

**AUSTRALASIAN DEMOCRATIC EDUCATION COMMUNITY
(ADEC)
formerly
Australasian Association for Progressive and Alternative Education
(AAPAE)**

**NEWSLETTER No 15
15th DECEMBER 2011**

This will be the final newsletter under the banner of AAPAE.

During the 2011 conference at the AAPAE AGM, there was an overwhelming majority vote to change the name of our group. We are in the process of making the changes official and new logos etc will be developed in coming weeks.

**Currumbena was the host for our first meeting in 2001.
To celebrate 10 years of gatherings we met again at CURRAMBENA in Lane Cove in Sydney on Friday evening 30th September – Sunday 2nd October 2011.**

FRIDAY (evening) 30th September

We gathered at Currumbena for a delicious dinner prepared by Tracy and Andrew. This was a great way to greet old and new friends and begin the important process of communication which happens when we have the rare chance to share a delicious meal together.

SATURDAY 1st October

The conference was built around 4 Rs
RELATIONSHIPS< REALITY< RELEVANCE <RENEWAL

Our first focus session, introduced all the participants and their school communities and articulated some of the important issues for them personally and their communities. Those attending were from Nepal, New Zealand, WA, VIC, NSW, ACT, QLD and the schools represented included Heartland Children's Academy, Tamariki, Kinma, Currumbena, Korowal, Pine Community, Maridahdi, Blue Gum and Hurstbridge Learning Co-operative. We also had a number of students from various tertiary institutions and people who had previously worked in the state systems or were currently working in them and in related industry such as ICT.

These are some key points I noted from each of the participants. I have loosely grouped them.

Generational relations/New, strong community/Culture of caring/Making new contacts/Collegial relations

Changes from rigid systems to progressive systems
Being open to new experiences/Freedom to teach

Importance of preschool /Changing the rigid and structured aspects of pre-schooling

Observation of children's growth and development
Share things in common
Group who trusts the kids/Kids respected and empowered/Kids coming to resolutions
Children can PLAY
Listen to children/Respect we give to kids

Offer ART and Craft opportunities and experiences

Increased demands of Government requirements and how to deal with this
Being forced into same box
Effect of National Curriculum on the way we teach
Experiencing difficult Reviews
Contribute to development of IT knowledge and skills
Sustainability of staff
Governance
Fulfilling exciting job that you can be passionate about
It is ok to be the way we are – not battling parents

Website designs and promotion of schools

AAPAE working together to make big ideas happen
Reflect on whether we are a secret club
Finding a conference which is relevant.

Dealing with shock of military style teaching
People respected and honoured
Honour the school
Helping people who are poor
Collective approach Alternative to Capitalistic system

Dealing with the panic of schooling when having a child
Secondary School
Matching parenting and schooling
Lifestyle commitment
Bush and environments add something special
Self-motivation

We were very pleased to be able to welcome **KARAN GOYALA from HEARTLAND CHILDREN'S ACADEMY in NEPAL** as our special guest at the conference. Patrick Price, through his Centre for Learning and Children's Rights (CLCR), has been working very closely with Karan in developing and changing the way education happens at Heartland, Karan has been at Heartland for 12 years. Karan and Pat explained their aim to shift education in Nepal, utilizing progressive methods and creating opportunity through education.

Karan described for us the context of the country whose political system has been keen on profit-making, people living in extreme poverty and in caste systems. Girls and women experience social discrimination and marriage is a key social process of control.

Teaching has been oriented towards the use of textbooks, no practical activities, students are followers rather than initiators and corporal punishment is active and strong, Students may do well academically and at exams but they have no experience in practical things.

There is a belief that if students are silent they are disciplined but Karan believes that students need to ask questions. In making changes they challenge the government, society and parents. Rather than force this on people the aim has been to find ways to do something together – to involve the parents and community.

Some of the issues they are addressing are:

Corporal punishment

Teacher training

Introducing different programmes gradually such as agriculture and Democratic Friday where the school community has experienced the idea that Friday belongs to you- you choose – you come to us if you are interested in what we are offering.

Developing the departments

Community programmes. and counselling activities to help understand the changes they are experiencing

Scholarships and Parental involvement creates happiness

Support from the International community such as CLCR in Australia

Online Learning eg in Mathematics

Increasing options for Learning

After three years there have been changes from limitations mentally and physically, conceptually and financially, towards democratic and progressive learning, attention to teacher development and philosophy of education, increased resources use in lessons changing the relationships between teachers and students and treating students individually and giving attention to their needs and interests.

Numbers have grown from 172 to 400

There is a policy of 1 free student among a family of three and that has meant that 68 students are receiving this help.

A key question for them is can we support change and try things differently? Karan would like to see life skills success in feeding family and community support. Those who can afford it still do seek education in other countries but Karan dreams of a different experience being available to his students and community.

We had fun making a colourful and diverse creation on the decking as part of Cec's reprise Cubby Building Session. The full text of the paper will be on the website.

The next session run by Wendy was REALITY – DOES IT BITE?

Some of the issues with which the schools grapple are

Units of Work

NAPLAN

Statistics of NAPLAN

National Curriculum

Funding Registration and Review processes

Numbers

Natural Disasters such as Earthquakes

Conflict between different groups in school communities.

Wendy, with input from Patrick, put all this in the international context as they briefed us on the 2011 IDEC which was hosted by Sands School and held in Devon in the UK. Of particular interest was a session they had with many of the participants from our Asia/Pacific Region.

The European Democratic Education Community (EUDEC) is a solid network of schools representing about 2800 students. It is large so they want a greater level of structure and are incorporating elements of the business and corporate model.

The EUDEC conference had an effect on IDEC2011.

Some of the participants and some issues

UK -

Sands School and Park School

Ian Cunningham

Derry Hannam

Centre for Personalised Learning

Human Scale Education

European Forum for freedom in Education New development

Israel

Yaacov Hecht's work in Israel broadens out from schools to whole towns being part of the learning

Democratic Culture in education cities

Socio-actualisation seeing rights of all others and own ability to help

Germany – not allowed to home school

Italy

France

USA-Charter Schools, Home Schooling, IDEA, AERO

India

Japan

Taiwan – Want to reform their government through holding an IDEC!

Puerto Rico Hosting IDEC2012

Talked about

Choice

Participation

Importance of Play

Building Relationships

Sustainability

Human Scale

Community

Valuing Individuals

Inclusion

Accreditation of Teachers

Communication Skills and Resolving Conflicts

Social and Emotional Development

Feet on the ground

Eyes on the Horizon

Heart in the Shy

Summerhill – history and heritage are important and current reality is all around us in people, places and cyberspace

Challenges for AAPAE

Regional or local?

Change name

Making connections with more school

Communications and collaboration in the region

Different ways of handling bureaucratic issues

Bank of ideas for perils

Alternative inspection report (Summerhill)

Patrick Price was supported by AAPAE to attend the 2011 IDEC and he has provided a report which is available for those who would like a copy. This extract gives us some idea of where Patrick thought the discussions focused.

....AAPAE could link in with providing a platform for the Australasian region, providing an extra means as a basis for communication between schools and networks implementing democratic education. Either a web like forum or online base for schools to access or place their thoughts, documentation of programs, ideas and potential strategies for handling authoritarian pressure on these school bodies. This was a constant theme among the workshops I attended (IE: how to handle, this, what steps could one take and models of successful action that have worked in the past for negotiating this action / response).

Regional conference concept: this idea was thrown around as part of a round circle discussion / workshop led by that Wendy. The feeling was that not everyone could attend in person due to a range of commitments (work, finance etc), however the predominant theme and move was that a greater amount of collaboration and communication was needed between the regions in an effort to support development and networking amongst our regions..... on-line type of forum or AAPAE's current website could play a linkage role in bringing these groups together for experience sharing, planning and organization of regional functions, conference, activities and general support. This idea could be floated again via email to these schools and their representatives in an effort to start this process. This is one particular area that the EUDEC movement and now organization as a body have done very well and I think our region could emulate this action. We just need some-one to get the ball rolling.

Boori Pryor has been a friend of Currumbena for many years. Boori is a storyteller, dancer, and writer and through all of these art forms, an inspiring educator. He led us in a wonderful session about his new book SHAKE A LEG, (2010, Allen & Unwin) which won the 2011 Prime Minister's Literary Award for Children's Fiction. He made connections with our four themes of relationships, reality, relevance and renewal. He revealed and shared the hidden story in this award winning book all the while continuing his life's work of communicating with great wit and humour, the wonder and place and depth of wisdom that our Aboriginal people hold in their stories and cultures. Boori has been a one man bridge between his Indigenous peoples and the rest of us and between cultures. Though he is always gentle with us he also challenges us by standing up for his people's plight and the way politics affect their lives. Some of current issues he mentioned included the art industry which has made millions and yet 'they don't really want to know about our people.'

I love the refrain in the text 'if you want to know how to make the best sauce you need to go to the source.'

AAPAE 2011 AGM was held during the Conference and for copies of reports contact Cec.

The Committee for this year was elected as follows

ADEC Committee for 2011/2012
 Cecelia Bradley (ACT) - President
 Sue Goode (NSW) - Secretary
 Keith Goode (NSW) - Treasurer
 Chris Price (NSW)
 Adrienne Huber (WA)
 Ian Sheppard (WA)
 Wendy Pettit (NSW)
 Di Scullin (NZ)

Juli Gassner (NSW) was co-opted as a Committee Member after the AGM

Wendy and the Currumbena kids entertained us with some great music and singing and taught us all a dance which they had devised and this brought our first day to a joyful conclusion followed by dinner together over looking Sydney Harbour.

Sunday 2nd October

Jo led us in the Focus session on Relevance.

We asked the question is AAPAE relevant?

Each participant spoke about their contact with the group and whether it has met their needs and hopes or is likely to do so in the future. AAPAE has been relevant because of the links it has forged nationally and internationally and for finding our voice and speaking out together about education. This has also reassured parents so that they feel confident about their choices. Face to face meetings have been very valuable in forging connections and relationships and also enabling some genuine debate about how we meet the needs of such diverse school communities and individuals who have had expectations and found AAPAE has not fulfilled these.

Lots of interests from university students indicates a need for development of democratic teacher's education and mentoring.

Celebrating the different way the students are treated, with respected genuine listening, self-management is encouraged, communities are small, caring relationships come first, choice is valued. We tap into those who want to do things differently but some also worry that we become 'selective' for those who have problems and difficult behaviours.

Do we put energy into expanding?

ADEC gives us an opportunity to renew and reconfigure our ways and means of communication and supporting each other – broaden interaction, update website make it more interactive and user friendly, use blogs, Facebook, word of mouth, online registration, share online.

Consider online conference.

Promote benefits to parents. Try to distill more clearly what we are. How do we do this?

Face to face visits open-ended invitations to visit each other's schools and communities and share what we are passionate about and specialties of schools. Provide support when times are tough.

What would membership look like?

Dr Marc de Rosnay, Senior Lecturer in Psychology at University of Sydney, a former student of Currumbena, father and present parent of two children at the school, led us in a session on children's identity. Marc succinctly put it for me that we adults 'enter into or sustain the delusion that we can create a sense of wellbeing in the child.' Marc challenged us to consider that 'a sense of well being belongs to the child and it must come from the child. We can't give it, we can't create it and we can't teach it.' If we do these things we actually undermine the child's autonomy. Our role is to 'create conditions and environments in which a child is more or less likely to achieve a sense of well being.' Another key point for me was his development of the value of resilience which Marc notes is not a guarantee of happiness but rather 'evokes resources and is experienced as something the children carry with them when parents and other caregivers are no longer there' and 'as a confidence that one's basic needs can be met'. The early caregiving environment is important in providing a solid foundation for emotional resilience. Central to the 'care giving process is an appreciation of the fact that the infant is changing and is someone with whom you can communicate.' Being in charge of oneself!

I found Marc's statement that children 'need reasonable people who like them in their lives' one to ponder for many hours.

Marc's full paper is available if anyone would like a copy.

Gavin Cruikshank, the Travelling Tech Teacher, led us in a session of the benefit of ICT in Education. He has a Bachelor of Engineering (Electronics) and is completing his Masters of Teaching. His enthusiasm for the benefits of ICT were evident in his plan is to create a mobile ICT classroom in a bus in which he can travel in to visit schools and communities and give them experience in the use of technology. He believes strongly that it is a teaching tool ideal for diverse learners and is interactive. He talked us through some of the aspects and tools of ICT, such as interactive white boards, Power Point and Prezi, student self directed learning, open office, Kid Pix, a drawing tool, collaborative group movie making, research tool browsers, social networking such as Facebook, Myspace, the use of Skype, Webinars, iTunes.

His main motto is 'Don't blame the tool, educate the user!'

One of the key processes he uses to engage students is to teach the process of game making – 3D games - and he offered a follow-up session to demonstrate how this can happen. Shannon, one of the Currumbena students showed me, a

skeptical Luddite, how quickly students are able to develop these skills. An interesting three way discussion with Shannon and Gavin gave me an insight as to why it is something they love and enjoy and includes many aspects of logical thinking and decision-making.

Out of our discussions some key issues dominated and we spent sometime discussing these in open space groups.

Curriculum issues and methods

Government regulations and Reviews

NAPLAN

Contact and Support and Sustainability

Maths

High School

Thank you to the organizing group and all at Currumbena who enabled us to have a memorable and productive time together, for all the tasty, nourishing food and for sharing your happy place with us.

INTERNATIONAL NEWS

From the InternationalDemocraticEducationNetwork
www.idenetwork.org

Newsletter, September 2011

IDEC 2012 will take place in Puerto Rico and will run from March 23 to 31.

Participants should arrive on March 23 when there will be registration, some activities and open spaces during the day. March 24 to 28 will be for the actual conference. On the 29th there will be a celebration of the newly created Americas Regional Meeting. On March 29 to 31 there will be tours around Puerto Rico. Options will include the Esencia Vital retreat in the mountains, the history of the struggle for Peace in the island of Vieques, tourism in the main island and a visit to Paradise in the island of Culebra.

'We have devised a great cultural program and already have been able to gather an impressive list of speakers,' writes

Justo Méndez Arámburu (justo@nuestraescuela.org).

'The Youth Forum, Juventud Estrella and our National Students Council are working to improve their organisational skills and broaden their international contacts. Please, let us receive all your wishes for your experience and stay in Puerto Rico. Also, any difficulty that you may confront to be able to share the wonderful experience we are working intensively to offer you.'

Justo's list of speakers includes Yaacov Hecht, of the Institute for Democratic Education in Israel, Elizabeth Baker from the Patchwork School, Colorado, which is to host IDEC 2013, Jerry Mintz of AERO, Shilpa Jain from Shikshantar and Justo himself. If you are travelling from outside the USA you will need a visa.

Details will be posted at <http://idec2012.org>.

Authoritarian Schooling website In a talk at IDEC 2011 David Gribble described a website he had been planning which would catalogue the various kinds of damage done by authoritarian schooling. The site should be ready early in October at www.authoritarianschooling.co.uk.

THANKS TO the Community at PINE COMMUNITY SCHOOL in Brisbane who have offered to host the 2012 gathering. DATES still to be decided.
www.pinecommunityschool.org

Please consider becoming a member of ADEC.
For details visit our website www.aapae.edu.au or contact us

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