

IACESA



INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION
FOR COGNITIVE EDUCATION
IN SOUTHERN AFRICA

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2015 IACESA CONFERENCE

OPENING ADDRESS BY IACESA PRESIDENT (2013 -2015) - ESTELLE BRETTEENY

A warm welcome to all presenters and delegates! The IACESA Board appreciates the time, effort and financial sacrifice of all the international and local presenters. We know that the conference delegates will gain tremendously from your specialized knowledge and skills. Without the delegates a conference is not possible and therefore we thank each one of you who is attending the conference and that will play a vital role in the success of this conference. We also have a few special guests, including IACESA founder members, who have been invited to share this conference with us and we welcome them too.

The IACESA Conference has been advertised for months as it is a very special conference - IACESA is celebrating 21 years in 2015! The Thursday programme is planned especially to include tributes to giants of cognitive education, to honour IACESA founder members and to reflect upon the development of cognitive education in South Africa. We are very privileged to have Prof. Willie Rautenbach and Mrs Rautenbach here today. Prof. Willie has played a tremendous role in SA to promote cognitive education and is viewed as the pioneer of cognitive education in SA by many people. As part of the activities to celebrate 21 years of IACESA, the IACESA Story Project was initiated. The purpose of this project was to collect 21 stories, written by cognitive education practitioners and academics in SA. It has been said that story is the fundamental instrument of thought and that stories is our chief means of looking into the future, of predicting, of planning and of explaining. Most of our experience, our knowledge and our thinking are organized as stories. The story of Prof. Willie is the first story in the booklet and the IACESA Board could think of no better person to reflect about the history and story of cognitive education in SA than Prof. Willie. Oxford University Press sponsored the booklet *21 Stories to Celebrate 21 Years of IACESA* and we are welcoming OUP at the conference too.

The IACESA logo is synonym with IACESA. It has been used for 21 years although the new logo is a modernized version of the original logo. Where does this logo come from? The logo stems directly from **The Thinker**. According to internet sources **The Thinker** was originally conceived as part of Rodin's composition: 'The Gates of Hell'. There is also a strong connection to Dante, a famous poet, who used to sit and think on a rock. As an independent work **The Thinker** became perhaps the best-know monumental work or sculpture of all times. **The Thinker** was detached from the personal connection with Dante and is now seen to represent the power of thought and mental creativity. The first exhibited version of **The Thinker** was in the 1880's but since then a large amount of sculptures has been placed in cities all over the world in museums, at gates of universities, etc.

I would like all of you to visualize a student in your class, your office or therapy session as Rodin's **Thinker**. Rodin's **Thinker** was thinking not only with his brain, but with his knitted brow, his distended nostrils, his compressed lips and every muscle of his arms, legs, his clenched fist and gripping toes. Can the average student you know do this? The original copy of **The Thinker** sculpture was supposed to be looked at in the

round and many of the bronze copies as well as original plasters have been displayed in a central position so that visitors can see it from every conceivable angle. Are you looking at the learners you teach or work with from all possible angles? **The Thinker** conjures up images of intelligence and deep thought and the muscular athletic body shows that the act of thinking is a powerful exercise. Can your students think deeply and engage in powerful thinking?

As part of IACESA 21st celebration I have asked my daughter, who is an artist, to produce an etching of **The Thinker**. The Intaglio process that produces an original etching is a very intriguing but time consuming printing process. The image is drawn onto a copper plate by using a sharp etching tool and after numerous technical processes each etching is printed individually. Etchings are very personal and each etching has its own fingerprint. Esmeralda decided to draw five versions of **The Thinker** in one etching – viewing **The Thinker** from different perspectives – it was her concept but it fitted our conference theme perfectly. The drawing on the plate is a mirror image of the actual print and when Esmeralda drew **The Thinker** images, within time constraints, she did not think about the position of **The Thinker's** arms. Although **The Thinker** sculptures produced over the years vary slightly in appearance, the right arm rests on the left knee and supports the pensive head; the left hand is open. In the etching **The Thinker** is supporting his chin with his left arm and the right hand is left open. It was totally unintentional but when I saw what has happened I knew this was meant to be. There was a direct link with the theme of the conference – instead of having the left hand open as if ready to grasp the reality of his vision and act, **The Thinker** in the etching has his right hand open. Daniel Pink is suggesting that that *“Left-brain-style thinking used to be the driver and right-brain-style thinking the passenger, but R-Directed Thinking is suddenly grabbing the wheel, stepping on the gas and determining where we are going and how we will get there”*.

So may this etching of **The Thinker – from all perspectives** remind us that we must all embrace this paradox of personalizing learning in the global classroom as nearly every classroom in the world includes diversity in various ways. We need to focus on each student's learning needs but at the same time impart global competence and skills for the future. **The Thinker – from all perspectives** can be purchased from the registration desk. It is an edition of only 21 etchings to celebrate 21 years of IACESA and a percentage of the sales will go towards IACESA.

We can not look at the thinkers in our midst from all perspectives and personalize thinking and learning unless we learn to think critically about what we are doing and how we are doing it. The conference programme will now commence with a keynote presentation about critical thinking by Prof. Mary Grosser, from the School of Educational Sciences at NWU. She is also part of the Optentia Research Focus Area and the IACESA President after this conference. We are celebrating 21 years of IACESA and I am delighted that our first presenter is from SA, a longstanding member of IACESA, an IACESA Board member and passionate about cognitive education.

Enjoy the conference, think critically and be inspired!