

Young People Present at IDEC 2015

The **International Democratic Education Conference** was held in Nelson in Aotearoa/New Zealand from 8th–12th April 2015.



All IDECs are different and 2015 had its own unique character. The organising group hoped to give space and voice to Indigenous and young people and this was very evident in the participants from 30 different countries. There were young people from such diverse groups as Navajo and Hopi Nations, Australian Indigenous people, Cyprus, Venezuela, a strong presence from Taiwan, Hong Kong and China – as well as many of our old and new friends in the Democratic Education Community from Japan, Korea, Israel, UK and US, Puerto Rico, Brazil, Nepal, Finland ... the list goes on.

Central to this diversity was the heart of the Maori youth and culture which permeated the whole event. The gathering was based at the *Whakatu Marae* and Founders Park and we were introduced to the *Marae* at a traditional *powhiri*, which is a moving and evocative welcome. The official opening of the conference was full of Maori spirit, music and ceremony and the inclusive creating of the IDEC 2015 symbol with stones.



We discovered more about the significance of the symbol of the octopus when **Dr Rangimarie Turuki Rose Pere**, a Maori elder who has been involved in education, community development and language revitalisation for the past 40 years, gave a passionate, challenging, cheeky and humorous session! She led us through a journey of sharing the *oneness* of the eight dimensions of total well-being and development. The energy is the Octopus whose legs represent the eight *iwi/Tangata Whenua*.

"This model of learning and teaching has been transmitted from our ancient ancestors Nga Potiki and Nga Uri-A-Maui, who have always lived here in New Zealand as Peace-keepers, and intermarried with our other ancestors who came to New Zealand in the Great Fleet from the Pacific Islands approximately a thousand years ago."

Rangimarie Parata, who is Chair of *Te Pa O Rakaihautu* told us of the 21st Century *Pa Wananga* Learning Village and, as Rose had done, she emphasised the need and value of taking action, stepping up and *Whanau* determining their own future and embedding their language, stories and culture in any learning processes and curriculum. Like many indigenous youth around the world, the Maori still face many issues, but the young people who participated in IDEC showed talent, strength of spirit and confidence in their choices.

Keynote Speakers

We had many and varied keynote speakers such as **Kate Lipkis** (Council in Schools), **Birgitte Sundvall** (the founder of the *Alfa-Pedagogik School* in Sweden), **Yaacov Hecht** speaking about Education Cities, **Justo Menez Aramburu** and **Ana Yris Guzman Torres** (from *Nuestra Escuelita*, Our Little School), **Ann Qui** (from *isckool* in Shanghai), **Gail Thomas** (from Soka University in USA) leading a discussion about Education Beyond Jobs, and **Nikkei Harre** leading us in *The Infinite Game*. **Kageki Asakura** (Japan), **Tae Wook Ha** (South Korea) and **Reshef Burde** (Israel) spoke about the situation in their countries where new laws about education will have major effects on the health of democratic education.

Youth-Led Sessions

I thought I would try to briefly mention some of the sessions that I attended that were led by the young people.

At this IDEC we had many young volunteers, parents and families who had had little or no experience of Democratic Education, so the workshop about School Meetings at *Tamariki* in Christchurch drew a large crowd of diverse and questioning participants. There was a large group of students from the school (primary ages) attending the conference and they were supposed to hold a meeting but they were having so much fun in the youth space, which was full of art and games and music and amazing performance and circus work etc, that they made a decision to continue on with the various



Dr Rangimarie Turuki Rose Pere



Countries represented in the photo:

Cyprus, Nepal, Aotearoa/NZ, Israel, USA, Australia, UK, South Korea, Germany

The young **Australia Indigenous students** from Perth, Brisbane and Cairns led the international group in a photographic protest about the WA Government's proposed plan to close many of the remote communities.

The young men from the **Holistic School** in Taiwan spoke with candour and insight of the things that happened in their lives that made a difference to them and the changes they made once they started to attend the school:

Ricky: *How I started to make decisions*

Will: *What I learned on the School Council*

Martin: *Finding out who I am*

Wei Huai: *What the school gives us is freedom*

Gee: *Why we go mountain climbing*

IDEC2016 will be held in **Finland**;
IDEC2017 will be held in **Israel**; and
IDEC2018 will be held in **Nepal**.

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other activities they were enjoying! So the adults held an improvised meeting and showcased the central role it plays in the daily life of the students and the school.

The students from the **Humanity School** in Taiwan presented a drama portraying the difference between conventional schooling in Taiwan and that of their school. As well as showing the stark contrast between the pressures and demands placed on young people and their desire to participate and make decisions about their own lives, the whole drama was scripted in English and

even those who could not speak English learnt their parts so well. They also presented an indigenous dance from Taiwan, which had some very similar characteristics to the Maori dances.

Some of the young people from the **Navajo Nation** have been learning how to use technology to tell their stories and they shared some wonderful short films that they had produced. Their honesty and humour even in the face of many of the difficulties in their lives meant they had captured some moving and original moments.

