

AAPAE NEWSLETTER No 10  
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Gathered around the fireplace (which we could not light because of the fires happening close to us, to the north of the city and extreme fire danger forecast for that day), under the trees, Dennis passed the branches of eucalypt leaves and invited us to take one, smell it and carry it with us during our time together. He passed around the white ochre and invited us to mark our hands with the earth, all part of the warm welcome to country by Dennis Foley – Gai-Mariagal, who shared with us his love and passion and understanding of the spirit of his people, past and present, on whose land we gathered and who shared this space with the community of Kinma. Thus our 6th AAPAE Annual Conference and our 1<sup>st</sup> ASIA/PACIFIC Regional Democratic Education Conference began from WEDNESDAY 3<sup>rd</sup> – FRIDAY 5<sup>th</sup> OCTOBER 2007.



Dennis gives the welcome to country! He told us that the country was very strong women's' country – a life giving and strong learning place.



The Kinma kids, Asheley Goodwill, John Bertmar-Ferguson, Rhian Gibson-Hughes with poise, confidence, humour and honesty told us of their love and life at the school and added to the warm welcome for everyone who had travelled to meet together. About 30 participants came from Christchurch, New Zealand, Adelaide, Melbourne, Maleny Queensland, Sydney, Canberra and a special welcome was given to Dr Kaila from India.

Sandy Barnes from Preshil in Melbourne wrote some extensive responses to the conference sessions so I have included them in this report –(see different font!)

Our Theme this year was Healthy Planet, Healthy School, Healthy People and it was great to see these strands being explored and integrated. It was wonderful to welcome our friend Stuart Hill to be with us again and continue our learning journey with him. Stuart focussed on Learning Ecologies and as with the importance of the whole ecology of the soil to life, our learning needs 'healthy soil' as well. He emphasised the importance of getting in touch with the unknown. When systems/people are stressed stimulation occurs, people adapt and in a physical way produce cortisol which is a poison. This is reactive management and can create a need more of this poison so this can lead to addiction, patterned behaviour, which then become allergies, the first stage of breakdown leading to degenerative disease, the second stage and systemic breakdown. What we need instead is Nourishment, Pro-action rather than reaction Spontaneity, Healthy Systems Function leading to Well-being

Stuart led us in a sharing session of memorable learning moments – the Whirr and Ahhh moments in life and many in the group made the point that these were moments of empowerment and liberation. He encouraged us to LIE BOLDLY about what we have not done yet as a way to reveal what is in our hearts and shows the way forward. This changes the emphasis from productivity which has to be rehabilitated and maintained to concentrating on Ecological Integrity first which builds natural capital and productivity emerges from a well maintained healthy system. He reminded us again on the personal level that if we engage and relate with each other from our wounded, adaptive, patterned unaware, dis-empowered fearful, acting out and postponing selves the response will either be rebellion or compliance – two sides of the same coin. If we relate from our caring healthy, spontaneous, aware, empowered, loving selves, with informed action which contradicts patterns, we shift from socialising to enabling both ourselves and those with whom we relate to also act from that place. Sandy Barnes from Preshil commented one thing that impressed me was his ideas about socialisation and as we are forced to adapt to a dysfunctional society we in a way develop behaviours and ways of interacting with each other that aren't true to our core self. We sometimes call this resilience but it means we can end up with our damaged bits trying to interact with others people's damaged/adapted bits and then wonder why we can't communicate (and love) at a sincere level

Dennis Foley led us in a session of cross cultural understanding and showed how it is in our own backyards. He emphasised the place and importance of the ORAL HISTORY of the indigenous people rather than labelling the stories as myths and legends, which denigrate and reduce the power and presence and purpose of the history. Sandy comments, Dennis spoke about aboriginal lore and why it is important to expose our children to many different religions and beliefs. There was some vigorous discussion about why Anglo Saxon teachers didn't discuss aboriginal culture more eg. lack of confidence, being afraid that they might offend if they get it wrong or overstep some taboo, lack of knowledge, awareness of how complex the culture is and not wanting to simplify or trivialise concepts etc. Dennis led us through an analysis of one of the major stories of the country we were meeting in,

teasing out the morals, ethics and lessons, from sharing of food and resources to rules about suitable marriage partners to punishment and shame and forgiveness for transgression all of which engendered much discussion in the group. Dennis was very encouraging for all of us to actively include aboriginal history, studies and perspectives in our teaching and to act rather than hold back. He encouraged us not to be fearful, to find out as much as possible, to follow the protocols as much as possible but then to just do it. Denis was adamant that it is better to try and get it wrong than to ignore it. Everyone can make an innocent mistake, we do it all the time when teaching, and that if we do we say sorry and forgive ourselves and go on. In Queensland mainstream, they try now to include an aboriginal component at every year level

Dennis's book REPOSSESSSION is a great resource.

He also recommends Keith Vincent Smith at the Mitchell Library as a great resource.

We than loaded into the cars and took off to the local tip! As you do!!!

This is a tip with a difference – Kimbriki – Recycling and Waste Disposal Centre - a place of recycling and renewal!

Pete Rutherford is in love with worms and runs his hands gently and adoringly through compost soil and encouraged us to do the same. Sweet smelling organic matter handed around the group on a silver platter!! Pete began his life as he told us as a chemical farmer and transformed now is an Eco-gardener, social ecologist and teacher. His key message based on interpretations of **'ECO' and 'LOGOS' is to "make meaning and take care of wherever we be!"**

At the tip he has created an organic garden of colourful edible plants and through workshops and many other means such as appearing on gardening shows. Sandy says, I nearly skipped this but I'm so glad I didn't. The tip recycles just about everything imaginable. He talks to thousands of adults and school children each year about life and philosophy. He demonstrated worm farms, need for diversity, composting, we tasted flowers from the garden

He shares his enthusiasm and knowledge with all who will listen and learn and shows that each of us can do this as well. He also introduced us to a melodious, resonant percussive instrument called a Hang Drum ( developed in Switzerland and coming from the Swiss word for 'hand',) whose vibrations harmonised with his spirit, words, the plants and the people. All in the middle of an organic wonder world in the middle of the tip.

One of our group commented. "I never expected to find divinity at a tip!"

Our convoy toured the tip and saw all the massive mounds of recycled material then back up the hill to Kinma for a Circle Session led by Juli Gassner. Juli led us in discussion of the place and value of circles in enabling relationship and learning both in alternative schools and her personal journey of introducing them into mainstream classrooms and schools. We availed ourselves of the opportunity to LIE BOLDLY and share our dreams. Juli and others also shared the pain of working in systems which act contrary to the idealistic talk and the dissonance which occurs when programmes intended to address particular problems are inserted in isolation within the schools with little reference to the culture of the school. One of the Kinma students, Chelsea, who is currently experiencing high school joined the group towards the end and the discussion and focussed on this experience and the connections and

disconnections with her Kinma experience and helped to bring our first day together to a realistic loving focus on the kids.

Day 2 began for many of us with a relaxing and energising walk in the beautiful surrounding bush. There is a clear running creek within metres of the school and we were tempted to settle on the sandstone rocks in this peaceful place for the day. However, the AGM had been postponed from the previous night so we were called inside and we had a lively and energetic discussion about a number of issues. It was decided that more time was needed on discussion so this was held over till after dinner. Summary of the decisions later.

Stuart and Adrienne Huber then generously combined their sessions so that we could fit in other suggestions. Adrienne gave a brief summary of her work with the Knowledge Building Community – a different process of Teacher Education at Wollongong Uni. The session was then based on an agenda of topics suggested by the group. One of the topics which engendered much talk was parent/teacher relationships. We were reminded of the difference which occurs when we operate from I and You rather than WE. We need to move from power struggle, polarised attitudes, defensiveness avoidance, blaming, cynicism, grief, hopelessness, helplessness, anger/fear to assertive loving recognition of the WE. We had some fun reframing the pejorative terms FERAL – Fun, Education Redefining Alive Learning and we are still working on HIPPIE! When we do anything or are asked to do things the key question is What is it in the service of? We need to act on love, not fear.

Stuart and Adrienne



Robin Grille, Kinma Parent and author of Parenting for a Peaceful World gave the next session titled Connecting with your Toddler/Child: Boundaries without Punishment. Robin emphasised that his most recent thoughts were drawing him more to concentrating on the importance and quality of the Connections rather than the boundaries. In many ways punishment and reward give immediate relief so it is easy to see why we resort to behaviour modification. He encouraged us to continue to challenge this and really come to grips with knowing how we are feeling and being absolutely authentic about expressing this in our

relationships with the children, even when the feelings are difficult and confronting. Be aware of the quality of our listening, be emotionally authentic and congruent, trust ourselves to be spontaneous and real and most of all be ourselves.

Dr Kaila from India gave a searching analysis of his research into the state of Indian Schools and Education. The adult and authority driven syllabus, the pressurised and exam oriented system and the negative, punitive, corporal nature of discipline paints a disturbing picture of the world the students have to endure. They are showing major signs of stress. Kaila did present hopeful signs in the 700 DAV schools which have democratic orientations and interests and the work of NGOs such as the URMUL TRUST. I hope to be able to post Kaila's slides on the AAPAE website soon.



Kaila

On Thursday, a number of Kinma and Currambena kids enjoyed the day at Kinma and immersed themselves in the environment. An impromptu student voice session with the kids happened over afternoon tea and they spoke of their lives and learning at school.

Our final speaker for Day 2 was Greg Whitby.

Sandy writes: Another unexpected surprise speaker was the Director of Catholic Education for the Diocese of Parramatta, Greg Whitby. He spoke about how teachers don't teach anyone anything; we can only create the environment and encouragement for people to learn. Not a new idea but he is re educating the catholic teachers in his area to put this into practice. They are designing large learning spaces with learning teams of teachers and students. The learning is not split into subject areas and teams decide what they want to learn about and how they will go about doing so and evaluate their own

learning. It is heavily based on a mix of good relationships and extensive use of technology. He produced some interesting information about the way kids use their computers to learn independently when they are not at school, which is very enriching and does not constrain them in ways that tradition classroom learning does. He believes that we are still trying to perfect an education system based on 19th century thinking, we spent the 20thC protecting the 19<sup>th</sup> century system and our students have largely moved into 21st century thinking.

Greg says we need a new DNA for pedagogy and a narrative for 21<sup>st</sup> C  
 At the moment school is compulsory and learning optional. He would like to reverse this! We need to move from formal to informal learning spaces, mass learning to PERSONALISED learning, competitive to collaborative learning and assessment, restricted and constructed instruction to creative, extended, personal authorship and innovation, from emphasis on content to knowledge and understanding.

SOUND FAMILIAR????

He declared CURRICULUM IS DEAD!  
 He encourages changing curriculum to learning frameworks, learning environments, leading as doing, from professional development to professional learning wherever, whenever whatever, school in virtual world as well as physical world, in shopping centres etc He has visited Unlimited and Discovery in NZ, he shared with us the work of Yoram Harpaz, Director of Mandel School for Educational Leadership in Israel. He espouses great support for the professional role and identity of teachers. (I would like to see the role of students receiving the same focus!)

Greg is a radical thinker working within the system and we had some lively discussion/argument with him about the ways to deal with the political/community expectations and constraints.

He invited us to visit his blog and keep the dialogue happening with him

<http://bluyonder.wordpress.com>

<http://gbwhitby.parra.catholic.edu.au/>



We then shared a meal of organic food prepared by the Kinma parents. This was followed by the extra meeting to continue the discussions from the morning's AGM.

THE DECISIONS!

1. In order to give equal time and importance and to conserve stretched resources, we decided that we would hold the AAPAE Conference and ASIA/PACIFIC Regional Democratic Education Conference in alternate years.
2. We accepted Dr Kaila and Dr Kushal's offer to host the next Asia/Pacific Regional Democratic Education meeting in Mumbai in India during 2008. Date to be decided.
3. The next AAPAE gathering will be hosted by Tamariki Christchurch, New Zealand in 2009. Date to be decided. The conference will take place on a Marae.
4. We suggest to Gab and the students at Blacktown Youth College that they organise and host a Student Voice weekend during 2008. Date and Venue to be decided. Juli G to liase with Gab about this.
5. We hope to fund raise and financially support 2 AAPAE representatives to attend IDEC 2008 in Canada, the Asia /Pacific Regional Conference in India, 2008 and 2 Blacktown Youth College students to attend the AAPAE conference in NZ in 2009.

Day 3 began for some with a yoga session given by Michael who teaches this each week to the Kinma kids. A calm quiet stretching start to the day for old hands and beginners alike

This was followed by Nikki Bruncker, a former Kinma and Currumbena teacher and presently completing her PhD at Sydney University and lecturing and mentoring in Education and Teacher Training. Nikki spoke about the dissonance that occurs in school cultures when the dominant practice is really behaviourist while the rhetoric is child-centred, social constructivism. This creates tension and stress for teachers and students alike and especially for trainee teachers who have to cope with the messages they receive at university and what they experience in the schools. She emphasised the need to develop pedagogy and structure which enables change to occur rather than add on programmes which attempt to solve problems issues in isolation from the real culture of the school. This linked for me with Stuart's earlier point that we need to develop the 'ecological integrity' of our education system first. This builds 'natural capital and productivity emerges from a well maintained healthy system'! Nikki spoke about her work to develop a portraiture of a mainstream school and finding ways to engage teachers in reflection and reform and support trainee teachers. This led to general discussion about the struggle to live and work according to child friendly education in the mainstream. There were many examples of the lack of diversity and negative treatment of the students but also some hopeful signs that this can be changed.

Linlee Jordan, a former Kinma parent and experienced homeopath working at the Harbord Homeopathic Clinic which includes the Children's Clinic, led us in a session on the place and value of homeopathy in the health of children. Linlee is the author of

*Challenging Children: Success with Homeopathy*, published in 2007. This is full of stories of ways that children's lives and learning can be changed and helped. She shared some of these stories with us as well as some of the history of homeopathy. She also highlighted the ways homeopathic remedies can enable suppressed and subtle capabilities to be released, so that the process is a holistic one not just a concentration on the physical symptoms. Linlee was supported in her session by Lorraine Ellison who also works at the Children's Clinic. Linlee talked about the value of using homeopathic first aid kits in schools alongside the traditional ways and encouraged schools to become homeopathy friendly places such as Kinma.

Marc De Rosnay led our final session. Marc is a former student of Currumbena has become a developmental psychologist, currently lecturing and researching at Sydney University. Marc took us on a journey of emotional development where emotional structure exists from the beginning, the baby is receptive and responsive to emotion and the feeling of the mother 'falling in love with baby' enables long term care. At 9 months, stranger awareness /wariness occurs and leads to the onset of social awareness. 12-14 months Social referencing happens and this can be the beginning of being socially phobic and fearful. At 4 yrs the person has become a conversational partner, mind-mindedness, thoughts, desires, feelings all indicate the presence of an intentional person. The research shows that the conversational milieu of the family environment in the first 3 yrs- how they talk and what they talk about and the verbal ability of the person has a major influence on the development of perspective taking ability, the ability to understand the other.



Cec and Marc catching up over lunch!

Sandy writes, Marc talked about emotional learning and some research he was involved in that studied how children learn about what is right and wrong (acceptable or unacceptable) He wasn't discussing this from a moral perspective but rather from a physical one eg babies learn that it is safe to interact with this stranger or to cry, because they glance at their mother and read her body language which lets them know whether this is safe or not. It's a checking process. He believes that children as they grow older need to be given feedback by people in their immediate community in a similar way so that they learn a sense of what is acceptable or not. They continue checking. He worries that in a society that is trying to make the children feel happy all the time we are forgetting to give this information. Parents and teachers are a bit afraid to say "no" or "that's not good enough" because we might upset the child. He was highly endorsing of the alternative schools because they mostly have daily circle meetings where kids raise and talk about what's right and wrong, what rules are fair, who did something naughty, and kids and teachers make explicit things like it's not on to hurt someone and if you did what are you going to do about it to help repair the damage. Their immediate peers and adults hold kids accountable; not some external body like a list of rules, the police or Principal they barely know. He believed that without clear feedback children cannot get at a gut level an understanding of what good is and therefore can't interpret the value of their actions clearly. If you can't do this you miss experiencing the wonderful feeling of satisfaction and pride you get inside when you know that you have done something good. We also talked about Restorative Justice in which Marc worked and why it works well in the juvenile justice system and in some schools but not all. When it involves the immediate community and enough time is given to do it properly everyone felt it is very effective.



Holding hands, in a circle, under the gums, Dennis and Asheley warmly created a moment of quiet review and reflection and officially closed our gathering. I would like to thank Julie Carr for the huge amount of work she did to enable the conference to happen, Juli G for her supporting role in this, the Kinma Kids and Community for their wonderful hospitality and care of everyone who came to the conference and for sharing their special bush setting. Special thanks to all the people who prepared the food and took care of the essential task of keeping us fed and watered! Much love to all, Cecelia



Our conference baby from Tallowood with Ian and Michelle.  
We hope the Kinma babies and families are all doing well

Photos by Fran – thanks Fran. If anyone else has any photos please forward them and we can put them on the website.

A few comments to end!

There was much more stuff to think about; it was all very thought provoking and stimulating. (Sandy)

It was a very calm, relaxing kind of conference with good discussion. (Sue)

Thank you to you all. It had a remarkable peaceful effect on me, not that the ideas did not stimulate, rather that they left a wonderful coming together of ideas rather than a fragmentation. (Juli G)

Please consider becoming a member of AAPAE. Membership forms are on the website [www.aapae.edu.au](http://www.aapae.edu.au)

A reminder for all of our wonderful gathering last year! There are edited recordings and some slides of IDEC2006 talks and galleries of photographs on the POST IDEC2006 website.

Thank you again to Bryn Morgan for all the work he has done on this site and to Eran Segev for his continued care of the AAPAE website.

[www.idec2006.org](http://www.idec2006.org)

AAPAE Committee for 2007/2008/

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**AAPAE 's Website!**      [www.aapae.edu.au](http://www.aapae.edu.au)

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**IDEC2008 in Canada**

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