



## ADEC CONFERENCE 2016



(Photograph of ADEC2016 Conference Participants by Dylan Breninger.)

The **2016 Australasian Democratic Education Community Conference** was hosted by Koonwarra Village School in Victoria, Australia, from Monday evening, 26<sup>th</sup> September till Wednesday 28<sup>th</sup> 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 participants from established schools such as Fitzroy Community School, Peregrine, Hurstbridge Learning Co-operative and Currumbena, 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.

Fiona McKenzie, the Co-ordinator at KVS led a group for 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 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.

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.

As there were many new people in the group, Fiona led us all in a timely discussion around the question "What does democratic education look like to you?"

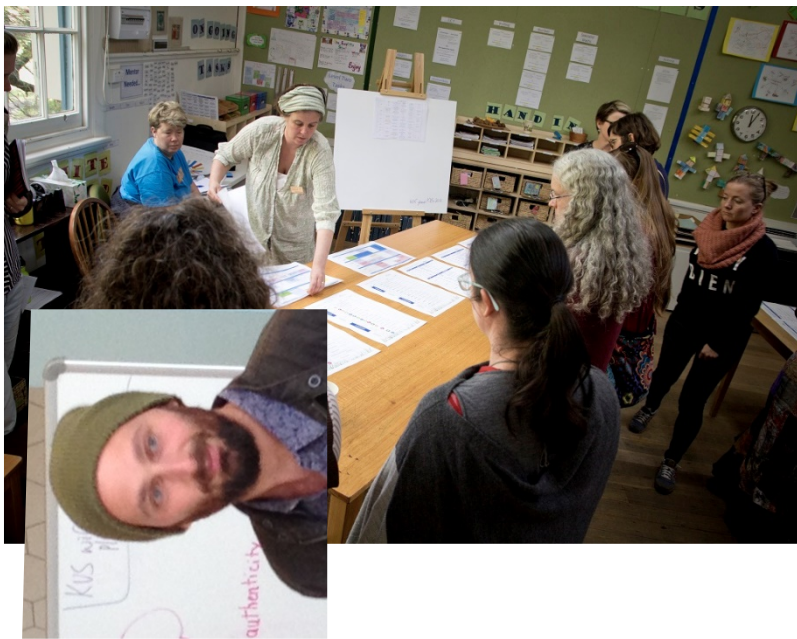


We asked people to reflect on what they respond to when the words 'democratic education' is used. The responses ranged from an emphasis on the creating of caring communities where all are active contributors and partners and those who highlighted the equality of the members of the school and learning community and their participation in the decisions about their learning and living.



Sarah Maclean, Mentor at KVS, led 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. The extent of student, parental, staff, community participation was varied in the schools and we would benefit from further discussions about these processes.

Sarah and Brad Kijlstra-Shone, 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

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

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. 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.

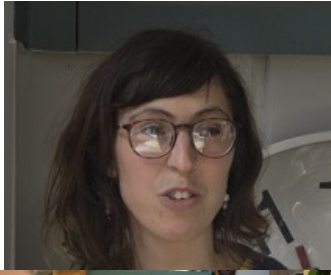


Moragh McKay, a home-schooling parent, shared with us her work in extending the homeschooling experience into the high school years with her children and a growing number of other learners, including some of the graduates from KVS who attended high schools for a time and found them wanting. Some exciting 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.

(Photograph by Dylan Breninger)

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. Cecelia Bradley was able to add in some of her experiences attending IDEC@EUDEC 2016 in Finland and APDEC 2016 in Taiwan



Thank you to everyone who prepared the delicious and nutritious food we shared.



Valuable time chatting, enjoying the sunshine and making connections





Our farewell hugs!

(Photographs by Dylan Breninger)

**The ADEC A.G.M. as held on Tuesday 27th September 2016 4:30 p.m. at Koonwarra Village School, Koonwarra, Victoria.**

**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](http://www.adec.edu.au)**

Report by Cecelia Bradley

Photographs by Dylan Breninger and Cecelia Bradley