

An Historical Account of the International Assembly

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The National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) has a long history with global and international education. There have been special interest groups focusing on global and international education and clearly many members have placed a high priority on making the organization more international. The following highlights events that kept the “flame burning” and led to the establishment of the International Assembly in 1994.

In 1981, President Theodore Kaltsounis suggested to the NCSS Board of Directors that the National Council for the Social Studies become the International Council for the Social Studies. This proposal did not go forward but many members continued to seek ways to make the organization more international in focus. A milestone was reached in 1988 under the leadership of President Jan L. Tucker, when the Board of Directors narrowly passed a motion to establish an international conference to occur every three years.

The first international conference was held as a joint venture between NCSS and the University of British Columbia (UBC) in Vancouver, Canada with sponsorship from the British Columbia Social Studies Teachers’ Association and the Washington State Council for the Social Studies with support from the Alaska and Oregon state councils. This joint venture brought together Canadian and American educators to plan the first ever conference open to educators from across the world but with a special

focus on the Pacific Rim. The conference, “Pacific Rim: International Conference on Social Studies Education,” drew 1100 educators from sixteen countries and jurisdictions around the Pacific Rim. Under the joint leadership of Jan L. Tucker, President of NCSS, and Don Wilson, Professor of Social Studies at UBC, the conference clearly established itself as an international event. With great enthusiasm and interest, conference attendees discussed how they might continue these valuable international connections. Many attendees viewed NCSS as too insular and not outward looking. While there was great enthusiasm and interest, it was clear there was not the infrastructure to support an international organization, and especially so without the aid of technology that is widely available today.

However, the idea did not die and continued to simmer as other international conferences were planned and attended, particularly in Miami, USA (1991) and Nairobi, Kenya (1994)*. In 1991, international educators approached NCSS President Margit McGuire and raised the issue of an international organization again. One suggestion was to create a position on the Board of Directors for an international

* Other international conferences followed in Sydney, Australia (1997) and Calgary, Canada (2000). Sadly this initiative died after the Calgary, Canada international conference in 2000.

member. This idea did not seem feasible given the time and cost of attendance and participation in board meetings. Additionally, it was not clear how such a position would address the interests of international members. As conversations continued, it became clear that NCSS could indeed support the infrastructure of an international component but what was the best venue?

Consideration was given to a special interest group (SIG) but was rejected because of the informality of SIGS. After additional discussion, it seemed that the “associated” organizational structure would meet the needs of international members. The first problem was: no one knew how such a group could be constituted as other associated groups had been in operation as long as anyone could remember. Additionally, it was not clear how such a body could be established under the bylaws of NCSS. There were also issues about whether such a group would “fracture” the organization by establishing yet another entity that stood apart from the rest of the organization. Counter positions argued that the International Assembly, as it would be called, would provide a home base for international members and visitors alike. The debate continued for the next two years and finally on May 1, 1994, the NCSS Board of Directors voted to establish the International Assembly as an associated group. At the annual meeting in Phoenix in 1994, the International Assembly formally met and approved its constitution. Robert Fowler, University of Victoria, Canada, a strong proponent of the International Assembly and one of the early advocates for such an organization at the Pacific Rim international conference, served as the first chairperson.

The rationale as stated in the International Assembly Constitution makes the case for the associated group:

For the past twenty years the annual conference of NCSS has attracted numbers of social studies educators from many countries. Canadians, Australians, and, increasingly educators from the European Community, in particular, have become active members of NCSS. Moreover, in recent years, educators from Africa, Asia and South America have offered significant contributions. These educators have taken advantage of the NCSS conference to interact and network among themselves and with their American counterparts on issues of common concern in teaching and learning social studies. This interaction has heightened awareness among all members of the international dimension of the social studies and the transnational nature of issues, developments and concerns in social education of the people of this planet. To its credit, NCSS has proved the major, if not the sole forum for an international gathering of social educators. The leadership of the Council in offering this forum to all social educators has been very much appreciated by U.S. and “foreign” members alike. In turn international delegates have provided a diversity of perspectives that have enlivened and enriched both the formal program of the annual conference and its informal debates and discussions. The international community welcomes, therefore, the Council’s decisions to grant affiliated status to the International Assembly. Hence, this proposed constitution is put forward for information in order

that it will be discussed, revised if necessary, and approved by the membership of the International Assembly at its meeting in Phoenix on November 18, 1994.

The International Assembly has featured many notable speakers since its inception including Former Chancellor Helmut Schmidt in 1999. At that meeting, the International Assembly instituted the Jan L. Tucker Memorial Lecture that has continued to attract internationally renowned government and policy decision-makers as well as authors and educators. The International Assembly has broadened the organization through its network of such notable presenters thus increasing the international focus of the organization and affirming the important contributions that the International Assembly makes to NCSS. As globalization increases, the International

Assembly plays an essential role in NCSS in highlighting topics from an international perspective, providing a forum for international educators, and supporting international outreach that is so essential to the National Council for the Social Studies. Today the International Assembly continues to flourish with strong leadership and a commitment to global and international education endeavors.

To date there have been eight leaders each serving a two-year term.
Robert Fowler (Canada) 1994-1996
Hans Hooghoff (Netherlands) 1996- 1998
Gavin Faichney (Australia) 1998-2000
Vickie Green (Canada) 2000-2002
Omiunota Nelly Ukpokodu (USA) 2002-2004
Toni Fuss Kirkwood-Tucker (USA) 2004-2006
Gloria Alter (USA) 2006-2008
Iftikhar Ahmad (USA) 2008-2010

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