as one who sought to express a government or party point of view but 'as one who has been privileged to have something to do, small enough in all conscience, with recent educational advancement in Australia, and as one with a profound belief in the tremendous significance of the teacher's calling'. He went on to say that he was honoured by the invitation from 'that great teacher, Dr Darling', to make the Inaugural Address and that he considered it 'a singular privilege' to do anything to help or stimulate the teaching profession.

The full text of his address was published in the ACE book, *The Challenge to Australian Education*,<sup>3</sup> the Foreword to which notes that, 'In the midst of a busy life, Menzies found time to prepare an address which was both an inspiration and a challenge'. Also in the publication are the details of the other four addresses given over the next three days. Something of the success of the first Adelaide National Conference can be gauged from the Foreword which notes that:

*It became clear during the Conference that the College itself was being challenged to face serious problems in education in Australia and, as a result, ... members present ... stated quite clearly their belief that, even at this early stage in its history, the Australian College of Education must make an attempt to deal with Australia-wide issues.*

The Foreword went on to note that two such issues were of primary importance – the recruiting and training of teachers and the provision of some forms of tertiary education for the large number of girls and boys who required further education after they left school but at the time did not get it.

In his report on the conference,<sup>4</sup> Dr Darling, after noting that the College existed at both Federal and State levels, went on to say that, although he had thought previously that perhaps nothing could be done at the Federal level, ‘the results of the meetings of the past few days had indicated that a great deal would possibly be done at that level in the future.’ He concluded by thanking the South Australian (SA) Chapter, in particular Fr Michael Scott, the Chairman, and Albert Jones, the Secretary, for the excellent organisation of the Second Annual Conference. It would appear that the first conference in Adelaide was a great success, and that the ACE had, at this very early stage of its existence, considerably advanced its standing as a voice of importance in Australian education through the presence of the Prime Minister, the calibre of the other keynote speakers and the importance of the topic presented.

### **1969: Focus on evaluation in education**

In 1969 the SA Chapter hosted the Tenth Annual Conference of the ACE, once again at the University of Adelaide. The Conference Proceedings booklet<sup>5</sup> noted that the Bonython Hall provided a splendid setting for a brief opening session consisting only of the Official Opening by the Minister for Education and Science, Hon. J Malcolm Fraser, and the admission of thirty Fellows, among whom were noted South Australian educators Douglas Anders, Sr Mary Campion, Lyndon Piddington and Colin Thiele. The shortening of the opening session had been achieved by holding the Presidential Address earlier in the afternoon, thus allowing extended time afterwards for the Presidential Reception and for conversation and fellowship among the members, a move that was reported in the booklet as ‘appreciated generally’ and ‘a pattern which might be followed with advantage at succeeding Conferences’.

In the Presidential Address, Professor William (Bill) Bassett introduced the theme of the conference, ‘Measurement and Assessment in Education’, in which he presented a basic map of evaluation processes covering society, system and institution and an outline of what he saw as the current emphases and deficiencies in evaluating education. The theme was further developed over the next three days by the presentation of twenty-three other papers. Ten of these papers, together with the Presidential Address and a summary of papers and discussions by the incoming President, Dr William (Bill) Radford, Director of the Australian Council for Educational Research, entitled ‘Some Changing Attitudes To and Views On Evaluation and Measurement’, were published by the ACE under the title, *Educational Measurement and Assessment*.<sup>6</sup>

The Proceedings booklet noted that the traditional hospitality of the host State was most evident throughout the conference and that:

*through the provision of entertainment on the Sunday afternoon, the arrangements for tours ... the extensive hospitality afforded to wives of Conference members, ... (and) the atmosphere of the College Dinner, visitors were conscious of a welcome, the cordiality of which was not dissipated in any way by either a bleak spell of weather or a transport strike.*

In summary, the booklet indicated that ‘The extent and precision of the planning by the Conference Organiser (Mr R J Stanley) and the Committee helped to make possible a most worthwhile Conference for the 384 people who attended’.

### **1977: Focus on education and the community**

In 1977 the SA Chapter hosted the Eighteenth National Conference at the University of Adelaide. The program booklet for the Official Opening<sup>7</sup> indicated that the Deputy Chancellor of the University of Adelaide, Hon. Justice Roma Mitchell, welcomed the guests and the Lieutenant Governor of South Australia, Walter Crocker, opened the Conference. The President, Professor Richard Johnson, then admitted thirty-one Fellows, including prominent South Australian educators Rosemary Gracinin, Brian Hannaford, John Steinle and Joan Young, and conferred the very special distinction of an Honorary Fellowship on Albert Jones, the Director-General of Education in South Australia. The text of the citation for Jones noted that he was a founding member of the College, that he became a Fellow in 1962, that he was the first Honorary Secretary of the SA Chapter and later the Chapter President. He was elected to Council in 1967 and served with distinction in the offices of Vice-President, President and immediate Past-President. It noted, too, among his other many activities in education, that he 'has always been concerned with the good of teachers and has seen the development of teachers as the most effective way of achieving this'. It concluded, 'His torrent of ideas, his unflagging energy and his practical wisdom have made him one of the outstanding educators of our generation'. The President then delivered his Address on the conference theme, 'Some Dimensions of Community', in which he asked the conference to define an image of what it is to be a community and the relationship of education to that community.

The ACE published an edited selection of fourteen of the addresses given at the conference under the title, *The Community and Education*,<sup>8</sup> together with the full texts of the Presidential and the Opening Addresses. The Introduction indicates that Crocker's address was printed as a Foreword because 'his words were thoughtful and provoking and relevant to the theme' and Johnson's because 'his words were a challenge and encouragement to every person who heard them'. This book covers a wide range of aspects of the relationship between community and education, schools and their communities and the provision of education in the community beyond schooling. A feature of this conference was the presentation to the delegates, prior to the meeting, of a bulletin with descriptions of seventy school/community projects from across Australia together with a brochure, *Community Education*, which summarised what was already happening in South Australian Government schools.

### **1986: Focus on major dimensions that shape education**

In 1986, the ACE National Conference, which coincided with the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of South Australia, was held at the Flinders University of South Australia and was the second occasion in which the College joined with another key organisation concerned with education, the Australian Council for Educational Administration, to present a joint conference with the theme, 'Contemplation, Celebration and Concern'. In his Annual Report<sup>9</sup> the President, Dr Peter Botsman, noted that 'Whilst many thought this an elusive title it proved a wonderfully adaptive theme for reflecting on achievements and looking forward to new challenges'. He noted that a feature of the conference was the production of a pre-conference resource book which was a valuable foundation against which both speakers and participants could look at the forces that constitute and shape education in Australia. A highlight of this conference was the delivery of the Buntine Oration by Professor Hedley Beare, a former South Australian. Dr Botsman described this oration as 'a memorable occasion in which Professor Beare, in a most eloquent address on "Shared Meanings About Education: The Economic Paradigm Considered" described what ensues when education is redefined in economic terms'.

As usual the ACE published both the Buntine Oration and a selection of other addresses given at the conference. This book, entitled *Shaping Education*,<sup>10</sup> edited by Professor Jonathan Anderson, noted in the Preface that the co-convenors, John Steinle and Gerry O'Callaghan, considered that this, the sesquicentenary year of the State of South Australia, was a fitting occasion 'to challenge participants to examine the past, evaluate the present, and to set a vision for a future in Australian education'. The conference had gathered a group of outstanding individuals from within the education community to lead the discussions and the book brought together the thoughts of these key leaders on the major dimensions that shape education in terms of curriculum, governance, community and human and financial resources. Prominent South Australian educators Fr John Neal, Dr Peter Tillett, John Cusack and Sr Judith Redden were among the forty-three members admitted as Fellows on this occasion.

### **1995: Focus on tomorrow's teachers**

In his report for 1995,<sup>11</sup> the ACE President, Dr Barry McGaw, stated that the national conference held in Adelaide on the theme, 'Tomorrow's Teachers', had 'encouraged a diverse range of presentations focused on the key role of the teacher', noting in particular the keynote addresses made by both international and Australian educators in this process. He went on to say that, in addition to the thirty papers presented, 'an interesting social program, including a conference dinner, was provided' and that the conference convenor, Lyall Fricker, who played host to the proceedings, was ably assisted by members of the SA Chapter Committee.

The President noted, too, that a highlight of the conference was the presentation of the A W Jones Lecture by Dr Lois (now Lowitja) O'Donoghue, Chair of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission, on the topic, 'Towards a new understanding of Indigenous Australia'.

At the ceremony for the conferral of Fellowships, the South Australian Governor, Her Excellency, Dame Roma Mitchell, presented fellowship certificates to forty-two new Fellows, including prominent SA educators John Bartram, John Butler, Denis Ralph, and Noel Volk. The College Medal was then presented to Ruth Rogers, whose citation noted that 'Throughout a long career that included experience as a teacher, lecturer and administrator, Ms Rogers has made an outstanding contribution to early childhood education'.

The ACE published six of the keynote addresses given at the conference under the title, *Tomorrow's Teachers*,<sup>12</sup> together with a comprehensive introductory overview by Robin Ryan, a member of the 1995 National Conference Planning Committee. The Introduction to this volume noted that three dominant themes that emerged from the keynote addresses from speakers chosen from all these areas were:

- the importance of early childhood education, and the adequacy of the preparation of early childhood education teachers
- the importance of vocational education and above all its appropriate integration with general education
- the importance of technology, its links with other elements in the educational process and with the wider society, and the time lags involved in its introduction to the education environment.

It went on to say that these themes 'represent the outstanding issues facing policy makers, teacher educators and practitioners today, for tomorrow' and concluded that 'the conference seems to have been judged by its participants – about a quarter of whom were not College members – a considerable success'.

## **2006: Focus on relationships between teachers, teaching and futures**

The 2006 National Conference of the ACE was held at the Holiday Inn in the centre of Adelaide. Departing from earlier custom, some of the papers are to be found on the ACE website<sup>13</sup> in the Peer-reviewed Papers section (formerly the Online Refereed Papers section) rather than in the kind of printed materials in the ACEOA from the other five conferences held in Adelaide. However, the ACEOA does hold a copy of the Conference Program and printed copies from the website of the preliminary advertising of the conference and a report from the SA Branch President, Louise Bywaters,<sup>14</sup> who convened the conference. The logistical aspects were managed by the Events Team of the Australian Principals Association Professional Development Council (now known as Principals Australia) and the President's report thanked them for 'an outstanding job with the organisation'.

The theme for 2006 was 'Teachers Shaping Futures, Futures Shaping Teaching' and the *Teaching Australia*-sponsored keynote address, entitled 'A Passion for Teaching', was presented by Professor Christopher Day from the University of Nottingham. The program booklet contains full details about the keynote speakers together with abstracts of addresses and comprehensive notes on the research and practitioner papers and panel discussions for each day. The program was organised by members of the SA Chapter Committee. The Branch President's report noted the conference was 'a resounding success', with delegates being 'treated to some fine presentations in a warm and friendly atmosphere that built genuine collegial connections, and a real chance to present or listen in a formal professional setting'. It concluded that 'The final program of research papers was outstanding and really presented delegates with a rich selection of sessions'.

The Buntine Oration was presented for the second time in Adelaide, on this occasion by Laureate Professor Peter Doherty, the distinguished scientist and immunologist. The website report notes that this was a highlight of this conference with the topic, 'Plagues, Pestilences and Influenzas and their Influences on the Future', being 'a confronting and very interesting presentation'.

Unlike at the other national conferences held in Adelaide, no Fellowships were awarded in 2006. This was because recently legislated privacy laws in South Australia required a change in the criteria for the nomination of Fellows and so nominations put forward could not be processed for that particular year. One aspect that did not change, however, was the involvement of the Governor of South Australia, on this occasion Her Excellency Marjorie Jackson-Nelson, who hosted a cocktail reception at Government House prior to the conference dinner.

## **Conclusion**

It is clear from the above details that these six ACE Annual National Conferences gave the SA Chapter the opportunity to host discussions on educational issues in congenial settings for members and Fellows from other Chapters as well as from their own. All other Chapters have hosted national conferences, too, and the ACEOA holds documents relating to the topics raised and the publications that followed. While the nature of publications is changing to keep pace with technological developments, the archived documents and publications, together with reports and other materials, illustrate how, over a period of fifty years now, the ACE has been at the forefront in bringing together on a regular basis those concerned with advancing educational thinking.

## References

- 1 Program details are to be found in the ACE booklet *Proceedings of the Second Annual Conference*, Australian College of Educators Official Archives (ACEOA) Box 004-02
- 2 Menzies quoted these words in the introduction to his Address
- 3 ACE Publication, 1961, ACEOA, Archives Copy
- 4 ACEOA Box 004-02
- 5 Program details and reports are to be found in the ACE booklet *Proceedings of the Annual Conference and Tenth Annual Report*, ACEOA Box 004-27
- 6 ACE Publication, 1969, ACEOA Archives Copy
- 7 ACE booklet *Eighteenth Annual Conference Official Opening and Presidential Address*, ACEOA, Box 004-19
- 8 ACE Publication, 1977, ACEOA Archives Copy
- 9 ACE booklet, *1986 Annual Report and Balance Sheet*, ACEOA Box 004-27
- 10 ACE Publication, 1987, ACEOA Archives Copy
- 11 ACE booklet *Annual Report & Financial Statements 1995*, ACEOA Box 004-32
- 12 ACE Publication, 1995, ACEOA Archives Copy
- 13 [www.austcolled.com.au](http://www.austcolled.com.au); go to Articles and Publications and then search on individual numbers between ORA38 and ORA50, omitting ORA43. Members should be able to download these through the members' area of the site.
- 14 ACEOA Box 518-08

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