

**To the ICAE
Thank you for 50 years of Hope**

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In the Lekwungen-speaking territories of the island where I live, First Nations Peoples lift their hands towards the Creator as an expression of respect and appreciation. I lift my hands to the International Council for Adult Education, its leaders and members, its networks of thousands, its legacies of millions on this occasion of its 50th Anniversary.

I had imagined that I might write an intellectual contribution reflecting on 50 years of adult education at a global level with clever references and inspiring words from the many who have influenced me over these years. But I have failed in that task! My head is filled with so many memories and so many diverse ideas that it has proven impossible to create that kind of reflection.

Instead, please allow me to share a more personal story, a shorter story than I had hoped, but some words to contribute to the many others that will come forth over this year in celebration of the wonderful years of the ICAE.

In some ways my journey with ICAE began in 1970 when I was working on my PhD at UCLA in Los Angeles, California. One of my jobs as a research assistant was to accompany visitors to UCLA while they explored the university and the community. In June of 1970, a charming Deputy Director of the Institute of Adult Education at the University of Dar es Salaam, Nicholas Kuhanga came into my office. Nicolas, a former student of Mwalimu Julius K Nyerere, the founding President of Tanzania was visiting the United States looking at various experiences in adult education. I had been studying the ideas of Nyerere as part of my work in International and Comparative Education but had never imagined meeting someone who was already a leader in the Ujamaa

movement¹. I took Nicholas around various adult education centres in Los Angeles and before he left, he told me that the Institute was looking for a research fellow to join their Institute. He asked if that would be a position that might interest me? I said it would and he set up an interview arrangement with Professor Terrance Ranger, former history Professor of the University of Dar es Salaam. By August of 1970, I was in Dar es Salaam with my wife who was expecting our first son.

My work at the Institute brought me into the world of adult education, the vision of Mwalimu Nyerere and his leaders and the international legacy of adult education from all parts of the world, from India, England, Sweden, the USA, Canada, Germany, Cuba, Denmark and many other parts of the world. I was captivated by the idea of providing adults, people of an age when they could influence their own lives, families and communities, with learning opportunities. The idea of building people's confidence and skills through highlighting their own lived experiences and building a possibility for better lives was powerful then and remains powerful to me in 2023.

The Director of the Institute of Adult Education was Paul J. Mhaiki, a brilliant leader who articulated the vision of Ujamaa with passion and grace. Paul was invited to the 1972 UNESCO World Conference on Adult Education (CONFINTEA II) that was held in Tokyo, Japan. I co-wrote that national adult education paper presented at Tokyo with my Director, Paul. As it happens Tanzania and its vision about adult education attracted a great deal of positive attention at the conference. But it was also at the conference that the Canadian J. Roby Kidd proposed the idea of creating an International Council for Adult Education. Roby had been a proponent of international linkages in adult education since his early participation in 1949 at the Elsinore conference on adult education. He worked in India in the early 1960s and Jamaica later in that decade building adult education structures. He felt that while UNESCO was able to bring nation-states together in support of adult education, a non-governmental body was needed to make the connections with the grassroots and the practice of the field.

With support from Helmuth Dolff of the German DVV, Arthur Stock of England, Gordon Selman of Canada, Malcolm Adeshsiah of India and P. J. Mhaiki of Tanzania, the ICAE was formally launched in February of 1973. J. Roby Kidd was the founding Secretary-General, Malcolm Adishehiah was

¹ Ujamaa is the Kiswahili word for familyhood or community-led development. It was the political vision created by President Nyerere which called for people to live together in villages and build a future based on lived experience and local knowledge.

founding President, Helmut Dolff and Arthur Stock were Vice-Presidents as I recall and Paul J Mhaiki was founding Vice-President for Africa! The ICAE was founded as an organisation made up of national adult education bodies. Most of the founding members were from the British Commonwealth, countries where the English concept of adult education had spread. But year by year other countries would join. The Nordic countries came in a block in 1976 at the time of the first ICAE World Assembly of Adult Education.

When my contract was finishing in Tanzania, Paul Mhaiki wrote to Roby Kidd suggesting that he hire me to 'help build the ICAE'. So, in 1975, after some time spent at the Institute of Development Studies at the University of Sussex, I joined Roby Kidd as the first full time employee of the ICAE. My position was that of a Research Officer. It was from that position that I began developing the International Participatory Research Network which had been based on my earlier work in Tanzania and which got a boost in visibility at the 1976 ICAE First World Assembly of Adult Education.

Roby had hired me with the idea that the First World Assembly on Adult Education and Development could be organized in Tanzania under the influence of Mwalimu Nyerere, Paul Mhaiki, Nicolas Kuhanga and others. He asked me to take on the job of Conference Secretary. Working with my former Director Paul Mhaiki who was by this time the Principal of Kivukoni College, I spent all of 1975 and the first half of 1976 getting the word out to all corners of the adult education world. We had funding from the Canadian government and from the Ebert-Stiftung Foundation of Germany but the vast majority of financial support came from national governments, local NGOs, personal budgets. In the end we were between 600-700 people from close to 100 countries. Mwalimu Nyerere was our keynote speaker and author of the Dar es Salaam Declaration on Adult Education. Majid Rahnema, architect of the UNESCO Learning to be Report, Lucile Mair, Jamaica's Ambassador to the United Nations and Paulo Freire were among many well-known names who gathered in the grounds of the University of Dar es Salaam. The key messages coming from the Dar es Salaam conference were that 'development' would not be attained without attention to adult education, that adult education had a transformative potential to change, that by coming together as a global movement all of our local work could be strengthened.

Between 1976 and 1979 I spent most of my time building the global participatory research movement. Working with several gifted graduate students from the University of Toronto such as Edward Jackson, dian marino, Deborah Barndt, Al Vigoda, and emerging global leaders such as Rajesh Tandon from India, Francisco Vio Grossi from Chile, Sylvia Smelkes of Mexico,

Ana Kranjc of Slovenia, Orlando Fals Borda of Colombia and others. We held participatory research gatherings in Venezuela, Ljubljana, New Delhi, Toronto, and The Netherlands. By 1979, the time of the ICAE Executive Committee meeting in Finland, participatory research was well known within the international development community.

In 1979, Roby Kidd stepped down as Secretary-General to become Treasurer of ICAE. I was named as the Secretary-General with Chris Duke of Australia named as Associate Secretary-General. I loved the work, the challenges and the vision of a global transformative movement with strong world links which would highlight the role of adult education in the common challenges of our times: literacy, poverty, health for all, women's perspectives and more. I remained Secretary-General until 1991 when I moved to academia in the adult education department of the University of Toronto.

The 1976-1979 period of the ICAE was one of making connections with UNESCO, ECOSOC, FAO, UNITAR and other UN bodies. It was also a period which was focussed more closely on those countries which had national adult education bodies. There was more of a focus on influencing adult education policies at the national and international levels. The 1979-1991 period had a focus on strengthening the links between adult education and the larger global social movements of the times. We had programmatic networks linked to the women's movements, health for all, participatory research, environmental adult education, worker's education, and older adults. The 1982 World Assembly brought the national associations together with the social movement adult educators at Marly-le-Roi outside of Paris. The French President Francois Mitterrand was our keynote speaker. Dame Nita Barrow of Barbados became our President. Our event was organized by Peuple et Culture under the leadership of Bernard Smagghe and Philippe Avenier.

1985 saw the third UNESCO World Conference on Adult Education (CONFINTEA III) in Paris. The ICAE brought several hundred adult educators from our membership to influence the agenda. A team of talented writers from ICEA in Quebec, led by Paul Bélanger, installed in the basement of the buildings at rue Miollis, pounded out and printed draft resolutions which were then taken to national delegations for action. Dame Nita Barrow did a keynote speech on The Right to Learn that was adapted as the declaration of the conference.

1985 saw the third ICAE World Assembly of Adult Education organized in Buenos Aires, Argentina to celebrate the return to democracy by President Alfonsín after the many years of military rule and oppression. President

Alfonsin was our keynote speaker. The Argentina world assembly saw the full emergence of the Latin American popular education movement. Francisco Vio Grossi, the Secretary-General of the Latin American Council for Adult Education (CEAAL) with local organizing done by the formidable Isabel Hernandez, brought the Latin American popular education to the attention of the world. We joined the Mothers in the Plaza de Mayo for a demonstration. The 'madres de la plaza de Mayo' were mothers of the disappeared young people who were killed during the years of oppression. The full energies of the social adult education movement were engaged.

Between 1985 and 1990, we kept our social movement networks active with meetings in many parts of the world. But we also began to work within the UNESCO and UN system to plant the seeds for a United Nations Year of Literacy. We met in Paris, in Germany, in India, in Toronto, in New York and elsewhere preparing the ground for the United Nations declaration of a Literacy year. By this time our President, Dame Nita Barrow who, as Ambassador of Barbados to the United Nations, was based in New York and helped us gain access and visibility. In the end it was Mongolia that made the formal resolution calling for a UN Year of Literacy and 1990 became that year. The ICAE led the International Task Force on Literacy, a coalition of NGOs supporting the year and bringing action to the pronouncements of the United Nations.

1990 was my last ICAE World Assembly as Secretary-General. It was organized in Bangkok, Thailand, under the planning brilliance of Rajesh Tandon, President of the Asia and South Pacific Bureau of Adult Education (ASPBAE) and Kasama Varavan, the Director-General of the Division of Non-Formal Education of the Government of Thailand. We held the "People's Launch of the United Nations International Year of Literacy" at the time. That ceremony culminated with the Royal Princess signing a literacy declaration, an event which was streamed around the world, long before webinars became common.

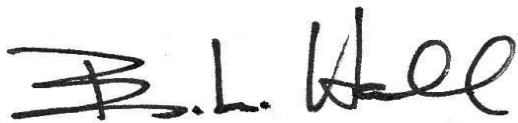
Reflections

I continued to play a role with the ICAE during the challenging years when there were ups and downs in both funding and leadership. I was pleased to have been able to provide some interim support until Celita Eccher, the remarkable Uruguayan Secretary-General and Paul Belanger, the visionary President were able to take over to carry ICAE through the next years of innovation and progress. I was delighted when Katrina Popovic was chosen as Secretary-General some years ago. Katrina is a progressive, scholarly, policy

intelligent leader who continues to carry the visions of the many founders forward. The next 50 years will be amazing!

My years with the ICAE were perhaps the most nourishing of my lifetime. I was exposed to so many brilliant people, powerful ideas, transformative experiences. I write this note on my 80th birthday. I give thanks to the thousands of people I have worked with in this remarkable movement.

Blessings

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "B.L. Wheeler". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized initial "B" and a long, sweeping underline.