The 2016 Australasian Democratic Education Community Conference was hosted by Koonwarra Village School in Victoria, Australia, from Monday evening, 26th September till Wednesday 28th September. More than 40 participants from Victoria, New South Wales, Queensland, Tasmania, Western Australia and the Australian Capital Territory, came together to share their experiences of democratic education.

Special thanks to Fiona McKenzie and all the people from Koonwarra who welcomed us to their beautiful school and enabled us to have a productive gathering. It was great to see the renovations and additions to the school and to be able to enjoy the stylish, light filled spaces, the gardens and green spaces which surround the buildings.
We had people from established schools such as Fitzroy Community School, Peregrine, Hurstbridge Learning Co-operative and Currambena, newer schools such as Koonwarra Village School itself and its sister school, Phillip Island Village School and a number of people who are at various stages in the process of starting schools including the School of Cultural Creativity. It is an exciting prospect to see the energy and interest in creating new schools and the meeting was a great opportunity to connect with others who are going through this process and learn from the recent experiences of the newer schools and their communities.

The first evening we shared dinner together in the coastal village of Inverloch and viewed the film “Most Likely to Succeed”, a documentary about High Tech High in the US. This documentary shows a way that education can be reinvented for a different world and every student can become an independent learner within a community which encourages initiative and creativity and caring relationships and preparedness for the challenges and opportunities of today and the future.

On the beginning of the second day, with a number of new people in the group, Fiona led us all in a timely discussion around the question “What does democratic education look like to you?”

We asked people to reflect on what they respond to when the words ‘democratic education’ is used. The slide is a summary of those reflections.
This slide includes:

- Development of a ‘whole school community’ – staff, student, family
- Adaptability ‘going with the flow’
- Sharing differences – it’s cool!
- Size – smallness enhances flexibility, meeting the children’s needs
- Larger size, different styles, older kids
- Development of a whole school community, staff, students, families as active contributors, partnership sharing, Participation, Co-creation.
- Invitation into opportunity
- Individuals working in a community, including needs, creative solutions, emergence.
- High expectations, children can achieve, know the child
- Conversations, Communication, Relationships, Connections
- Mindful Conflict Resolution
- Everyone, adults and children are learning together and are equal
- Individuals working in a community
- Sense of capability, people are empowered, say “yes” as often as possible
- Having your say
- Give children a voice, working together, participating, everyone listening to that voice
- To allow experience of making decisions, choice time
- Challenging assumptions
- Long term view of children – a decision for now maybe different if the long term is considered.
- Re-thinking, Re-education for adults
- Choice can be relative, adult responsibilities and experiences.

Some of the participants have, in the past and again at the meeting, expressed a sense of unease about the use of the word ‘democratic’ to describe our schools. As you can see from the list, no one word adequately describes this very complex diverse system of human interaction and articulates what is different about the schools, but at the moment, it is the word “democratic” that has brought 400 people from 35 different countries together at IDEC@EUDEC2106 and 300 people together at APDEC2016.

Initial responses after this discussion were expressions of more comfort with the descriptor. However, I think it is important that we continue the dialogue as that enables us to support each other in our differences. I would encourage everyone to reread the ABOUT ADEC section on the ADEC website (www.adec.edu.au - ABOUT) and see if the ideas listed above are reflected there. It has been suggested that we need a more up-to-date expression of this and hopefully some people will work to enable this to happen.

We also had a session of...
Posing questions we wanted to address during the meeting and things that we would like to share and these became the basis of the open space sessions. Participants were very keen to attend most of the sessions so arrangements were made to double the sessions or where possible do a repeat, but it is was still difficult to get to all of them, so the following comments are a brief overview of the sessions I attended.

Sarah Maclean, Mentor at KVS, led us in a wide-ranging and informative discussion about processes of decision-making in the school communities. We heard about KVS’s Parliament where the children are involved in deciding issues such as school rules, social issues, personal learning projects, menus etc. Decisions are made through discussion and consensus. Other schools spoke of the variations they have for the process, such as Parent Meetings which make all the decisions by consensus and School Meetings which are a mixture of voting and consensus and supported by whole school community commitment to the processes of conflict resolution. We also had some discussion about the sociocratic process, which was a strong theme at the recent IDEC and APDEC, when rather than attempt to get everyone’s agreement, the decision point is reached when there are no objections and people agree that they can live with the decision. I think it is fair to say that even though there was a recognition of the potential for issues to arise, there was consensus in the group of the value of this active participation by the students in the schools. The extent of parental, staff, community participation was varied in the schools and we would benefit from further discussions about these processes.

Bex Horsfall is a homeschooling parent who spent much of this year on a journey with her family to visit schools in Australia and around the world. They also spent time at the AERO conference in the US. She shared her photographs and travelogue with us of the experience and was able to highlight many of the initiatives and happenings around the world and some of the key ideas she took from this. Bex is still processing many ideas and thoughts into a coherent plan for the future and it will be interesting to see how this is expressed. I was able to add in some of my experiences attending IDEC@EUDEC 2016 in Finland and APDEC 2016 in Taiwan.
Dan Rosen, Mentor at KVS, led us in a session about Authenticity which he equates with “ME-NESS” in action. Dan intrigued us by presenting a puzzle for us to solve putting the Dr Suess quote together…

Today you are you! That is truer than true!
There is no one alive who is you-er than you!

A key thought for me was the importance of being true to yourself, embracing vulnerability and cultivating authenticity in our lives and especially in the classroom and learning places.

Sarah Maclean and Brad Kijlstra-Shone, both Mentors at KVS, shared KVS’s Kitchen Garden Curriculum which is based on the very hands-on experience of setting up the gardens and using the produce in the meals that the community shares each day. They showed how they have linked this to the Victorian Curriculum. The kitchen garden curriculum along with outdoor adventures and nature journaling are part of the specific Koonwarra curricula which the community has decided is important for learners to experience. This sparked some thoughts and initial discussion that our schools and ADEC could do some research about the possibility of creating a curriculum that could be presented to the governments and bureaucracies for approval to use in our schools.
Sarah also ran a session explaining how the KVS Learning Contracts support students to become ‘effective learners’.

An effective learner works collaboratively, knows when to seek help, can listen and respond to feedback, can identify barriers to learning, will discuss their learning with peers and mentors, can generate their own ideas and self direct their learning. There is more detail about the contracts on the KVS website.

Hadassah Wanstall, Mentor at KVS, ran a session looking at when the group is both a herd and a pack – leading to meet everyone’s needs. I was not able to attend this session but Chris P shared the handout with me. This was based on the metaphors of the giraffe and jackal. Non-Violent Communication suggests that the giraffe’s characteristics which include observing from above with some distance from the conflict, able to hear feedback even if it is hard, having a large heart but not being an easy prey and able to take action when necessary. This is what we aspire to when it comes to conscious and compassionate communication. However the needs of the Jackal for clear strong leadership, definition of roles, feeling safe and secure, can sometimes be important as long as it is not an unconscious reaction which causes harm.

Moragh McKay, a home-schooling parent, shared with us her work in extending the homeschooling experience into the high school years with her children and a growing number of other learners, including some of the graduates from KVS who attended high schools for a time and found them wanting. Some exciting things are happening in this group and they point to a very real way that learners can become self-directed and in charge of their own learning.
The participants wanted to look at ways to inspire a care for learning beyond the curriculum, how to keep the spark for life long learning, how to inspire projects which come from within by guiding not pushing, how to learn in a group individually and with others, and find the balance between guided and self-directed learning (“you don’t know what you don’t know”), to find a way to create a high school that is self-directed, preparing KVS for high school and what the social aspects of home schooling look like.

Fiona led a number of people who were keen to discuss in depth the processes of setting up of new schools and many of the specific questions on the question list developed at the beginning of the conference were discussed at this session. It was exciting to see so much interest in starting new schools by individuals from all around Australia. The conference provides a unique opportunity for people to get together to learn from the experience of other school starters, share information that is often difficult to access (e.g. how schools are funded) and provide a support network for ongoing conversations.

Other issues which people would like to explore are ways to support training teachers. Cec indicated that this issues is very much in the front of the minds of people in the international community and they are working on finding ways to do this.

ADEC A.G.M. Tuesday 27th September 2016 4:30 p.m.

Koonwarra Village School, Koonwarra Victoria.


Apologies: Ian Sheppard, Sue Goode & Juli Gassner.

1. Acceptance of last year’s minutes.
   Moved by: Cecelia Bradley / Seconded by: Juli Gassner

2. President’s Report delivered by Cecelia Bradley - see attached
   Moved by: Chris Price / Seconded by: Adrienne Huber

3. Financial Report
   Moved by: Wendy Pettit / Seconded by: Bex Horsall

   President: Cecelia Bradley
   Secretary: Chris Price
   Treasurer: Cec & Chris until we found a volunteer to take on this role.
Committee: Wendy Pettit, Adrienne Huber, Wendy Lee, Julie Gassner & NZ Rep-Cec will email.

5. **Discussion about APDEC in Taiwan.**
Cec has sent through several reports which will be on the ADEC website.

6. **Any Other Business**

**Membership - continue Association** - after discussion it was decided to continue Association as it has an advocacy role, connects like-minded schools and people. The conferences provide an exchange of ideas, views & connections.

**Paid Membership / No membership fee** - Discussion of history of uses member’s money & decided that we should continue paid membership.

**Chris to do an invoice** that can be sent out to members apart from the form on the website.

Each state will have a person who will keep in touch with schools & interested people to send out the membership invoice & check how they are doing during the year.

**Australian Capital Territory:** Cecelia Bradley

**Tasmania:** Wendy Lee

**Western Australia:** Belinda Faulkner

**New South Wales:** Wendy Pettit

**Victoria:** Adrienne Huber/ Fiona McKenzie

**Queensland:** Drew /Jessie-Cec will contact to see if they are able to take on.

**New Zealand:** Di -Cec will contact for availability.

**Cec to pass on a standard email to State Reps to use**

Tim Berryman at previous discussion said he would do a map of where all the schools are in Australia & N.Z. **Cec to email Tim.**

**Wendy Lee**- send a photo of our discussion about “What is Democratic Education” for use on website & information.

**Logo-Adrienne Huber designed the logo.** Thanks & acceptance was agreed at the meeting with the suggestion that it have a deeper background colour. Adrienne said she would do this & then it can go on the website.

Meeting concluded at 5:30 p.m.
Thank you to everyone who prepared the delicious and nutritious food we shared.

Most valuable time chatting, enjoying the sunshine and making connections
We encourage you to become members of ADEC and actively contribute to the continuing dialogue we found so valuable at our meeting.

Forms for Membership of ADEC can be downloaded from the website www.adec.edu.au

Report by Cecelia Bradley
Photographs by Dylan Breninger and Cecelia Bradley
AUSTRALASIAN DEMOCRATIC EDUCATION COMMUNITY

President’s Report for ADEC’s AGM held on
Tuesday 27th September 2016

Held at Koonwarra Village School 20-26 Koonwarra Victoria

I would like to welcome you all to this AGM. How wonderful that we are all meeting here in Koonwarra. Special thanks to Fiona McKenzie and all at Koonwarra for enabling this to happen.

Our 2015 AGM
The 2015 ADEC was part of IDEC 2015 and APDEC and was held at Founders Heritage Park, & Whakatu Marae, 87 Atawhai Dr The Wood, NELSON 7010 New Zealand as part of the APDEC meeting. APDEC discussions took much of the limited time so we had to curtail the ADEC AGM to the essentials.

Membership of ADEC
Financial membership - Individual and School membership has been declining in recent years. We need to discuss this and make some decisions about how we wish to proceed. EUDEC uses a term ‘Schools of Interest’ for those who are connected to the network but are not financial members.

HAPPENINGS
ADEC LOGO
We have been calling for design suggestions for a number of years now and there has been no response. So Adrienne has organized for the design of a logo and it is currently in provisional use on the facebook page and website etc. We would like to make a decision at this AGM as to whether we are happy to continue to use it as our logo. Thank you to Adrienne for doing this.

I attended IDEC@EUDEC2016 in Finland and this was a great experience. A report of this event will be available through the adecist and on the ADEC website.

I also attended the first APDEC in Taiwan in July 2016 and this was a most stimulating and enjoyable happening and as well as being fun, we did a lot of work. A full report of this will also be available.

The two main projects initiated at APDEC are the continuing discussions and work on the formulating of an APDEC Declaration and the setting up of a Teacher Development program for those who wish to work in Democratic Education. There will also be ongoing work supporting the organizing of APDEC2017 in Japan 1st – 5th August 2017 and IDEC2018 @APDEC in India.

There is a lot of interest in developing exchange programs for students and teachers in the Asia-Pacific region and I hope that this will gradually be able to happen.

I have had renewed contact with Dr Rebecca English who is a Lecturer in the School of Curriculum Faculty of Education at Queensland University of Technology. She is still keen to get involved in some research projects with our school communities.. This is a great opportunity to collaborate with some current researchers and hopefully get some research happening. If any of you would like to be involved let me know and I can keep you in the loop re developments.
It is great to see that some people are putting their energy and creativity into new school and learning space start –ups and ADEC would like to be as supportive as possible in this process.

COMMUNICATION
ADEC is on Facebook – Adrienne has been doing a great job of keeping ADECers on Facebook up to date and current.

ADECList still exists.
Suggestions for livening it would be welcome if it still serves a need.

ADEC Website
Bryn has continued to maintain the website and we try to keep it up to date as much as possible. If there are any suggestions you have to include or improve it he is very willing to discuss these.
Thank you very much again to Bryn for volunteering your time and skills.

ADEC Newsletters – have been a bit scarce this year but hopefully the reports of the conferences will make up for that.

Next ADEC Conference??
We would be very pleased to hear from anyone willing to host ADEC2017.
We also need to liase with people in New Zealand (who are also hosting a conference starting on the 29
th and the schools so that dates of other meetings do not clash.

Thanks (please add any I omit or forget)
Special thanks go to Sue Goode and Keith Goode for their many hours, over many years, of voluntary work as the Secretary and Treasurer of ADEC. Sue and Keith have decided not to nominate this year for Secretary and Treasurer. They have been a wonderful support to me personally and I will miss their presences and contributions. To our group. Both these roles are essential in the smooth functioning of the association and keeping us on the right side of Fair Trading and the Charities Commission. I would like to encourage all of you to consider whether you are able to step into these roles.

Thanks to all the members of ADEC for their participation this year, especially the members of the ADEC committee; Sue Goode, Chris Price, Keith Goode, Wendy Pettit, Juli Gassner, Adrienne Huber, Alison Brizzel for their contributions and support.

Particular thanks go to everyone here Koonwarra Village School who has been involved in enabling this conference to happen especially those on the organising committee. Thank you to all in the community, who have welcomed, helped, housed us, fed us so well and contributed so much.

My love and thanks to all

Cecelia Bradley – President
27th September 2016