



Evaluation Report

Australian IDEC

10th-16th July 2006

Please find below collated comments and, where appropriate, observations and comments on the findings. The report provides information on two evaluation approaches

- an evaluation survey to participants
- interviews with 8 participants during the course of the event.

The data below certainly warrants close inspection by the organizers of future IDEC conferences.

The International Democratic Education Conference in Sydney (10 – 16 July 2006) attracted almost 300 participants over the 7 days of the event. Some statistics about the conference participants:

- 15 countries represented: Burma/Myanmar, Canada, Germany, India, Israel, Japan, Korea, Nepal, New Zealand, Spain, Switzerland, Thailand, UK, USA and Australia.
- Approximately 55% were international guests and 45% were Australian.
- Almost 50% were students ranging in ages from preschool to tertiary level.
- Schools represented included: Currumbena, Kinma, Blacktown Youth College in Sydney, Preshil, Hurstbridge, Village School, Fitzroy Community School, Alia College in Victoria, Booroobin, Sudbury, Centre of Learning and Pine Community School in Queensland, Tamariki, Mountain Valley and Unlimited in NZ, Tokyo Shure in Japan, San School, Sungmisan and Dream School from Korea, Tutorial School, Albany Free School from USA Freie Schule "Kapriole" from Germany.
- Many were parents; all the participants learn with and from each other and in that sense are teachers together with about 25-30% of them working in preschools and schools; approx 12% work in tertiary education and related consultancy and support work.

This survey instrument was developed with the conference organizers. It was conducted in the afternoon of Saturday 15th July. The total number of responses was 47. The questions used in the individual or small group interviews reflected the questions in the survey.

An additional survey was conducted with the Organising Committee; its intention is to gather data specifically on organizational and operational aspects of the event. The results of this survey are provided elsewhere.

Evaluation Survey

Question 1 Please place an X to indicate how well you believe the objectives of the IDEC were met.

Objectives	Not at All 1	2	3	4	Very Well 5
Enable people from all around the world to talk about democratic education and celebrate what we do.		1	4	8	34
Extend the opportunity to talk about democratic education to others			8	18	21
Strengthen the networking of young people as global citizens.		2	9	19	17
Share democratic practices and values.		2	11	16	18
Promote the concept of democratic education across all ages.		2	10	18	17
Share the passion of quality democratic education.		2	6	13	26
Have fun			6	12	29

Comment: Clearly, the overwhelming majority of participants believed the objectives of the IDEC were achieved well or very well.

Question: Were the objectives communicated to participants prior to the event? Were they included in the Conference information?

Question 2 Identify the most useful and least useful parts of the workshop and say why.

Most Useful Aspects	Least Useful Aspects
Visiting schools Speech by Aboriginal person Speech by Yaacov Hecht Gail Thomas: peace and non-violence Terry O'Connell – Restorative Justice Arik's workshop. Robin's lecture. Di Roberts, John Marsden, Harn-Burma, Kumi Kato, Louise Porter, Yaacov Hecht, Sally Carless. Stuart Hill's enthusiastic presentations and deep understandings. John Edward's differentiation between leadership and management and his 5 year preparation for our 'ideal'. Games Art centre The morning forum kept you informed; good that it	When speakers didn't turn up. Need more movement/eating breaks. Cost and location: very expensive Small problem with translations. Sitting around all day only listening but not participating. Too many speakers No time to reflect on sessions or to just hang out and talk with people. Individuals attending to sell their wares – this should not be a market. Difficult to understand some speakers Most workshops were about teaching and not enriching of kids and students Too many pre-planned lectures. Too short – 10 days is better. Repetition

<p>was run in a democratic fashion</p> <p>Forming own workshops</p> <p>Talking to people, creating partnerships, seeing old friends, making new ones</p> <p>Networking</p> <p>Diversity of backgrounds and views</p> <p>Sharing ideas and thoughts</p> <p>Playing and singing together</p> <p>Getting new inspiration and strengthened resolve</p> <p>Wonderful speakers</p> <p>Meals very good</p> <p>Out and about trips.</p> <p>Learning about democratic education.</p> <p>Everything.</p> <p>Bringing democratic schools together.</p> <p>Research – supportive.</p> <p>Being surrounded by people who really value and respect children and feel passionately about their rights.</p> <p>Hearing new ideas, practices, etc.</p>	<p>Starting times changed and may have affected attendance</p> <p>More women speaking in plenaries where there were no parallel sessions – it was unequal.</p> <p>Need space to critique Democratic Education</p> <p>In democratic education there is nothing like ‘least useful’.</p> <p>Needed a central space to get together in evenings.</p>
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Comment: This table reflects the diversity of people and (sometimes contradictory nature) of their interests and needs. The variety of content, speakers, processes, engagement strategies as well as the logistics of food and accommodation all were appreciated. Translating was a constant problem for small groups; this will need to be addressed in future events.

Two suggestions were offered:

- ensure the IDEC website enables all participants to be connected
- ensure the speakers’ powerpoints / handouts / overheads are put on website.

Other ideas for improvement are also evident in the right-hand column.

Question 3 What are the key aspects of the IDEC you would like to see *repeated* in the future IDECs? Why?

- Art Centre.
- Fantastic organization and efficient, responsive organizers. Please share your system.
- Education about human rights issues in other countries.
- Sense of community. Song. Inspiring speakers.
- Lots of opportunity for workshops etc. offered by people within the IDEC community.
- Unstructured sharing time to consolidate ideas presented.
- Presentation of evolving thinking, i.e. Yacov.
- Sharing schools experiences
- Morning meetings
- Student forums.
- Networking allows people to discuss ideas.
- Speakers who challenge our understanding of democracy and democratic schools.
- How to build a movement of democratic schools, particularly focusing on the public system.
- School presentation, because I want to know practices.
- I want to meet people who long for education.
- Community. It’s power, for the really truly education.
- The interaction between people is essential because you can learn so much.

- Selected key speakers related to the conference thence spontaneous workshops offered by participants.
- International flavour vital.
- Speakers who use the warmth and flow of their own unique experiences to present ideas (ie Stuart Hill, John Marsden, Yaacov Hecht, Ros Dunlop, Adrian Bertonelli).
- High quality of speakers and range of topics.
- Talking – conversation is the key.
- The ability to *create community of democratic ed. in conference.*

Question 4 What are aspects of the IDEC you would like to see improved or changed? Why?

- A far greater focus on democracy, democratic processes.
- Meditation and yoga should be included. They are good physically and mentally for everyone.
- Short movement breaks between sessions – before and after.
- Having a place where it's easy for musicians to gather and play and sing.
- Fewer workshops, more free time for information discussions.
- Teacher/student sessions.
- Visiting more democratic schools.
- Make all food vegetarian like in Germany, saves money and raises quality of food.
- With ideal technology it would be possible for each presentation to be filmed (including sound) then translated and re issued in the other languages (presented at a delayed session).
- More space in the program – not so crowded.
- More children involved.
- Now, democratic education is known only by some people who are concerned about education or can afford to spend money for it. That's the issue that IDEC should improve.
- Ensure things run on time better...being on time makes it more participatory.
- Developing a solid social, cultural, political framework from which to grow in – see ourselves as a movement that is making structural changes at a big level.
- Internet all day long – like in Germany.
- A copy machine with inexpensive paper and toner for all on site.
- More non-English people can be participants. Language is big problem but I want to talk with all country people.
- The way workshops are done could be improved, but that's up to the people. I think they need to be more interactive for other people attending.
- Get information about other schools – how they work – through video/workshop and get contact.
- Recording of workshops (sound would be OK, video would be better). That way we can bring back more information. A way for IDEC to make money?
- Have place at event for currency exchange and without process fee.
- Cost could be cheaper.
- More conscious awareness of environmental impact.
- More dance, drama, singing. In Japan we had separate talent show (concert) and every school also did a song or dance.
- More outdoor activity
- Less organized, less expectation. More simplicity in living and communication.

Comment: The responses to questions 3 & 4 offer a range of ideas that ought to be considered by organizing committees. The appropriateness and usefulness of the suggestions will depend on capacity, culture and purpose of the future events.

Question 5 Please offer comments on the conference from the perspective of the main role you had at the conference.

My role at the conference was (please tick the most appropriate one)

- Speaker (A)
- Participant (B)
- Organizer (C)
- other...(say what it was) (D)

From this perspective, the conference was.....

(A)

- Good even though my presentation had a small attendance I accomplished my purpose.
- Very good. It was nice to have the presentations publicized before the conference and for them to be able to read about them in detail.
- A great educational experience; I will have plenty to reflect upon.
- Very supportive.

(B)

- Interesting, inspiring, full, stimulating, satisfying, empowering, reaffirming.
- Overly focused on cerebral activity, sometimes the lecture theatre felt like school again.
- Excellent
- Great.
- Magnificent.
- Fantastic.
- Energising, positive, supportive and at times confusing – deciding which talk, discussion or workshop to attend (not a negative).
- Too short – kind of expensive.
- Good and I learned a lot about myself from this conference.
- This is my best IDEC in my life. I can reach other people. I can talk with other country people.
- A life-changing experience.
- Nicely organized. Hopefully we want to have more teenagers.
- Things were perfectly organized. The site was easy to go about. Things were very clear and in good spirit.
- Inspiring. I will take the philosophy, wisdom, values and love to my mainstream community.
- Very interactive and insightful.
- Fantastically confirmation and feeding, inspiring, stimulating.

Question 6 What are the major issues facing democratic education?

- Government – its reluctance to empower people, its misuse of its legislative powers, its ignorance of international human rights law.
- Poverty.
- A balanced approach between inner and outer education.
- Spreading the word, credibility.
- Acceptance by mainstream educators and community.
- Opposition from repressive governments/regimes, etc.
- Seen a radical edge still in our town. The poor cousin to Steiner, Montessori – too free, so I guess issue is information dissemination, more understanding of what we represent.
- Lack of research on “Democratic education vs. mainstream schools”.
- Money, exposure, support from governments.
- That many democratic schools are not accessible to marginalized communities.

- Lack of knowledge amongst the larger population.
- Spreading our beliefs to wider circles. Overcoming common obstacles.
- Maintaining established democratic schools, establishing new democratic schools, connecting democratic education with wider community.
- Conservatism in western countries.
- Convincing governments that it works. Getting real information about the positive effects of DE out into the public.

Comment: Some of these may well become topics for research, articles for distribution via website, local workshops and the future IDECs. It is my understanding that some of these issues have been around for a long time. It would be useful for organizers and the broader community of democratic education to decide priorities and develop strategies to address these issues. The Conferences may be one place to discuss or even deal with such matters; certainly, the IDECs offer opportunities to share learnings about how these things are dealt with in different countries.

Question 7 What are the gaps in our knowledge about democratic education?

- Too much reliance on teachers being the centre, the drivers of education.
- Old thinking.
- Being able to document how successful it is.
- More research for support.
- Defined strategies to collaborate with Governments.
- How to convince those who have power and finance of our value.
- Some term definitions. Some speakers contradicted each other.
- Links with progressive social, political, public health and other progressive frameworks – critical analysis of structural violence – and where democratic schools fit in.
- Every time we learn new things. The gaps would be the practice of the knowledge.
- I'd like to know more about the different schools in different countries, including those who weren't here this year.
- Peoples "Democratic Schools" need to take a lot of time to think about how democratic their school really is.
- How alumni manage/develop/live as adults in terms of socio and psychological criteria, compared with alumni of mainstream schooling (includes rates of suicide, mental illness, etc).
- Teacher training.

Comment: This question elicited not only what the gaps are but also ways to fill them. And research was top of the pops here. Research into such things as: linking to mainstream, linking to other global initiatives (e.g. sustainability, social justice and health), teacher education approaches, evidence of the usefulness/effectiveness/differences of democratic education.... Perhaps there needs to be a research element at future conferences: reporting on findings and research underway.

Question 8 What key themes would you like to see in future IDECs?

- Democracy and promotion of democratic values.
- Links to spiritual development
- A balance between inner and outer democracy.
- Peace, justice, human rights – the role of education.
- Develop manual about philosophy and applications to aid communication with mainstream.

- Support for schools/countries struggling.
- Sustainability...or else what?
- DE Universities.
- How to influence governments.
- Increase our understanding of ourselves and DE processes.
- Promotion of Democratic Education – how to go about it.
- Democratizing the public system.
- Indigenous experiences of education
- Democratic Education with refugee communities and displaced peoples.
- Children’s roles in running democratic schools.
- Supporting democratic schools to establish and grow.
- Session on how does your school/group run meetings – what rules/practices do you use.
- Student exchange, staff exchange.
- “Isolation” – we have the problem in Japan, same as other country.
- Creating a better world.
- Sustainability – teacher training. Spreading ideas to S.E. Asia.
- How does nature demonstrate democracy?/co-operacy? How do we know what is right? What does self-managed learning really mean in terms of responsibility, empathy, compassion and social policy?
- Criticism and flaws of democratic education.
- Living and learning together in democratic and community for peace and justice world.

Question 9 Other comments

- Thank you very much for organizing a wonderful conference
- Fun, fun, fun.
- Thank you for all your hard work. This was wonderful.
- Thank you for your wonderful hospitality and for providing a platform for me to share with friends.
- Biggest, hugest ever, thanks to the organizers – great job.
- Thanks for your love and concern. God bless.
- Thank you for allowing my participation and encouraging me to be even more involved.
- Our gratitude to all the organizers, but particularly Cecelia, Chris and Wendy.
- Please prepare some space for another/minor language, because many English speakers speak so fast. This is Democratic Education Conference, please think about that. Many students couldn’t participate in the workshops.
- Station for making T-shirts was great. The staff organizers were quick in response to our needs.
- Thank you very much. From the first time Cec was in touch with me, through all that had to do with the stay here; you were all very warm, friendly, great listeners, pleasant and welcoming. Thank you.
- I come to IDEC for the nurturing and support that comes from hanging out with like-minded people. It re-charges me for the next school year. I also get some new ideas on current problems, but not as important as the feelings.

Interviews

Over the course of the week, 8 people were interviewed. Of these, 4 were deliberately interviewed twice, in order to capture their evolving thoughts about the event. Each interview

took about 20 minutes. Two students are included in this number; a handful of other students were invited to participate but did not arrive at the scheduled time. Program interruptions and a fire alarm on the Saturday may have contributed to this. This small group of interviewees was not meant to be representative; this process was used to dig deeper into some of the issues.

The interview was conducted more as a conversation, with a few key questions as guides. Below, I have collated and grouped responses under the major headings.

Topic 1 Attendance at this event.

- To have an opportunity to connect with other schools and innovators.
- To see the bigger context for our work.
- To get recharged.
- To support IDEC.
- For several reasons: to meet other democratic educators, to meet friends from past conferences, to learn and talk about ideas and to learn new directions: *Communication enriches me.*
- My students wanted to come here because there is a limited number of Democratic Schools in Japan.
- Interested in the Australian education system and the education of indigenous peoples.

Topic 2 Meeting expectations, quality of process and presentations

- Very well meeting expectations.
- The changing program requires one to be tolerant.
- The organic nature of the event is welcoming.
- Day 1 was a little restrictive...but the purpose for that is appreciated.
- The morning sessions were a bit long; it's great that they are run by kids; ability and sensibility and energy and patience to make sure all things are dealt with; slow is okay; decisions flexibly raised and dealt with...sometimes there's some repetition because not so structured.
- Very impressed with cooperation and getting to know others.
- *At first I was quite surprised and expecting a more fluent, less structured event with more free time each day to reschedule – I didn't initially feel the boost for my democratic education; but eventually, others have become more involved and introduced new ideas and processes...it's freer.*
- Very accepting of other cultures and languages.
- Ideology isn't preventing conversations.
- Good intellectual content: *I stayed up till 3am writing...to work out what was relevant to school and self.*

Topic 3 Important issues in Democratic Education

- *The involvement my government in Democratic Education: it shouldn't be involved; education needs to be owned by people not governments.* The role and responsibility of government in education (broadly conceived, not just democratic education) was not addressed at the conference.
- *I'm still trying to get around how democratic education is conceived and understood.* The philosophical, political and definitional issues of democratic education and schools were not discussed at the conference. *I know what my philosophical approach is, but I want to hear about how others understand democratic education.*
- *I'm curious to learn but I question the evangelical nature of it. Democratic education makes a lot of assumptions, especially about how people understand democracy.*
- *If it's important to find different ways to meet young people's needs, democratic schools may not always be the right way.*

- *We must engage in conversations about the key concepts of democratic education.*
- Need more action on getting into the mainstream.
- *Even in alternative schools, we still come from the 70s philosophy. Child-centred approaches were appropriate then, but now children are more equal and need to be involved in more and more of the schools.*

Topic 4 In future, IDEC needs to...

- Keep its own difference in each country! Reflecting cultural differences in the conferences is important.
- Deal with new people coming in to the conferences.
- Consider the principles and philosophies and definitions, not to enforce a single idea or approach, but simply to share at this level in ways other than lectures. Work-shopping and discussing key principles would be useful.
- English-only events are a barrier. *I understand the need for communication, but if there were some way to have translations, that would be good.*
- IDEC needs to find ways to fund more people, more trainees, more university students. *(What about an exchange program for university students!)*
- Must get a higher profile in media.
- It's important to recognize and acknowledge that there are lots of different models of doing schools differently.
- Would welcome the opportunity to watch good teaching practice and have some real interaction with students. Would be good to create opportunities for young people to 'teach' us.
- IDEC needs a focus on teacher education.
- Perhaps a *debate* on one or more of the key issues associated with democratic education would help us progress thinking and action in democratic schools.
- We need to find ways to move in and with the systemic schools.
- We must ensure that research is not only conceived of as something just academics do; we need to promote and support *teachers and students as researchers*.

Topic 5 Other comments and questions that need to be raised.

- We are a gathering of people who are keen to advance the cause of democracy in schools and schooling. To what extent are we also keen to advance this cause within each country in which our schools exist?
- What meaning do we attach to the word 'democracy'? Are we able to respond convincingly to enquiries and challenges?
- Is democracy always a good thing? Has it always been a good thing?
- One speaker, Bob Walshe, suggested that two criteria are indispensable if we are to claim a genuine democracy: people's *right to participate* and the *equality of voting power*. To what extent does this reflect the thinking and fundamental principles of others engaged in democratic education?
- What's happening to advance the cause and practice of democracy within the education authorities and bureaucracies?

Note: The students who participated and contributed to the matters above also commented on the need for *more games and activities that get kids talking to each other about their schools. I love my school and want to tell everyone about it!*

RECOMMENDATIONS

The experiences of the Sydney IDEC lead to the following recommendations for the future IDECS.

That:

1. Future organizing committees engage with the findings of these evaluations and consider the findings in their own planning processes. Note especially Qs 6, 7 & 8.
2. Future organizing committees put in place processes to evaluate their events.
3. Translation services, interpreters and multilingual communications be considered and addressed.
4. The IDEC Program be diverse, interactive, student focused and flexible. And that it be less crowded and include adequate time for reflection.
5. Gender balance in the program be addressed.
6. Research by teachers and students in partnerships with academics, related to Democratic Education, be supported. And that reports be provided on research findings and research which is underway.
7. Workshops be recorded so that all can have access.
8. Emphasis be given to developing and improving DE's relationship with governments and mainstream education.
9. Participants continue to be afforded opportunities to experience and value the sense of the International Community of Democratic Education.

Cecelia Bradley, on behalf of the IDEC2006 Organising Committee.

August 30, 2006