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The Territory Chapters Begin The Northern 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 commonly occur.

G W Bassett¹

This is the final in the series of Archival Briefs on the beginning of Australian College of Education (ACE) Chapters in the Australian Territories. The beginnings of the Australian Capital Territory and Papua New Guinea Chapters were dealt with in Brief Numbers 01 and 04.

By the early 1970s, the ACE (now renamed the Australian College of Educators) had been in operation for over ten years and all states and other territories had established Chapters; it is no surprise, therefore, that ACE members residing in the Northern Territory (NT) saw the advantage of having a local chapter that could allow them the fellowship and involvement in educational projects that other members enjoyed. The first moves in this direction appear to have begun in August 1971 when a meeting of the NT Institute of Inspectors of Schools suggested the convening of a meeting with the aim of forming a subgroup associated with the ACE. Details of this and subsequent informal meetings over the next two years are to be found in a history of the NT Chapter commissioned by the Chapter Committee in 1976 and written in 1978 by I R Stevenson.² In 1979 this article was published under the title 'The Northern Territory Chapter of the Australian College of Education – A Brief History' in *Unicorn*, the then Bulletin of the ACE, a copy of which is held in the Australian College of Educators Official Archives (ACEOA).³ With such a valuable document already available, this Brief needs only to outline the steps towards chapterhood that the *Unicorn* article describes, augmented by supporting material from other documents now held in the ACEOA.

Stevenson's article begins with details of the social and political background against which, he noted, 'the NT Chapter's development must be seen'. A major such development occurred in 1973 when A W Jones, Director-General of Education in South Australia and President of the ACE, visited Darwin on 23 October and was invited by Dr H Beare, Director of NT Education, to meet with those interested in an association with the ACE, 'to advise them on the best way to establish a Northern Territory group, perhaps a Chapter'.⁴ A series of letters on file indicates that Jones not only encouraged the group to apply for this but also took steps to overcome the main obstacle standing in the way of the NT becoming a Chapter immediately. This was a legal matter as the Articles of Association of the ACE allowed the College to have only eight chapters and, as the Papua New Guinea Chapter had been established in 1972, eight already existed. At its first meeting for 1974, the ACE Council created a Northern Territory Division of the College from 1 January that year in order to provide at least some form of association with the ACE for NT educators, pending eventual chapterhood.⁵

Dr Beare then wrote to Jones to thank him for his 'interest in and support for the Northern Territory Division', to inform him that a dinner, attended by 31 members, had been held to inaugurate the Division and that it had been decided to form an

Interim Committee pending the clarification of the membership of 43 others interested in joining. The Interim Committee, under Beare's chairmanship, held its first meeting later in February, set up a 'Panel of Censors' to review new applications for College membership and also organised a series of professional activities.⁶ By August it was decided that a full committee should be in place and an inaugural dinner was held on 8 August to elect the officers. The minutes of this special occasion indicate that 73 people were present, including 34 NT members and nominees for membership together with such guests as the Secretary of the Australian Department of Education and the Directors-General from all the states, and from New Zealand.⁷ Dr Beare was elected Chairman, E A Robertson as Deputy Chairman, W J McGrath as Secretary and W J Doherty as Treasurer. H Garner, L Smith, Fr I T Doneley, D Davidson and A Hall were elected as committee members. A W Jones, President of the ACE, was guest speaker and, after declaring the Northern Territory Division officially inaugurated, he spoke of eventual chapterhood once PNG gained independence, thus opening the opportunity for the NT to become the eighth chapter.

The first of the three committee meetings for the rest of 1974, later in August, dealt with a range of issues including securing the Division's financial affairs; formalising the Panel of Censors; ensuring that applications for membership came in by September; appointing an editor for a regular newsletter; arranging for guest speakers for the rest of the year; and for Division representation at the forthcoming Hobart Conference, where Dr Beare was to present a paper entitled 'The City as a School – A plan for new towns and cities'.⁸ Some concern was raised about the fact that the Division had no Fellows and it was decided to take this up with the ACE Registrar. At the October meeting it was announced that Dr Beare was resigning as Chairman as he would be transferring out of the Territory early in 1975 and the advice of the Registrar was sought on replacement procedures. At the December meeting the Deputy Chairman, A E Robertson, was nominated as Acting Chairman for the rest of the year and arrangements were made for the first meeting for 1975 to be held on 6 February. Clearly the new Division was setting a sound basis for its future as an active and progressive Chapter of the ACE.

The meeting planned for 6 February 1975 did not take place, however, as Cyclone Tracy had devastated Darwin on Christmas Day 1974 and many members of the Division had been evacuated from Darwin as a result. However, on 5 March a special meeting of the Division was called to consider the situation. The minutes of this meeting indicate that the sixteen members still resident in Darwin agreed with the Chairman that the activities of the Division should proceed as normal despite the difficulties created by Cyclone Tracy, because 'it was, after all, a NT Division not simply the Darwin Division of the College'.⁹ Vacancies on the committee were filled from those present and suggestions were made for activities for the year. It was also resolved that the Secretary be reimbursed the \$60 already spent on advertisements in the local paper to locate Darwin members.¹⁰ The minutes of the committee meeting held a week later give the strong impression of a committee resolved to carry out the earlier decision that things should proceed as normal. The list of activities discussed includes the preparation of a paper on bilingual education in the NT for presentation at the next ACE annual conference, plans for the first of the Dinner Meetings and for a public forum on education. The committee went on to discuss the new regulations regarding the nomination of Fellows and the need to seek a representative of the Division on the Advisory Committee on Education in the NT.

This effort to carry on as normal is evident from the minutes of the next three meetings as these and other important issues were pursued, but things were not normal in many other respects. Most members, for example, had lost their personal

papers in the cyclone and it was necessary to write to the Registrar for details of the financial status of those unable to recall if they had paid their dues. Stevenson presents a very vivid account of other difficulties facing those members who assembled for the special meeting and whose decision to carry on the work of the Division he noted as 'commendable and brave' as he went on to describe their situation:

...the members who did assemble at Darwin High School that evening had their hands full re-establishing their own professional and private commitments. Many were living in makeshift accommodation or trying to rehabilitate their homes despite the continuing Wet. Schools and Colleges had only recently opened their doors again and the problems of recreating an education system fell heavily on all.¹¹

He concluded this section by noting that an indication of the Division's activity, despite the problems, was 'the increase in membership to 52 by June of that year, a bank balance of \$401.75 and the publication of a Division Newsletter'.

The disbandment of the Papua New Guinea Chapter on 12 September 1975 provided the ACE Council with the opportunity to resolve that 'The Division of the College situated in the Northern Territory be declared a Chapter of the College'¹² as from that date. The Division was advised of its changed status early in October. The minutes of the October committee meeting of the new Chapter indicate the resolution that 'the Chapter formally invite the President of the ACE to attend a dinner to inaugurate chapterhood' and the November minutes report that all arrangements were in hand for such a dinner.

The minutes of committee meetings, the Annual General Meeting and general meetings for 1976 show the year as one of both consolidation and progress. Increasing membership remained an ongoing issue as did the arranging of general meetings with guest speakers. The need for the Chapter to have members nominated for ACE Fellowships was first addressed with the admission of the Deputy Chairman, J D Gallacher, to Fellowship in March. Early steps were taken to set up a Regional Group in Alice Springs and this was finally approved by the ACE Council in June. In July the 'excellent standard and quality' of the Chapter Newsletter was noted.¹³ In September research began for a Chapter project into 'Current Teacher Preparation – its adequacy for the Territory Situation' and an itinerary was set up for the use of the \$1000 provided by the ACE for visits to remote areas of the Territory.

Stevenson noted that by the time of writing the brief history, the new Chapter had 'gone from strength to strength', as in 1978 it had four Fellows (J Gallacher, Dr J Eedle, Fr I Doneley and W McGrath) and 107 members.¹⁴ He went on to say that members had presented papers at ACE annual conferences and published articles in *Unicorn*; that regular meetings with guest speakers, panel discussions and forums had been held; that in 1978 Professor W Bassett had presented the first Annual Orations in Darwin and Katherine on 'The Community and Education' and that the hosting of the 1981 Annual Conference of the ACE in Darwin would 'mark our coming of age as a Chapter...'. The article also lists the office bearers of the Chapter during the formative years of 1974 and 1976.

The edition of *Unicorn* for March 1976 also has a section relating to the developments leading up to the formation of the Chapter and beyond, which notes that:

Much of the credit for the establishment of the NT Chapter must go to Dr Hedley Beare, formerly Director of Education for the NT and now Chief Education Officer of the ACT Schools Authority; it is fitting that Dr Beare was admitted as a College

*Fellow at the Annual Conference in Hobart, January, 1975, while still a member of the then NT Division.*¹⁵

Details of further developments since 1978 are to be found in documents in the ACEOA, all of which indicate that the NT Chapter is well fulfilling the role of a Chapter of the ACE both within the whole of the Northern Territory where it provides an educational focus and at the wider national level.

References and Notes

- ¹ Jecks, D A (Ed.) (1974), *Influences in Australian Education*, Carrol's, Perth, p. 226. Archives copy
- ² The question of a history of the NT Chapter was first raised at the Chapter Committee meeting of 7/7/76 (Australian College of Educators Official Archives [ACEOA] Box 801-02) and in a letter of 10/11/78 (ACEOA Box 802-02) forwarding 'the brief history of the NT Chapter of the ACE to the Media Centre', which explains that this article was 'suggested by the Committee and agreed to by Ian Stevenson for *Developing Education*'. Minutes from this period indicate that Stevenson was a Chapter Committee member. Other aspects of the history of the NT Chapter are in ACEOA Box 801-20.
- ³ *Unicorn*, Vol.5, No.1, February 1979, pp. 90-99. ACEOA copy
- ⁴ All correspondence for 1973 to 1976 is in ACEOA Box 801-05
- ⁵ ACE Council minutes for this particular meeting are in ACEOA Box 024-07
- ⁶ Minutes of Division Committee Meetings for 1974 are in ACEOA Box 802-01
- ⁷ The Directors-General were in Darwin at the time for one of their regular meetings.
- ⁸ This paper, along with others presented at the ACE Annual Conference in Hobart, was published by ACE under the title *Towards a Learning Society* in 1975, a copy of which is in the ACEOA. As will be seen, by the time this paper was presented in January 1975, Darwin itself was indeed in need of a re-building plan after the devastation caused by Cyclone Tracy.
- ⁹ Minutes of all committee meetings from 1975 to 1979 are in ACEOA Box 801-02 and of Annual General Meetings are in ACEOA Box 801-06.
- ¹⁰ As Stevenson notes on page 95, 'the correspondence file (fortunately preserved intact) indicates just how widely so many members had been scattered as a result of the evacuation of Darwin.'
- ¹¹ Ibid.
- ¹² The minutes of this Council Meeting are in ACEOA Box 033-07.
- ¹³ The Chapter Newsletters for this period are in ACEOA Boxes 803-01 and 803-02.
- ¹⁴ Stevenson, p. 96.
- ¹⁵ *Unicorn*, Vol.2, No.1, March 1976, pp. 98-99. ACEOA copy

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