

Adult and Community Education (ACE) Conference, Wellington 2018  
**Kia Mau, Tamaua te Aka Matua**, Becoming Global Citizens, 12–14 June  
<https://www.aceaotearoa.org.nz/events/ace-conference>

The 2018 ACE Conference was held at Te Wharewaka o Poneke in Wellington and attracted over 100 participants of all ages, cultures and professions, over the three days from Tuesday evening through to Thursday afternoon.

After the wonderful Pōwhiri, we were greeted by the ACE Conference Team and the Conference Steering Group. From the very beginning, there was a joyful and emotional mood, thanks also to the musical accompaniment of the moderator Pale Sauni (ACE Aotearoa Board) who raised the question with the audience why are we here and what are we looking for.

The first keynote speaker Prof. Dr. James Liu went straight to the topic “Becoming Global Citizens” and presented his research under the name of Global Consciousness. The speech by Dr. Liu presented Lifelong Learning as an ultimate process in the here and now, where it depends on where we stand and where we come from. Dr. Liu described the emergence of global culture as a historical development, and is the product of the interaction between the ingrained system of cultural logic and the technologically driven global economy. He also highlighted the progress of political leadership and countered the consistently high number of criminal offenses committed by locals. It may be a question of multiple identities that fuel the discussion of who we are and what different education each one possesses. Above all, in the application of the sustainable development goals presented by the UN, he could see a positive challenge, which also seems to be dealing with our own person. His closing words concluded a stimulating lecture: the better I know myself, the more I reach global consciousness.

My impression of the first day is a very positive one, which immediately made me curious about the diversity of the people and their friendly engagement.

The second day started with the keynote speaker from Peru, Nelida Cespedes Rossel. Nelida, who has been working as a professional teacher for decades and has been an Honorary President of the council of Popular Education in Latin America and the Caribbean. She gave the audience a vivid overview of the three most important movements in Peru. One of the great movements has been an educational movement with Paulo Freire, a Brazilian educator and philosopher. The work of Paulo Freire played a significant role as he developed a literacy program in the 1960s. This was not only a technique for the rapid and targeted acquisition of reading and writing, but also a method of raising awareness. Since illiterates were not eligible to vote in Brazil, literacy was a campaign of high political relevance. He himself saw his program as a step towards the democratization of Brazil. Paulo Freire called his work the *pedagogy of hope*.

In a personal conversation with Nelida we talked about *the Forum Theater* by Augusto Boal. Boal, a Brazilian theater practitioner and political activist played an important role during this time and was a close friend of Paulo Freire. *The Theater of the Oppressed*, as it was called, was also the subject of my final thesis in my studies of social work and adult education, incorporating social competences that can be achieved through this practice. The *Forum Theater of the Oppressed* is still very present among students of social work and acting. Augusto Boal's concepts were also pioneers in the education of managers and in companies that made up the Entrepreneurship Theater. The spectrum

of this form of learning ranges from staged small plays to role-plays, in which the participants themselves act. The goal is to animate them emotionally to reflect their own behavior.

After the first lecture and a break with coffee and appetising snacks, the conference participants were able to sign up for various workshops. I chose the workshop on ['Supporting adults with dyslexia and other learning differences'](#) because I work with people who also have learning difficulties and for these reasons I wanted to find out what attitude New Zealand has to it. The workshop presenter Mike Styles has been supporting people with dyslexia for many years to achieve in tertiary education and the workplace. Dyslexia, Mike Styles showed us, is a very varied condition and no two dyslexics will have the same set of characteristics. He emphasised that many have a range of difficult and sad experiences during their school- and in work lives. Now it is possible to get affordable technical aids like the 'smart pen' for reading, which offers comprehensive help for everyday life. Even a low-cost app can be purchased and could also be designed in Māori, a participant noticed. In Germany, there are more than 5 million Germans who have a reading and writing weakness. I remember that there has also been a powerful software in Germany, which is an effective medium for the accurate diagnosis and treatment of children's and adults' individual reading problems. Its effectiveness has been proven by several studies and is supported by the government.

Mike Style seemed a pioneer in New Zealand in this area. Dyslexia is not dishonorable, he said, quite the opposite. However, he missed the understanding of the public. 'If someone breaks their leg, you want to help them. No one wants to think of him as stupid, but tries to cure him with the necessary tools. However, if a child suffers from dyslexia it is considered 'stupid'. The technical aids seem to be a good way, but it also needs an understanding environment, educational offers, patience and a good team, emphasised Mike. We must learn to recognise the individual concerns of those affected and work towards a solution, he appealed to the audience.

A lunch break provided opportunities to exchange views with other participants. A short conversation with the director Colin McGregor highlighted the need to bring the target group of the elderly more into the center of adult education. For years, I have been working with the older generation and have been able to share some experiences with him.

Before the next workshop, the keynote speaker Veronica Tawhai started with an overview of her research at Massey University on the occasion of her PhD studies. This very personal talk included the Treaty of Waitangi 1840 and has remained in my memory and touched me a lot. The question of how indigenous people become a global citizen when they were deprived of their livelihood and raised the question of their identity was very emotional. The question of who we are and what it means to be a 'honorable citizenship' was partly addressed by Prof. Graham Smith, who she quoted: 'I am looking at our students and saying 'the profit is actually not in creating wealth or money. Our profit is in our people and how do we advance our social and cultural and economic interest as a group? ...All that stuff that I am talking about, to me, is part of that cultural citizenship.'

The Workshop-Session 2 ['Developing Māori students' soft skills to support improved achievement outcomes'](#) was held by Jodie Cook and Karen Terekia. I would like to

comment less on the content of the workshop, as they can be found on the conference website. I would like to emphasise the pedagogical working method of the lecturer with us as a class. The introductory session immediately created an interesting and familiar atmosphere. Forming small groups to create case studies and discussing tertiary sector key competencies gave a good insight into the way we, as students, work.

A very exciting second day with highly educated lecturers and conference participants came to an end and a fitting conclusion to the [ACE Aotearoa Annual Awards](#) was made after an excellent Conference dinner at the Te Papa museum at the waterfront.

The third and last day of the conference started with a presentation by Ako Aotearoa, who showed us how cultural competence can be built into the work with Māori and Pacific educators and learners. They closely work with ACE Aotearoa and support each other. The following presentation *'from pretty-dodgy' to 'better-gogy'* addressed how to improve the teaching quality in the ACE Sector with a focus on language. Analiese Robertson, the ACE Aotearoa Professional Development and Networks Manager, used the language as the main instrument to be a good supporter of learning in the future. 'We want to make the language accessible but my job is not only teaching but to look after'. At this moment, I remembered the rules of Albert Mehrabian, who taught me about the combination of body language and spoken language in a presentation or job interview. Since the spoken language after Mehrabian also depends on the rhythm and tone and only 7% of the content would be the teaching of Albert Mehrabian also an interesting aspect in the modern education and training.

Finally, I would like to draw attention to the address by the Minister of Education and Ministerial Services, Hon Chris Hipkins. It will be available on the conference website and I encourage everyone to read it. He referred to the high number of volunteers in the sector and acknowledged that they should be paid work in the future. His opinion on the paid 'volunteer' activities was strongly supported and applauded.

The third day was closed with an educational game from Germany. Chains made by people with disabilities were distributed to the participants, and given to their neighbour, who expressed wishes for the other. Later, I learned that facilities for the handicapped, who can sell handicraft here in New Zealand, are little known. Most of these facilities are cared for by social workers and the work done by the people is a kind of occupational therapy as well.

For me personally a very stimulating conference finds its end and I am positively surprised by how many people from all over the world participated and fight for freedom, social justice and human rights. Also, the words of Nelida Rossel will remain with me: 'we all have to fight for our rights, for our pedagogical view, which has to be linked with the political view. We have to talk face to face and participate in the real situation'. Nelida added balloons to the crowd and compared the flying balloons with dreams we have.



*Viola (left) with Nelida Rossel (right)*