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Recollections on the Association over five decades

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1. AAAE IN THE 1960s

Arch Nelson
Adult education and literacy consultant, Armidale

I would say you are taking a grave risk, when you ask me to reminisce. That is a very dangerous request to a person in his 80th year! I would like to say first of all that my attitude to the Association can be attributed to my previous experience of adult education.

I worked in Adelaide in the tutorial class department as a tutor for a number of years and I recall that our secretary in those days, a very efficient secretary, was one Colin Lawton. As a matter of fact when I was a primary school teacher here in SA, I had as many as four WEA tutorial classes in each single week. And one of my recollections is that we had no trouble about the organisation of these classes. The theory of the WEA tutorial class arrangement was that the WEA looked after the consumers; it was the community representative so to speak. It was very efficiently done here in SA. I do not want to reminisce about them but I do recall that one was down at Largs Bay, and that was a fairly highly respectable, middle class group. I had one at Port Adelaide which was tremendously interesting. It included Marxist and Henry George people, people of various brands of political sympathy and I had an entertaining and educative evening once a week with a dozen or so people. I also looked after a group at Port Augusta. I wrote the lectures in handwriting and sent them up to Port Augusta and somebody up there had the job of imparting them to a group and fostering the discussion afterwards.

My first thinking about the Association was that I should support it for a number of reasons. I had in mind that we had made some quite substantial advances over the years. I spent some time in army education. Whereas my experience in Adelaide had been restricted, it was broadened in army education. One of the questions I asked myself when I went into the army was whether the kind of thing that I did with those highly specialised groups that I taught in Adelaide could be done with ordinary troops. I found that it could be. One of my jobs was to go around and instruct officers in running the current affairs discussions. Senior officers were very sceptical that the material that came from Army Education Headquarters could be used. I was sent out to show them it could be. I remember I went into Western Command, WA, and General Robertson grinned at me and said, 'Well Nelson, if you are able to instruct my officers in the use of those comic book pamphlets that come from your HQ every two

weeks, in order to inspire discussion among the troops, you're a better man than I am'. It occurred to me that l expected to be a success. But my response to the general was simply, 'Well, Sir, I believe that you have some criticisms of the *Current Affairs Bulletin*'. But I did find out when I went around that ordinary men and women were capable of discussing the issues put forward in the *Current Affairs Bulletin*. Two things impressed me in my three or four years in the army about the troops. One was that the ordinary fellow had a much greater capacity to discuss the issues of the day than he was given credit for, provided he was reasonably led. The other was what one man described as the 'pathetic gratitude' of those people who were being given literacy training in the army. I went to Singleton in the course of my travels. The headmaster of the high school there was Bert Madgwick's brother. He was very active with the troops at the Singleton training camps and the people who were being helped to improve their literacy at his high school in Singleton were to use his words 'pathetically grateful'.

When I came to consider the proposed Association back in 1960, it occurred to me that there were three things that we should think of it as doing. One was to help us to hold the things that we had gained in adult education. We were better off after the war in the field of adult education than before. It always struck me that there was a danger that we might go backwards, and lose the advantages that we had gained. The second thing that I thought was very necessary was that we should promote rational discussion among adult educators. After the war there was a bit of tension in some camps; there was, for example, tension between people at universities and people outside universities and so on. There was not always harmony, and I felt that there was a need for discussion. The third thing that I felt was necessary was that we should learn to be more innovative than we had been. Perhaps I might look at the Association in those terms.

First of all, it certainly has been successful in promoting discussion and it also has been successful in assisting us to hang on to the things that we had already achieved, and in that respect I'm reminded of the year 1966. Those of you who have been reading the history of adult education or who were active in the field at that time will remember that in 1966 there was a kind of crisis in university adult education. The University Commission stated that it would not provide any money for adult education in universities after the year 1969. I was happily working at New England. I should perhaps have been very worried about this but I was not particularly, because I was very confident about the work that we were doing then. Nevertheless, I realised that there was a possibility that in 1969 we might not have any money. So I thought that some action should be taken. I spoke to Des Crowley who was Chairman of this Association. I said. 'Des, I think you should make representations to government'. He said, 'Yes, Arch, we're doing that'. I also had a talk one evening, a long talk, with our local member Ian Sinclair. I told him that I thought it would be a tragedy if there were no money for adult education at the University of New England. He said, 'Yes, Arch, people say to me Armidale is a peculiar place to have a university. Why did they put it there? Why do students have to go all that distance?' He said, 'Yes, possibly there is something in that but, you know, it has been worthwhile having it there for the influence that it has had on local communities through adult education'. I was reasonably confident, but I still realised that there was some danger. It happened at that time that the mayor of one of the rural places that we were serving came to me and said, 'I notice that down in Grafton you have a fine community development effort, could we have a similar one in X town?' I said, 'Yes, we'd be very happy to move into X town and to establish a regional office there, and implement a scheme of community development similar to that in Grafton, but you know there's a danger that we might not have any money in 1969'. He said, 'Well, that's a serious business.

I'll get on to local government people in the area and talk to them about it'. He did that and I understand that at a national meeting of local government authorities, this was ventilated and an appropriate resolution went to government.

Now three approaches had been made. I appreciated the approach made by this Association. It came from a professional body, and I'm sure that the Deputy Prime Minister had some influence. But I think most influential of all were the people from local government, because by dint of their efforts, national government felt that the people were behind us, that communities were concerned about adult education.

The next point that I made was that there was a need for discussion at this time. How well did the Association in those early years in the 1960s promote discussion? I think it did it magnificently well. Some people have suggested the Association at that time was not very effective. But I remember early in 1968, we held a conference at New England—I was the Chairman at the time—on rural adult education. Discussion was lively and rational, and I hope—I'm vain enough to hope—that that meeting and that discussion had a valuable influence on the future development of rural adult education in Australia. In fact, I found myself as a result of it, moving around Australia to places beyond universities, talking about rural adult education and the work that we were doing.

Now those are two aspects in which the Association has been active and successful. The third important thing I suggested the Association ought to do was to promote innovation. Here I'm going to trespass on Barrie Brennan's field into the 1970s. Early in the 1970s I attended a meeting of this Association and there was a working party set up on adult literacy. I was interested in this field and had been asked by the International Association of Adult Literacy Methods to produce a couple of volumes on adult literacy in Australia. So I

went into the meeting on adult literacy which had been midwifed by this Association and we talked. We talked about the need for an association on adult literacy. We went around the table and people said, 'What do you do and what do you do?' I said, 'I used to be a Director of Adult Education but recently I've been downgraded to become a Professorial Fellow in Adult Education at the University of New England'. And they said, 'Well, if you're a Professorial Fellow, you're just the person we want. We'll make you the Chairman for the Australian Council for Adult Literacy'. So I became Chairman, and I remained Chairman for a number of years, and since I stopped being Chairman about six years ago, they have made extremely great progress. These days, I look with pride on the achievements of the Australian Council of Adult Literacy, but I would like to congratulate this Association on the fact that it is, in effect, the midwife of the Australian Council for Adult Literacy.

The last point that I would like to make is that I think we were very wise to act as midwives for the Council. I think work in adult literacy is of supreme importance. There is a danger in university circles and elsewhere that we concentrate on the already successful, and it's my hunch, and I have thought deeply here, that the whole of the field of education from primary, secondary, university and adult level, is not going to be as successful as it ought to be until we concentrate on this problem of adult literacy. My hunch is that the really weak link in the educational chain is in the home and in the society, and among the people who are less literate. What we have to do is to develop their confidence and develop their interest in education so that they become effective family and community members, and effective family and community apostles for education.

2. AAAE IN THE 1970s

Barrie Brennan
University of New England, Armidale

I have admired and respected Arch Nelson as an adult educator and as a contributor to adult education in Australia during my whole career as an adult educator. So, having that in mind, I will not try to match Arch in terms of the way he has been able to share his experience and talk about days beyond the memory of most of us. My brief is to talk about the AAAE during the 1970s.

What I am going to do is to liken the AAAE in the 70s to a period that we have all been through ourselves and suggest that the AAAE in the 70s was a period of the Association's *adolescence*. We can all think back to a point in our own lives when we went through that delightful time of adolescence. What was it all about? For most of us perhaps it was about having high ideals, having an idealistic view of the world and an optimistic view of the future. In adolescence we enjoyed meeting real and anticipated challenges. On the negative side we were troubled by anxieties and fears and also lacking the realism that later maturity might bring.

So let me suggest to you how I see that the AAAE in the 70s was the stage of the Association's adolescence. Let me talk about the AAAE's adolescence, its idealism, its high optimism.

There were many constitutional changes in the 70s, but I think two were of very great importance. The first was to change the membership base of the Association. The founding fathers—we need to use that term because the executive was dominated by men—made a distinction between the professional people, most of whom worked for universities or the State Boards or the WEA, and the second grade citizens, the amateurs. That worked well in the 60s, but by the 70s there were some very different people in the Association. I will

mention some names because if I do not mention names, then this paper becomes really de-personalised. People like Chris Duke who came from England to the Australian National University suggested that it was wrong to have these divisions and it was better to try and see a much wider membership potential. So in the 70s the Association did away with types of individual members and looked on all those who could support the ideals of the Association as being members, fully entitled to all the rights and privileges.

The second major constitutional change was the creation in the mid-70s of the option of the Association having branches. The change was a very far-sighted move, far ahead of its time in terms of where the people were because the Executive was absolutely unsuccessful in establishing one of these branches although they tried in places like Hobart and Adelaide. But the initiative was that sort of adolescent idealism, saying this is something that perhaps is down the track but we ought to set the plans up for it now, and we did.

The second aspect of this idealistic, optimistic approach that the Association had for the world was looking at some of the specialist groups that needed to be catered for. I am talking about the 70s now, but the AAAE was running conferences on Aboriginal education. There were not many Aboriginal people there, but the important thing was the notion of the Association bringing some leadership to those in the community and adult education in general about the special needs of Aboriginal education. Before the term 'multi-cultural education' was as high on the priority list of politicians and journalists, the AAAE was in fact endeavouring to bring together people whose birthplace was not this country, trying to bring them together in an organisation called Ethnic Forum. I recall that Alan Davies organised meetings in Sydney at football clubs that were dominated by particular ethnic groups. The AAAE, a small organisation, saw the need to address the concerns of adults in cultures other than the white Anglo-Saxon.

The question of women's education, as it was called, was brought very strongly to the AAAE and its Executive through the person of Gwen Wesson who had a real battle to convince the group of males that this was an important issue. But I think to the great credit of the AAAE in the early or mid-70s, some of the first ever interstate conferences in women's education were organised by Gwen and paid for, supported and sponsored by the AAAE. The point is the enthusiasm, not always the success, nor were the activities always properly evaluated, and the notion that in the 70s these sorts of projects were seen as being part of the brief of the Association.

There were additional special activities that were taken on. To all the enquiries that were held in the 70s, the AAAE with its small resources base tried to respond, whether the enquiry was about the way technology would impact on Australia through the Myer committee, or on teacher education, or on education and training by Sir Bruce Williams. The AAAE through its Executive tried to have an adult education position put forward. Macquarie University in Sydney had a good facility for the media and the AAAE ran a number of workshops, 'hands-on activity' we would call it today. The workshops tried to bring together the people who were trying to make educational film and video with the people who were going to use them. Particularly through the people at Macquarie University, and Doug Robertson, the national secretary at the time, the workshops brought many people in contact with an area that they had never heard of called adult education.

I want now to note some major events. If you have a look in libraries of major institutions, you will probably find a bundle of documents that were produced through the work of the AAAE and particularly the Centre for Continuing Education at ANU, for what was called an Audit Conference. The purpose of the audit conference, arising from a request from UNESCO, was to try and see what was happening in

adult education in Australia in the mid-70s. No one else was prepared to do this, so the AAAE decided it would and as a result two things happened. There was a conference and a major publication. If you want a picture of what Australian adult education was like in the mid-70s, then look at the reports of the AAAE Audit Conference. From that, and that sort of thinking, the AAAE Executive produced things called five year plans. Most optimistic documents, full of enthusiasm or zeal to see that adult education would move from the margins to the centre of educational provision. The Executive even issued a manifesto. Finally it was not called a manifesto because that was thought to be a bit risque but it was called the Canberra Statement. Dig in the archives of your organisation to see if you can find that statement which, I think, still has a great deal of relevance to those who seek to work in the field of the 90s. The AAAE became involved in research, the first time it had become involved in a major research project through the now defunct Educational Research and Development Committee. The Association sought funds from the US Kellogg Foundation to establish the Association as a major leader in the provision of services to adult education in Australia. The approach was unsuccessful, but was part of what its adolescence was all about.

Let me move on to the other aspect of adolescence where you have fears and anxieties. One of the things I think you can see in retrospect that the AAAE never really came to grips with was the new monster that grew in the 70s called TAFE. Here was the old 'Tech Ed.', given this great blessing from the Commonwealth Government, and tremendous resources with a brief that said, 'We can do everything for everyone'. TAFE was so big and so powerful that this little organisation called the AAAE never really realised the full implications of what TAFE was all about. There was another organisation that was launched with many pigeons and much fanfare in the fair city of Melbourne called the Australian Association of Community Education (AACE). It also was a fear and anxiety

producing organisation for the AAAE, because here was the AACE with all its resources and all its political support and poor little AAAE by comparison was so small and weak. So these were the anxieties of the AAAE in the 70s.

I think that the lack of realism that I have mentioned really came to the fore at the end of the 70s. Many very important things were done, and conferences on innovation in adult education were conducted. Such activities had never been done before. The conferences brought together a whole lot of very interesting people who had innovations to report and these provided a very important stimulus for hard-working people out in the field. The AAAE in the 70s did many significant things, but the problem was that the AAAE at the end of the 70s was still a voluntary organisation. It had an office in Canberra with a national secretary, Doug Robertson, who served the Association throughout the whole of this period, and some additional clerical assistance. But to take on large projects and carry them through, to be able to go and speak with authority to governments, without solid financial and membership support was not possible and, as the 70s came to a close, many people were feeling a degree of frustration and anxiety because of the promise of the 70s in the AAAE's adolescence. As the 80s came on, to many it seemed that the AAAE was not going to be able to deliver in the 80s what the 70s had promised.

Individuals are usually excused for the successes or failures of their adolescence. The AAAE should not be blamed for its adolescence in the 70s. Its efforts, its idealism and its optimism, though not always producing results, produced exciting times. In the harsh times of the 90s, the freedom of the 70s may take on a new attractiveness.

3. AAAE IN THE 1980s

Dianne Berlin
Council of Adult Education, Melbourne

Since Barrie Brennan has suggested that the 70s marked a period of adolescence for the Australian Association of Adult Education (AAAE), then I will continue the metaphor for the 80s. The 80s, I would contend, saw the AAAE mature into *young womanhood*. I will go further, and contend that for the 80s, it was the decade of women in the Association.

I would like to start by using two personal anecdotes that I hope will illustrate several points I want to make about how the Association changed in the 1980s.

My first participation in an AAAE Conference was at the University of New England in Armidale in 1977. The conference theme was Australia—The Next Twenty Years and that illustrates one point where the Association has not changed. Like all good adult educators, it has always been a forward looking organisation, attempting to work out where adult education will be heading, what the needs are. So in that sense there has not been a change, because looking into the 90s and beyond is a major priority for everyone.

My distinct recollection of the 1977 conference (apart from being immensely stimulated by it) was that there were a lot of men there, and many of them came from the academic continuing education sector. We saw at the 1990 AAACE Conference what diverse fields we come from, how geographically far flung we are, and how many of us are women, including importantly, Aboriginal women who have been a constant presence at conferences in the 80s.

So if I could sum up the 80s in one phrase, I would call it the decade of women. For the first time, we had a woman President, Pauline Seitz—in 1983–84. 1 was elected President in 1987 and 1988, and

now we are entering the 90s with a women President, Ann Whyte. Our membership has expanded and it has been women who have been joining.

For the first time in several years, the Executive is going to have to take account of its gender balance policy, because the elected Executive has eight women and six men and the constitution allows it to co-opt a further five or six people to ensure balances from state representation and interest areas across the field of adult education. So it is going to have to look at co-opting some men. What a change that is!

Another way the Association has changed, which represents a difference from the 70s, has been the growth in networks and interest groups, from the Cross-Cultural Network to the Prison Educators' Network and all the networks in between. These reflect the increasing diversity of practice and provision, as well the particular interests of some of the members, and they are the sign of a healthy organisation.

Another anecdote. At the 1984 Conference in northern New South Wales, a tall gentleman named John Wellings tapped me on the shoulder and told me that the Executive had just been meeting, that it needed to co-opt a representative from South Australia and that my name had been suggested. The point of that story is that I was very nervous about accepting. I had no idea who was on the Executive but assumed that they were all eminent, highly important people and I wondered what I could possibly contribute as a humble education officer in the Workers' Educational Association in South Australia. Well, all that has changed because we women are much more confident these days. And Executive has more, I hope, of a human face. We have attempted over the years to be visible at the conference, we write profiles of ourselves in the newsletter, we use the newsletter as the official channel of communication, consulting with members on all policy matters. After all, we have been elected by the members, and we want to represent their interests.

I think that has been a significant change in the 80s, where the Executive has genuinely attempted to consult closely with the membership. It has meant that annual general meetings in the 80s have been largely procedural affairs, with little debate, because matters have been previously canvassed. In earlier decades, I gather, annual general meetings were often quite controversial because of some lack of consultation and lack of true representativeness.

Another change. In 1983, in Adelaide, we held the first joint conference between the Australian Association of Adult Education (AAAE) and the Australian Association of Community Education (AACE). It was a big conference, with almost 400 participants and amongst other things, the conference resolved to amalgamate the two organisations. For reasons I will not go into, that did not eventuate until 1989. However, we have finished the decade with a new name and, very importantly, a new structure. The South Australian Organisation of Adult and Community Education (SAOFACE), which was formed in the early 80s in anticipation of the amalgamation, is now the South Australian Branch. And there are now branches, albeit some of them fledgling ones, in most of the states and territories of the nation. I do not think that we can underestimate the importance of this decision, because whilst the Executive can and does influence national policy on adult education and lifelong learning, the reality is that funding for adult education, particularly when it occurs in community-based organisations, is largely a state matter. And if we are going to branch further into training, award restructuring and workplace-related education and training, then direct negotiations will need to take place within state structures.

Talking of policy, my final point is that whilst the AAACE always has wished to influence national policy on adult education, in the 1980s the Executive made a strategic decision to meet frequently with Canberra-based politicians and bureaucrats. AAACE is now known, acknowledged and consulted by the power brokers in Canberra. That is a significant change, and augurs well for the field.

So if I can sum up the decade, it was a decade of women, of diversification, of strategic reorientation, of consultation and of organisational restructure. I think that those descriptors are significantly different from ones that would be applied to the 70s, and I hope to be around in the year 2000 to see what changes this decade has wrought, and whether the Association has effectively addressed its key issues. I wish the Association well as it heads towards its fortieth birthday. Let us hope that it does not have a midlife crisis in the year 2000!

4. AAACE IN THE 1990s

Alastair Crombie
President AAAE 1988–1990; Executive Director AAACE 1993–1999

The 1990s was, literally, the decade of 'AAACE'—'book-ended' by two changes of name. The 'C' was added in 1989 when the Australian Association of Adult Education amalgamated with an ailing Australian Association of Community Education, whose core focus was the community learning role of schools. 'ACE' subsequently became the standard designation for the field—but without that particular connotation of 'community education'.

In 1998, after a great deal of debate, the membership supported a further change—to Adult Learning Australia (ALA). This was in large part a response to the paradoxical situation that, while overall participation in adult education and training was growing and diversifying, some of the 'traditional' providers of adult education were struggling to stay afloat. ALA now laid claim to being the peak advocacy body on behalf of adult learners, as well as the providers. This was bound to be a difficult act to sustain.

By 1990, the National Training Reform Agenda was becoming a tectonic force. The 1988 national wage case set in motion a massive process of Award Restructuring within which skilling Australia

to become the 'Clever Country' was the central pillar. The Hawke Government had earlier restructured the operating landscape with the creation of the 'mega-Department' of Employment, Education and Training (DEET), a new Ministerial Council (MOVEET) and a National Board (NBEET).

These new structures, together with the Unified National System of Higher Education, the Hobart Declaration on schooling, and in 1994 the establishment (in Brisbane) of the Australian National Training Authority (ANTA), were emblems of a decisive new **national** approach to education and training into which ACE, after its years in the wilderness, gradually got drawn.

The Training Guarantee, mandating expenditure on training by larger companies, and in 1994, 'Working Nation', the White Paper on Employment and Growth, pressed skill-building as a national priority—and created major new opportunities and challenges for ACE providers in the burgeoning domain of labour market training.

While the ramifications of the National Training Reform Agenda thoroughly permeated AAACE through the nineties, the beginning of the decade was also strongly influenced by International Literacy Year in 1990. After an initial, rather nominal involvement, the Government made the interesting 'discovery' that ten percent of Australian adults were functionally illiterate—an enormous ballast in the tanks of the 'Clever Country' ('No Quick Fix'). Various new measures—and additional funding—followed.

However, the landmark event that most shaped the decade for AAACE was the 1991 report of the Senate Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training, chaired by Senator Terry Aulich, *Come in Cinderella*. The Association had lobbied for such an inquiry for several years—it having been nearly half a century since the previous such inquiry, the Duncan Report of 1944.

The regular Canberra lobbying undertaken by the national executive from the late eighties had revealed a challenging 'first base' problem; most of the parliamentarians and bureaucrats did not know what we meant by 'adult education'. In response to this, the Association pioneered a National Directory of adult and community education organisations, with an initial edition listing more that 1,000 of them (later editions identified double this number).

With some bravado, this was branded as education's 'fourth sector'—extensive, dynamic and diverse, but un-charted, un-recognised and under-supported. This conceptualisation, together with a broad typology of four main types of adult education, and five types of providers, gave the field a scope and structure that policy-makers were able to get hold of.

The Committee report was very positively received—and not only for its long overdue recognition of the distinctive contribution made by the field:

> … the impressive achievements of the sector have taken place despite its minimal resources, variable levels of official recognition and a lack of overall policy direction… It is grossly inefficient for governments to ignore or neglect the sector's remarkable education and training capacity, particularly as relatively small additions of guaranteed funding to the sector will reap additional benefits in terms of overall levels of skills formation, to say nothing of the abundant personal and community benefits.

Many developments flowed, in one way or another, from this path-breaking report.

The first recommendation—that there should for the first time be a national policy on adult and community education—was implemented in 1993, and through many revisions, the ACE national policy has continued to provide direction and priorities for the field. Provision was also made, albeit on a modest scale, for a national 'desk officer' for ACE in the Commonwealth Department, and subsequently within ANTA.

Having worked closely with the informal Conference of Senior Officers in Adult Education to help get the inquiry underway, then to shape the national policy, the Association was pleased to see this grouping now given formal standing as the ACE Task Force of MCEETYA, and gradually given substantial responsibilities—for monitoring the national policy, allocating R&D funds, managing a new national data collection process, and so forth.

Most importantly for the Association, the report greatly strengthened our bid for additional resources to service the sector, advise governments and represent the sector internationally. This met with success in 1992, when our grant was increased to $185,000 a year, enabling the appointment of an Executive Director from January 1993, and movement of the national office from borrowed quarters at the ANU to its own offices at Cook. At the same time, additional funds—initially $450,000 per annum—were allocated to research and development, and this proved to be incredibly valuable in supporting documentation and analysis of the ACE sector and its many contributions.

In 1995 the Association was commissioned by ANTA to review ACE research funded under this program, and by other means, for the period 1992–1995. This project identified fifty-seven such projects—a massive surge in such inquiry compared with preceding years. AAACE itself became a beneficiary of this new research and development fund, undertaking projects in such areas as disability access and competency standards for the ACE sector.

While the Association had previously carried out or assisted with small research undertakings on a rather *ad hoc* basis, during the nineties it became common for the Association itself to be managing, or have some involvement in, several such projects. It also now became routine for the Association to be consulted by governments in relation to any significant developments impacting on the broad domain of lifelong learning.

With its additional staffing capacity, and firmer financial base, the Association was able to spawn two other important initiatives—Learning Circles Australia (LCA) and Adult Learners Week (ALW).

Drawing from both Scandinavian and north American experiences (Study Circles Resources Centre, then in Connecticut), the Association's first and very successful Learning Circle program was on Aboriginal Reconciliation, funded by the Aboriginal Reconciliation Council, and personally supported by its Chair, Pat Dodson. Learning circles kits on Blue Green Algae, Civics and Citizenship, Citizens and Crime, Sustainable Rivers and other topics followed, and the Association became known as a champion of the learning circles movement, and a resource centre for it.

Adult Learners Week was also 'borrowed'—in this case from the United Kingdom. On his visit to Australia in 1993, Alan Tuckett, Director of the National Institute for Adult and Continuing Education (NIACE) in the UK, impressed both the AAACE Executive and DEET officials with his briefing on the success of Adult Learners Week in the UK. AAACE was commissioned later that year to test and develop a proposal for an Australian version, and as a result our first ALW took place in 1995, with a budget of $250,000 and AAACE as national coordinating agency. This major initiative added a national ALW Coordinator to the national office staff, and gave the Association a prominent and rewarding role in this on-going celebration of and advocacy for adult learning.

Aided by the fact that Alastair Crombie, the Executive Director from 1993 to 1999, was for much of that time a member of Executive Committees of both the Asia-South Pacific Bureau of Adult Education (ASPBAE) and the International Council of Adult Education (ICEA), the Association also became during the nineties an active and respected participant in the international adult education movement. This was exemplified in particular by the hosting in Darwin in 1996 of the four-yearly ASPBAE General Assembly, and the sending of

an eight member Australian delegation to the Fifth UNESCO World Conference on Adult Education in Hamburg in 1997. The Association also maintained involvement with the International Community Education Association. For this Conference, UNESCO adapted the 1995 logo for ALW in Australia, and the Australian example was used, with others, to successfully make the case for an **international** ALW.

As a result in large part of the Association's success in garnering funds from AIDAB to support their work, ASPBAE opened a regional office in Australia, which was co-located with the AAACE, resulting in a number of regional programs being conducted in Australia and neighbouring countries, including a regular Leadership Development Program.

As well as ASPBAE, the Association also provided a 'home' at various stages for the Federation of Independent Aboriginal Education Providers, and for the Higher Education Research and Development Society of Australia, for whom secretariat services were provided on a commercial basis.

After the change of national government in 1996, it became harder for the Association to gain support for its agenda, which by then included a heavy emphasis on 'demand side' interventions to stimulate awareness, interest and participation in adult learning—particularly from the 25% of the adult population found to have had no structured learning experience since leaving formal education.

Nevertheless, in 1997 there was a review (*Beyond Cinderella*) of the 1991 Senate report which boldly recommended that existing national policies for ACE and VET 'should be brought together in a way which articulates the commitment to lifelong learning', and that ANTA should become 'NACVETA'—the National ACE and VET Authority. This report included a useful stocktake of progress since the first Cinderella report, but the government's response to it was very disappointing.

Beyond Cinderella is useful for encapsulating the abiding tension throughout this period between the 'vocational' and the 'non-vocational'. Invited in after years in the wilderness, Cinderella found herself co-habiting with a gorilla. VET and vocationalism were rampant, 'lifelong learning' a worthy but incoherent ideal. The Report urged that 'policy makers must abandon the assumption that learning for life and learning for work can be easily distinguished'. This 'vocational/non-vocational divide fails to accommodate the rich harvest of various kinds of educational experiences that make up a learning society'. Unfortunately, these urgings fell on deaf ears.

The Association's organisational strategy for responding to the enormous dynamism and diversity in the adult learning domain was branches and networks. The project of building a federated structure began towards the end of the eighties—the creation and support of State and Territory Branches, each sending a representative to the national executive (along with representatives selected from the membership at large). While this responded to the unforgiving geographic spread of members, special interest networks were actively cultivated to try and give focus to work in particular areas—disability, research, higher education, prisoners, and so on. Both structures were fragile, depending heavily on the presence of a 'champion' to give leadership and direction, but they also brought some significant achievements.

By any measure, the resources available to the Association increased dramatically during the decade. In 1990, the budget was $75,000; by 2000 it was $370,000, with around $145, 000 of this garnered from sources other than the annual grant. In addition, the office was routinely managing several hundred thousands of dollars of project funding. Staff had grown from two to eleven, and the website launched in 1996 had become a major communications vehicle, alongside the newsletter.

The Association was well served by a series of highly experienced and committed Presidents—Anne Whyte (1990–92), Prue Madsen (1992–94), Jim Saleeba (1994–96), Roger Morris (1996–98) and Dorothy Lucardie (1998–2000)—who each brought a distinctive dimension to their leadership of the organisation. Inaugural Executive Director, Alastair Crombie, bowed out in 1999, making way for the appointment of Tony Brown. While others came and went, Mary Hannan provided her enduring commitment.

5. ALA IN THE 2000s

Roger K. Morris

A personal note

*What follows is obviously not **the** story of Australian adult education and ALA over the past 10 years. It is just one story—it is **my** story. I joined the National Executive (the Board) of the **Australian Association of Adult Education (AAAE)** at the Annual General Meeting in 1987, the same meeting at which Dianne Berlin became the President. I was the last President (before the Association's current name, **Adult Learning Australia)** of the **Australian Association of Adult and Community Education (AAACE)**, the name we had adopted in 1989. These three names are very important markers of change in the recent history of adult education in Australia and the Association's response to those changes.*

The broader context

Arguably the term 'adult education' has become outmoded. Partly, this is a result of the broader adult education project having been largely successful, in the sense that there are now many more opportunities for adult learning available across the lifespan. Adult education, reconceived as 'adult learning' or 'lifelong learning', is thus no longer clearly recognisable as a separate entity, as a separate sector of education or as a social movement, as it once was. There has

been a shift to a concern for 'adults learning', no matter where that learning occurs—in the work place, in the VET sector, or in higher education. Recent figures from DEST (2005) reveal that the majority of commencing students in higher education are no longer traditional school leavers: 41 per cent of commencing students are now aged 25 or over while more than 60 per cent are over 20 years of age.

More broadly, there has been an acceptance of the need for a more cohesive national approach to education in Australia, driven by two principal factors: an **economic** concern to develop a more skilled and adaptable workforce in the context of increasing globalisation and a **social** concern to provide more opportunities for an increasingly diverse population. Education, now more than ever, is being seen as an instrument of government policy and as having the potential to remake the economic and social fabric of Australian life. Contemporary adult education in Australia needs to be understood within this broader educational context. Changes in 'adult education' must be seen as part of a range of changes occurring more broadly across the whole of education: increasing school retention rates; mass participation in higher education; promotion of a more open education and training market, with a range of government, private and community providers; increasing links/movement between different educational sectors; growing emphasis on vocational outcomes; more flexible pathways of learning and ways to skill formation; growing concern with common standards; and more strident demands for quality and accountability.

Beginning in the early 1980s, the time when I and many of my colleagues entered the field of adult education (like so many others, from another career, in my case, teacher education), a critical mass of issues—regarding lifelong learning and recurrent education, including retraining, re-skilling, up-skilling, second chance learning, access and equity—came together to create what seemed to be a very positive climate for adult education. This period could, in retrospect,

be described as the beginning of the 'golden years' of Australian adult education. The broad field of adult education and the Association were confident and growing. Greater government support was sought and to some extent received. However, such government recognition was not without its drawbacks. Increasingly, adult education and the Association were seen, by Government **and** by some adult educators, as being part of the broader Government agenda for education outlined above.

The new millennium

So just how did Australian adult education and its professional association, the newly named Adult Learning Australia (ALA), enter the new millennium? There was a lot of continuity among the key providers, most of which had been a part of the adult education scene for many years, including the Evening and Community Colleges; the Community Adult Education Centres; the Continuing Education Centres; the Neighbourhood Houses; the Local Community Centres; the University of the Third Age (U3A); the Colleges and Institutes of TAFE; the universities' continuing education or extra-mural provision; the WEA; and the Council of Adult Education. Most of these provider types were represented among the ALA membership as it entered the twenty-first century.

The big issues also seemed to persist, including the reluctance of Government to fund 'general' adult education and some non-vocational, social purpose adult education; the ongoing debate about the identity of the sector; the tension between vocational and non-vocational outcomes; the unsettled question of the role of the volunteer as opposed to the professional adult educator; and the fight for real recognition beyond the field's marginal status. Again, the ALA was centrally and crucially involved with, and impacted upon in its own operations by, all of these issues.

However, it seemed (to me at least) that more and more, questions of survival in the new century, both for many in the field and the Association, came down to choosing the economically rational alternative. The old-time debate over what counted as 'adult education', narrowly defined as non-vocational, not-for-credit 'liberal education' in the so-called 'Great Tradition', as distinct from what was merely the **education of adults**, had given way to an even narrower and economically-driven version of adult education: **lifelong vocational education and training**. Some adult educators, remembering John Ohliger, were now asking: is there vocational education and training after death?

In more practical terms, just how did the Association deal with the context in which it has operated in the recent past? We probably need initially to clarify what the Association is about and what it sets out to achieve. To me, the ALA is:

- first, a professional association of adult educators no matter where they work (that is, it serves **individual practitioners**);
- second, a classic interest group consolidating and presenting to government and other significant bodies the views of the field (that is, it serves **the providers and the field**);
- third, a body which seeks to promote adult learning as a social good across the community (that is, it serves **the broader society**);
- fourth, a body which represents Australian adult education in the wider international arena—in ASPBAE, ICAE and UNESCO [that is, it serves **national goals**); and
- finally, like all other organisations, a body that seeks to sustain itself and to survive (that is, it serves **internal organisational goals**).

The Association has continued to serve its individual members. It remains the only professional association of adult educators to operate across the broad field of adult education including in its

membership all types and levels of people, who identify as adult educators. In meeting the needs of these members for professional development and refreshment, ALA has continued to provide an annual conference, an excellent professional journal, an informative newsletter, an exceptionally useful website, and a range of regular emailed news comments and commentary. ALA, in fulfilling its second, lobbying role for the field, has convened focus groups, workshops and working parties that addressed specific issues. It has met both formally and informally with politicians and bureaucrats. It entered into memoranda of understanding with similar organisations both within Australia and internationally. It has sought to ensure that Australia was well represented in the councils of the international adult education movement. In terms of promoting the value of and need for adult learning, the Association has maintained pressure on both the federal and the state governments to produce a clear and implementable lifelong learning policy. Organisationally, in order to better operate in a changed world, ALA has made a number of changes: it moved from a federal structure (with state branches) to a more unitary national structure; the size of the National Board was halved and its method of election and term of office revised; the number of Board meetings per year was reduced; and the activities of the Association became more focused in and on the National Office and the Staff.

Though the National Board members and the Staff laboured long and hard, it cannot be said that the ALA has been particularly successful in recent years. We may have had some successes but largely the Association has been in a holding pattern. Costs were increasing but there was reluctance or an inability on the part of the membership to pay for these increasing costs. Attempts to provide alternate sources of funding came to little. Government grants failed to keep pace with rising costs and were increasingly tied to particular governmentally defined outcomes. Other more sectional adult education or learning associations were reluctant to concede

a leadership or even a coordinating role to the ALA, even though it remained the only organisation that encompassed the broad field of adult and community education, both in terms of fields of practice and geographical spread. Despite ALA's strongest representations, Australia did not finally send an official delegation to Brazil for Confintea VI in 2009. And, perhaps, most crucially the development and active promotion of a national policy at the governmental level remained problematical.

Over much of its history, adult education in Australia has operated without the benefit of formal legislative foundation or overt policy. Governments have seemed to believe that adult education was a good idea as long the demand on public funds was small. Australia does not have a lifelong learning policy as such. Instead, there have been a number of national enquiries and consultations with catchy titles, which have had little direct impact on policy or funding. In 2002 all states and territories endorsed a 'Ministerial Declaration on Adult and Community Education', which emphasised the importance of learning in building community capacity and the importance of adult education as a pathway to further education and training for 'second chance' learners. But the major thrust has been, not with the adult education sector as such, but with adult learning in the context of the range of education available.

Some directions for the future

The term 'lifelong learning' has been largely co-opted by the economic rationalists and is currently being redefined in rather narrow, instrumentalist terms. As Roger Boshier wrote in 2000, lifelong education as a concept traditionally has been seen as being **life-wide** as well as **life-long**. It was/is about the total person, not just the employee. It was/is concerned to democratise education and the wider society so as to eventually create a truly educative learning society for all. However, the 'newer' conception of lifelong learning, as many politicians and bureaucrats see it and use it, is not concerned

with the emancipatory project or social justice. Rather, this lifelong learning agenda seems to be directed at creating better lifelong servants of the 'system'. Some, following Bowles and Gintis, would even argue that the success of such individualisation and privatisation of learning is crucial to the survival of contemporary capitalism.

I agree with John McIntyre, who outlined in 2005 those changes in direction that need to be adopted for adult education to recapture some of its original intent as a powerful vehicle for the development of a learning society:

- There is a need for national policy leadership to give coherence to efforts to promote adult learning.
- There is a need for an ecological perspective on adult learning, emphasising strategies to facilitate learning in workplaces and communities.
- There is a need for adult learning to be understood in relation to broad social policy.
- There is a need for 'learning communities' to be a key focus of provision, especially the formation of partnerships of educational providers, community agencies, local government and employers.

It is in pursuing directions such as these that the major thrust of ALA's future efforts must be focused.

A concluding comment

The story of adult education, in Australia as elsewhere, has been characterised by a fight for formal recognition. Such recognition (albeit as 'adult learning') has now largely been achieved. Lifelong learning will become an increasing reality for many. But there will always remain those who are without access to quality education during the adult years. As ever, it will be those adults that adult education and its peak body, Adult Learning Australia, must continue to serve, to include and to empower.