



The ITC Archives: Interviews with the Early Leaders of the ITC



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As explained in the cover e-mail, the ITC Council would appreciate your providing detailed answers to the following questions:

- 1. During what year did you become involved with the ITC, how did this affiliation occur (e.g. were you asked to join the ITC, were you a representative of another organization, or did you elect to become involved), and what was the nature of your initial work on the ITC?**

“I believe I became involved in the ITC in about 1991 or 1992. I was a member of the American Psychological Association’s Committee on Psychological Assessment and Testing. At that time this committee funded one member to attend the ITC Council meeting. I believe I was co-opted at a Council member during my first meeting. Ironically, some members opposed my membership, voicing objections to my serving as director of research for MENSA.

I felt the Council was mired in activities that lacked an international impact, had little vision, and spent too much time and energy engaged in in-fighting. However, I saw considerable potential in the organization. For example, its goals, if achieved, could materially impact test development and use internationally, especially in developing countries.

Test development and use in developing countries constitute one of my abiding interests. I recognized the ITC had considerable potential to create policies and programs and thus needed resources that were beyond the ability of many resource-limited countries to accomplish on their own yet were needed by them.”

- 2. What were your initial impressions of the ITC, including its organizational structure, missions, and personnel?**

“Jean Cardinet, a Swiss psychologist, envisioned the need for an international association of national test commissions that would address important regional and international issues. His efforts during the late 1960s and 1970s were instrumental first in promoting this vision and then helping to form the ITC. Leadership was transferred to Ype Poortinga and the Dutch Committee on Testing when Cardinet decided to discontinue this leadership. Ype became its first president in the mid-1970s, thus officially forming the ITC (Oakland, T., Poortinga, Y., Schlegel, J., & Hambleton, R., 2001).



Young organizations, similar to infants and toddlers, typically display growing pains. For example, both attempt to define their roles and to obtain needed resources. The early years of the ITC displayed growing pain: in-fighting and bickering among the senior members, failure of the officers to perform their duties, limited financial and professional resources to develop and sustain meaningful programs, and a lack of vision. Organizationally, Council seemingly devoted more time to proposing revisions to its constitution and by-laws than to shaping and instituting meaningful policy. Our stated missions rarely were realized.”

3. Who were some of the key leaders in the ITC at that time and what were their roles?

“My Council membership occurred years after Iraj Ayman (Iran), Jean Cardinet, Ken Miller (United Kingdom), and E. Belvin Williams (United States) met in 1975 at the request of Ype to form an advisory board. Only one of these members, Ken Miller, was on Council when I joined it. He served as president after the abrupt departure of Iraj Ayman, ITC’s first president. My early memories are strongest in reference to Justin Schlegel (France), a somewhat quiet and gentle man who sought harmony and who served as the editor of the fledging ITC Newsletter (now the ITC Bulletin), John Keats (Australia) who served as president, Ronald Hambleton (a Canadian who was and remains living in the US) who also later served as president, and later Barbara Byrne (another Canadian living in the US) who served effectively as treasurer.

The views of Ken Miller and John Keats were inseparable and often inconsistent with those held and expressed by Ron Hambleton and me. The backbiting behaviors of John Keats distressed me and led me to suggest to him that, in my judgment, he needed to put down the axe (typically directed toward Ron Hambleton’s views) and pick up a shovel (and pitch in with our work).

The ITC languished also due to a lack of unified programs, limited finances, and misuse of them. The ITC Bulletin may have been the ITC’s most visible program. It served as both a newsletter and a scholarly journal. The ITC’s annual revenues generally were in a \$5000 to \$6000 range. Approximately 30% of this budget was spent, I thought misspent, on funding the Bulletin, edited by Ken Miller, which had 27 subscribers. Other financial appropriations included 20% each for administrative, newsletter, and annual Council meeting expenses and 10% for special projects. Elected officers and Council members generally were not reimbursed for travel or office expenses.”

4. Every organization and association goes through growing pains. During your first few years on the Council, what were some of the impediments that you felt limited the ITC’s work and needed to be changed?

“As noted above, impediments included back-biting, divisions of opinions as to viable program goals, leadership lapses, and a lack of financial and other resources.”



5. What prominent changes have you seen in the ITC between when you first were a member and now?

“The ITC currently can be described by terms that are the antheses of those used above: greater comradeship among Council members; understanding and unity in defining and working toward the realization of important goals, missions, and products; stronger and sustained leadership; and more ample resources to fund deserving programs.”

6. Where has the ITC done well? What do you think the ITC’s biggest accomplishment has been over the years?

“The ITC’s success can be seen in various important accomplishments. They include holding successful conferences that advance and disseminate knowledge, serve to socialize its members, promote understanding, provide pride in the association, increase the association’s visibility and membership, and increase income.

The development and promotion of guidelines that address various issues that impact test development and use have increased the ITC’s capacity to impact other professional associations and applied practices. Their impact may be greatest in countries that are resource-limited yet are striving to attain international standards.

The formation and quarterly publication of ITC’s scholarly journal, International Journal of Testing, also is important. The ITC and its individual members have been engaged in various other forms of scholarship through their own publications of journal articles, chapters, and books. The association’s efforts to publish a handbook on testing are laudable yet years behind schedule.”

7. Where has the ITC possibly made “wrong steps” or mistakes?

“My summary of earlier ‘wrong steps’ can be found above. In contrast, I believe the ITC has not made grievous organizational errors within the last 10 to 15 years. Although the ITC has not made ‘wrong steps’ in reference to the following issue, it is one about which I have expressed concern.

I have been critical of the limited role and thus the limited impact of the International Journal of Testing, given my belief that it fails to provide scholarship that promotes an understanding of the international status of test development and use. For examples, articles that others or I co-authored that help promote this understanding were rejected by our journal and subsequently published in more prestigious journals. I continue to submit my articles on this topic to other journals, believing their content is likely to receive a more receptive review from other journals and will reach a larger audience. This outcome is ironic in that I suggested the ITC establish this journal and, as president, signed the initial contract—one negotiated by Bruce Bracken.”



8. What do you perceive to be current challenges facing the ITC and what role should the ITC play in this regard?

“Test development and use are well established in most Western countries, Australia, Hong Kong, Israel, New Zealand, and to some extent in the Republic of China. However, test development and use are not strong in most countries, especially in smaller developing countries. Their status is especially dire in countries in Africa (with the exception of South Africa), the Middle East, and many countries that comprised the former Soviet Union. Test development and use are not strong the People’s Republic of China (except within I/O psychology), India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, or other Southeast Asian and Pacific Perimeter countries. The ITC should continue and increase its efforts to help advance test development and use in those countries that are poised and want assistance in its efforts to develop an infrastructure needed to contribute in these areas.

The ITC also should establish policies that help guide graduate preparation in psychometrics, including the identification of courses and applied experiences that contribute to the needed attainment of expertise in this area.

Additionally, the ITC should establish a program to accredit exemplary psychometric programs, thus further establishing high academic and professional standards for preparing persons with this specialty.

Lastly, the ITC has access to most of the leaders in test development and use. It should develop education and training modules that address specific issues important to test development and use, thus assisting interested students as well as faculty in acquiring needed knowledge and skills important to their practices—a resource that is especially important in developing countries.”

9. What do you believe should the ITC be focusing on right now and who are the key stakeholders that should be involved?

“Although richer than before, the ITC’s professional and financial resources remain limited. Although its missions could become far-reaching, the association must limit its focus to what is most needed, what it does best, to continue its successful work, and to jettison work that is not done well or no longer is critical. It should continue to conduct self-evaluations as to the relevance and effectiveness of its programs in an effort to identify those that are most needed and achievable. I believe programs identified above under number 8 should be considered if the ITC decide on pursuing one or more new areas.”

10. If there was one thing you could change with regards to the ITC, what would it be?

“I would strive to make better use of the professional resources over which the ITC has considerable control. Our Council members and those with whom they are associated together with our ITC members either include many, perhaps most, of the world’s most talented in test development and use or have access to this talent. The utilization of this talent is needed to achieve our international goals.



Council tends to look inwardly for professional resources. Its effectiveness will increase as it looks more outwardly. Continued reliance on the efforts and resources of those on Council, while important and remain necessary, are insufficient.”

11. What structural or organizational changes to the ITC should be considered to further its effectiveness?

“The creation of an assistant to the secretary and the employment of Ananda Van Tonder were strokes of genius and led to important structural organizational changes that increased the association’s effectiveness and efficiency. However, I have advocated for membership changes since joining the Council. Some changes have been made. For example, at first, membership largely was limited to national professional associations of psychology or others national agencies devoted to testing issues. Slowly, over the years, additional membership categories were created. The number of individual members increased dramatically as a result of providing two-year membership following a person’s attendance at an ITC conference. However, such membership rarely is renewed.

ITC leadership seemingly continues to envision membership to be restricted largely to persons who are psychologists. Although psychologists are instrumentally engaged in test development and use, professionals who have other credentials also contribute importantly to these efforts. Thus, ITC leadership should continue efforts to broaden membership and thus better respond to the needs as well as impact of professions beyond psychology.”

12. To what extent did you find it difficult to dedicate your time to the work of the ITC?

“All professional behaviors occur within a personal context. Additionally, all lasting and important relationships are reciprocal. Thus, the following description of my personal context may help to understand my response to this question.

I have two personal goals: to be a good father and to strive to be competent. My temperament qualities include intuition and thinking—qualities universally associated with striving to be competent and to be an architect—a change agent. I value leadership opportunities, knowing that through them I learn much, thus nurturing my competence, and am able may influence the formation of institutional infrastructures, may help shape the future, and thus serve as an architect. I was able to strive toward these goals through my work with the ITC. Thus, I approached my work with the ITC with a deep sense of honor and appreciation. I believe my relationships with the ITC have been reciprocal: we both seemingly benefitted.

My initial association with the ITC occurred at a time when the ITC was growing from early childhood to adolescence—a time during which considerable parental guidance is needed. I felt a passionate commitment to the ITC and felt honored to participate in the maturation of an organization that had considerable potential. Thus, at times I felt I was exerting a parenting role.



I also felt honored to work alongside some of the world’s most gifted scholars from whom I learned much. For example, my work with Ron Hambleton, later with Barbara Byrne, along with countless other colleagues helped elevate my academic and professional abilities.

In summary, although I devoted considerable time to the work of the ITC, I always found this work to be consistent with my personal values, thus to be personally valued, and never an onerous intrusion into my time.”

13. How would you compare the first ITC conference you ever attended with the one hosted in San Sebastian in 2014?

“Although all Council members have attended their first ITC conference, few attended the first ITC conference. I along with Ron have. This conference, organized by Ron and me and held in June, 1993 at Oxford University, was the best conference I ever attended—and I have attended hundreds.

Its significance is due to various conditions. Early on I wanted to contribute to the ITC and proposed three ideas to Ron. He thought my desire to sponsor an international conference was ambitious yet the most viable and encouraged me to submit a conference proposal at the next Council meeting. My plan was accepted albeit with reservations. The ITC had no experience sponsoring an international convention and thus had little confidence of or expectation for its success. Additionally, the ITC lacked the financial capacity to properly fund the conference. For example, the Council awarded me less than US\$300 for this effort. Ron and I were able to obtain financial support from 14 other agencies and associations, thus allowing us to reduce conference registration and to provide travel support for many participants from developing countries.

I felt confident that a proper location (e.g., Oxford University) and the selection of some of the brightest stars in our profession to provide keynote addresses on the conference theme (i.e. Test Use with Children and Youth: International Pathways to Progress) could serve as a magnet that would draw at least one hundred participants (Oakland & Hambleton, 1995 provides a review of this conference). Ron’s work in obtaining excellent keynote speakers was critical to the eventual conference success. One hundred fourteen participants from 40 countries attended.

This conference was organized before the widespread use of the Internet. I prepared and printed all conference materials, obtained mailing lists, sent conference announcements by mail multiple times, responded to conference inquiries by mail, and received most conference reservations by fax to my home.

We all resided at St. Hugh’s College. Thus, we ate together, had all conference activities there, and spent considerable time socializing throughout the days and nights. I arranged nightly events to complement daily conference activities. These included an opening reception on the lawn of St. Hugh’s, attendance at a Shakespeare play at Stratford-on-Avon, walking tours of the city that focused on the city’s mythology, visits to well-known pubs, and an evensong event at the college.



Many conferees expressed sadness at the ending of the conference, having formed common and strong bonds personally and professionally with colleagues from many countries who they may never see again.

The success of this conference enabled Council to plan other conferences with confidence of their success. For example, six year later, in 1999, Ron and I organized the second ITC conference, held at Georgetown University in Washington DC, on test adaptations, thus building on his important work on this topic. The ITC also co-sponsored another conference that year in Graz, Austria with the International Association of Cross-cultural Psychology, again discussing test adaptation. Subsequent conferences have been held, on average, every two years.

Thus, although the San Sebastian conference was excellent in every way, no conference can compare to the importance of the ITC's 1993 conference for the ITC and me."

14. Among your various contributions, what do you believe may be your lasting legacy?

"I believe the following may constitute lasting legacies: the co-leadership of the 1993 and subsequent ITC conferences, my leadership in proposing and subsequently signing the contract with Erlbaum to publish the International Journal of Testing, and leadership in developing two guidelines (i.e. on practitioner use of test revisions, obsolete tests, and test disposal as well as on the assessment of immigrants and second language learners)."

References

- Oakland, T. & Hambleton, R. (Eds). (1995) *International perspectives on academic assessment*. Boston: Kluwer.
- Oakland, T., Poortinga, Y., Schlegel, J., & Hambleton, R. (2001). International Test Commission: Its History, current status, and future directions. *International Journal of Testing*, 1 (1), 3-32

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Shortly after completing this interview, Tom Oakland was murdered in his home in Gainesville, Florida on Wednesday 4th March 2015. An edited copy of this interview together with many tributes from colleagues were included in *Testing International*, Vol 33 July 2015