

Telephone survey/review with ICSEI members

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Motivation

On the Board and among members, every now and then, the question comes up if ICSEI still fulfils its unique position around the world for which it was founded and whether it lives up to the expectations of today's global membership. To find out more on this issue the decision was taken during the January 7, 2015 Board meeting that a sample of members should be interviewed to get a clearer view on this. Andy Hargreaves (President Elect) and Michael Schratz (President) were commissioned to ask members selected by the ICSEI Secretariat to represent different continents and countries, as well as differences in longevity of membership in ICSEI, about their views. They were asked to conduct an analysis and provide a written report to the Board with a view to the results and their implications and recommendations being shared at the AGM in January 2016 in Glasgow.

The following five questions were generated for this purpose:

1. What makes ICSEI special and how is it different from other organizations?
2. Why do you come? Why do you pay?
3. Do you have any suggestions how it might grow?
4. What would make it more attractive to other people (including young people)?
5. What would you keep, subtract or add to the name?

Procedure

The interviews were mainly conducted by phone, face-to-face or occasionally by email. Detailed notes or transcripts were taken from each interview. If individuals had not responded to contacts or were too difficult to schedule given their other commitments, the Secretariat provided substitute names.

Twenty ICSEI members were interviewed during 2015, and these interviews form the sample for this review. It is important to stress that the process of interviewing and sample selection is not a rigorous research study but a review of some members' opinions and perceptions to help guide ICSEI's decision-making. In addition, the interviews were conducted with existing members and not with people whose membership had lapsed for some reason, or with others who were not or not yet members of ICSEI (i.e. potential members of ICSEI).

Generally, members felt surprised to be interviewed by the ICSEI President or President Elect, and also felt valued by being asked about their views on and expectations regarding ICSEI's future.

The authors of this review want to thank the ICSEI members participating in the interviews for having been generous with their time and open and helpful with their contributions. They hope that the review will make a constructive, evidence-informed contribution to discussions and decisions about the future development of ICSEI.

1. The uniqueness of ICSEI and its difference from other organizations

Essence

ICSEI is a special network of thinkers who conduct and consume credible/valid research. It comprises an international diversity of people in a welcoming community on a scale that enables people to interact easily and effectively with others and to conduct more sustained conversations than very large conferences sometimes permit. ICSEI opens minds, honors research and also practitioners' views of research, is good for (informal) networking, links theory and practice, communicates important policy ideas, and tracks new trends. ICSEI publications and networks are welcomed as well as the Congresses, though most people see ICSEI as being predominantly an annual Congress.

- *ICSEI is regarded as a professional community that offers researchers, policy makers and practitioners added value to their work.*
- *The global perspective helps broaden each member's horizon particularly when participating in the Congresses.*
- *In a nutshell: "It is global, easy going, it goes around the globe, rather big, well connected, family feeling."*

However, there seems to be a lack of innovation in the focus of ICSEI and also in some of its processes, participation is too expensive for people who have to travel far, the timing may be difficult for people with young families and/or who may be in the midst of vacation time, keynotes are not always high level, and though the community is international, it is often Anglo-Saxon dominated and cultures and ethnicities outside European and Asian ones are under-represented. Language issues for non-English speakers are also not always considered sufficiently.

Strengths

For most of the members interviewed, ICSEI represents a special network of thinkers with similar interests that cannot be found in AERA, ECER and other larger conferences. It adds the value of an international focus and gives members a feeling of connectedness. The fact that ICSEI is not driven by US agendas, as compared, for example, to AERA, is viewed as a strongpoint. Bringing together experts from diverse contexts helps to develop new ways of understanding and enables new learning among diverse people. ICSEI not only offers credible research on school effectiveness and improvement, but also honors practitioners' views as equal to and as valid as researchers' views from universities and research institutes. From all sides, it is highly valued as a way to

connect theory and practice. In one member's view it is "the only Congress in education where practice, research and policy link."

For young researchers, ICSEI can provide a significant place to present and exchange their findings. For this reason some university-based faculty supervisors support the participation of graduate students and the presentation of their work there. ICSEI is seen as a welcoming community for new members. ICSEI widens the horizons of teachers (e.g. through participating from the host country) by giving them access to experts and expertise from all over the world.

Networking is an essential aspect of ICSEI for members during the Congresses, and also, increasingly, after and between the Congresses too, in the more formal network groups.

Keynote speakers are regarded as normally quite good though the quality is not viewed as consistent – see below.

By moving the Congress from continent to continent, each one is embedded in the culture and system of the country, which offers learning possibilities about other countries, especially their education systems (including visits to schools). Showcases have been excellent opportunities for getting to know particular systems (alignment of research, policy and practice)

Challenges

Despite its strong international orientation, ICSEI experiences some difficulties in achieving high levels of inclusion. Some members only attend Congresses that are within financial reach - particularly those members who work in schools. Some non-English speaking members find it challenging to present and discuss their research in an international context ("native speakers are quicker in discussions, non-native speakers might need some more time"). Some minorities within ICSEI experience their minority status emphatically – for instance, one respondent felt that many ICSEI presentations on effectiveness and improvement in high poverty settings were essentially presentations about ethno-cultural minorities that were not by representatives of those minorities. Graduate students are under-represented and despite some financial incentives offered by ICSEI, questions have been raised as to the degree of mentoring that is available by research-active professors to support the participation of funding for such students at ICSEI conferences. Keynote speakers have not always been "high level" ("some have been good, some not") and "they should not be just 'Anglo-Saxon'".

The development of networks has been welcomed by several ICSEI respondents, but some members would like to see more incentives and less bureaucracy regarding the development of local and regional ICSEI activities. At some Congresses, more opportunities could also be taken from the particular strengths and orientations of the host country.

The current timing of ICSEI suits some kinds of members, especially long-standing ones, but there is a concern that younger educators with family commitments may be discouraged from participating in ICSEI and its Congresses at a time of year that falls in the middle of a major family holiday period and just before the resumption of the professional calendar in many jurisdictions.

There is strong approval of and continued support for the emphasis on improvement and effectiveness but equally strong feelings that other kinds of change including innovation and/or transformation that are occurring in the field should be reflected in the official and actual orientation of ICSEI.

2. Members' reasons for paying membership and coming to Congresses

Essence

ICSEI is worth the effort and investment, creates connectedness of research and practice and brings members in contact with people who are valued. However, for certain segments of members, particularly young researchers, money can be a hindrance to participation. Membership – and members – could be more visible!

Strengths

The answers of the members interviewed varied depending on their particular situation. Very often the arguments referred to experiencing different “conceptual frameworks” (“Need the world to explore my thoughts, but also different kind of people and education systems is like a mirror and helps to narrow your focus for your own system”, “present their findings from global perspectives which provide many different lenses on similar issues”) or to being part of a global association which values both research and practice. Some members feel committed to ICSEI and want to support the organization “as it fills an important niche explicitly bridging research, policy and practice”, even if they only go to Congresses every 2nd or 3rd year. Network members find the membership fee rather reasonable since they keep being involved during the year (“membership helps you to see what your questions are”), get calls for papers and contribute to publications (“for other organizations, you pay more and get less”).

Challenges

For some interviewees, membership is not visible or transparent enough (they don't know who else is a member when logging on). In some cases, going to Congresses is too costly, especially if members have to pay out of their own pocket. The following recommendation was made for organizational membership from one participant: “For organizational membership it would be good to have just the members, but not necessarily the names (e.g. 4 memberships), as co-workers might change/be on parental leave etc., but memberships then could be transferred – would open space for organizational membership.”

3. Growth potential for ICSEI and possibilities for making membership more attractive

One proposed growth area is to look more at learning and improvement/effectiveness processes beyond as well as within schools.

There were a number of suggestions for making ICSEI more inclusive in various ways. These included strategies to support mentoring of younger researchers, and for bringing emerging scholars into ICSEI at first with supervisors or more senior colleagues from their own institution and then as a new generation of invited speakers or mini-keynotes. They also included explicit strategies to reduce the Anglo-Saxon/white dominance of the organization, notwithstanding the growing membership among participants from Asian countries and systems.

Several respondents drew attention to the possibilities of and need to intensify the use of digital and social media by updating the website, establishing a twitter hashtag that others would then use and “take to new levels”, and using Facebook and twitter to stoke up interest before and between Congress sessions.

The vision, platform, and narrative of ICSEI globally could also be developed. What is ICSEI’s *marketing USP* (unique selling proposition)? How can we communicate what makes ICSEI different to AERA, EERA or other conferences? What distinct contribution does ICSEI make to the research and practice of global educational reform?

Within the Congresses themselves, advantage can and should be taken of *new formats for presentations* such as digital poster sessions, online discussions for people who cannot get funding for participation, open space technology, and TED-talk style mini-keynotes to provide platforms for emerging as well as more diverse talent and contributions.

The current agendas and issues in the host country should be maximized as a resource for ICSEI Congress planning.

The culture of ICSEI could also *reach out of “the club”* (e.g., by treating beginners with respect, and sharing the story, history and potential of ICSEI).

For the reasons mentioned above, serious consideration should be given to changing the timing of ICSEI from early January in order to be more attractive to more potential members and those who currently only attend intermittently.

The timeline for submission and acceptance for papers should be moved forward (more time to plan travel for distant locations and get to know the country and book early flights at a cheaper rate).

Some members see ICSEI as “very quiet” (“if you are not at the Congress, you are not involved”) and want *more information flow* in between.

Participation from more countries could be enhanced by increased *support* (scholarships for participants from developing countries are not sufficient. Participation is still expensive!)

4. Making ICSEI attractive to more (younger?) people

The interviewees see great potential in ICSEI for young people to meet educators from across the globe who have job-alike positions. The organization is not too big, so young researchers can be connected with fellow researchers, develop relationships with people in the field and communicate about their work over time. They can experience inspiring dialogues about school effectiveness and improvement and have access to recent research findings and newsletter updates. Graduate students love the workshops within ICSEI.

Challenges

Young researchers need to be specifically invited to ICSEI by current members and by people in their own institutions, and be provided with financial support from research grants and institutional resources within those institutions. ICSEI could provide incentives, rewards or recognition to members who bring emerging scholars with them to ICSEI Congresses. Without this persuasive and invitational approach, young researchers, especially those in North America and Europe, will tend to concentrate all their scarce time and resources on high profile conferences such as AERA and EERA, within their own country or continent, especially in climates of austerity. This invitational approach can be enhanced by reduced rates for registration and by having easier access to social events, receptions and dinners where considerable networking occurs.

Younger researchers and emerging scholars can find it difficult to get into the core of the community if they do not share or have not been part of its history. For some, ICSEI seems to address and include more settled and senior researchers in leadership, consultancy or policy positions. Some areas of school effectiveness and school improvement research do not always appeal to young researchers, who may be undertaking smaller research studies. All kinds of research and researchers need to stay welcomed within ICSEI.

5. What's in the name? Keeping or changing ICSEI as a brand

Essence

Participants who have been members of ICSEI for some time are satisfied with the existing name, though not closed to reviewing it. Everybody seems to know what ICSEI stands for. New members who are not so familiar with the name usually do not know a lot about the history behind it and so tend to largely accept it as it is. When the name was broken down word by word, there were suggestions for small additions or tweaking

of parts of the name, but nobody proposed a radical transformation of the name or the brand it represents.

Specifically:

- **International:** is universally supported and welcomed.
- **Congress:** created more ambivalence and sometimes speculation as to whether ICSEI should officially be more than an annual Congress. The designation was baffling to some (like “US Congress”)
- **School:** There were some definite views here that learning and the study of learning, even in the typical school-age range, was now extending far beyond schools as we normally understand them. So there is openness to and support for a wider designation but there were no specific suggestions as to what that might be.
- **Effectiveness:** Widely accepted and approved. A distinctive and continuing tradition.
- **Improvement:** Widely accepted and approved. As above. Especially in combination with effectiveness.
- **Additional words:** *Innovation* was mentioned several times as being very prominent currently. *Transformation* was mentioned occasionally.

6. Summing up

This review affirms that ICSEI offers members excellent opportunities to communicate with colleagues internationally about their own and others’ research and its implications for policy and practice; to work across the theory/practice divide, and, to a lesser extent, to engage in the growing availability of networking, publications and newsletters. Most see ICSEI as a Congress in a smaller, more intimate venue than AERA or EERA, for instance, and regard it as genuinely if not fully international in nature.

We have five recommendations to put before the Board and then the AGM following on from this review:

1. The name and acronym of *ICSEI* should be affirmed or revised at the 2016 AGM based on a discussion and recommendation by the Board. This should occur in light of feedback from this review that *International*, *Effectiveness* and *Improvement* are highly valued and non-controversial aspects of ICSEI’s historic and current identity; that the appropriateness of the word *Congress* should be reviewed in light of ICSEI’s expanding role and activities; that the term *School* might be replaced by something that connotes a more expansive consideration of contemporary learning and different units of change; and that the word *Innovation* should be added so as to incorporate related and recent as well as classical thinking that complements effectiveness and improvement.

2. The timing of the annual Congress should, within four years, be moved from the beginning of January, to a date to be determined by the Board and then the AGM. This would be to enable higher rates of participation from practitioners, from emerging scholars, and from people travelling across hemispheres.
3. The Board and then the AGM should discuss and then determine whether ICSEI should stand for something morally, professionally and strategically in a global sense beyond being a community of researchers, policy makers and practitioner meeting for presentation and exchange of ideas and perspectives.
4. Once and for all, in light of the question as to what ICSEI should stand for beyond international exchange of ideas and perspectives across the theory/practice divide, the vision for ICSEI should she be confirmed or revised after discussion by the Board and a decision at the AGM.
5. Three ICSEI Task Forces should be established in light of this review: a Task Force on Equity, Social Justice and Diversity; a Task Force on Generational Inclusion and Renewal; and a Task Force on Communication.

The Task Force on Equity, Social Justice and Diversity: This should address the question: How can a global organization like ICSEI do justice to and reflect as inclusively as possible the diversity of peoples in the world. Do people who want to get to the yearly Congress get the chance to do so? Is the Congress itself modelled in terms of equity and diversity, for example in its selection of speakers and formats (including languages of communication and translation facilities) for presentation?

The Task Force on Generational Inclusion and Renewal: How can ICSEI be more positively and insistently invitational to emerging scholars in its selection of speakers and speaking platforms, in its promotion of mentoring along with recognition and rewards for effective mentoring, in the ways it increases awareness of the specific benefits provided by ICSEI in a climate of scarce resourcing and a crowded conference calendar, in the opportunities it provides for leadership, in the resources it provides to support and subsidize attendance as well as full participation in social and networking events; and in the timing of annual Congresses so that they are compatible with the professional and personal lives of emerging scholars?

The Task Force on Communication How can ICSEI support and promote even more activity in networking and publication between conferences especially in terms of local and regional initiatives? How can it enhance and accelerate the presence and impact of ICSEI on digital and social media platforms through blogging, Facebook, twitter and other media? How can it explore opportunities for members to become aware of and to interact with fellow members while safeguarding issues of privacy.

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