

**AAPAE NEWSLETTER No 8**  
31<sup>st</sup> August 2005

A brush with history in alternative education happened when The 2005 Annual AAPAE Conference was held at PRESHIL School in Kew in Melbourne from Monday 4<sup>th</sup> July – Wednesday 6<sup>th</sup> July. Preshil is one of the oldest progressive schools in Australia and it was wonderful to be welcomed there by Sandy and Viviane and be able to wander the grand, old and newer, quirky buildings and sense the presence of generations of kids in those complex, intriguing natural surrounds.



The THEME of the conference was:

**Enabling Educational Change for Sustainable Learning and Living.**

This was a broad umbrella for many topics, thoughts, discussions, debate and creative expression. After lunch together and the gathering of new and old friends, **Sue Heart** started our more formal sessions with the song we began to learn together in 2004. This set us on on the path of being wholly engaged in grappling with change.



We've got to sing as if nobody's  
listening,  
We've got to love as if we've never been  
hurt  
We've got to dance as if nobody's  
watching  
We've got to live as if it heaven on earth

We've got to sing when the spirit says  
sing  
We've got to change when the spirit  
says change



Getting to Know You !!

**Professor Stuart Hill**, the Foundation Chair of Social Ecology, University of Western Sydney, and “agent - provocateur” followed with the first of his three powerful sessions. Stuart built on the work we began with him at FCS in 2004. In this first session Stuart touched on all aspects of the theme:

enabling, change as a personal, socio-cultural, environmental and general experience, living sustain – able lives and learning sustain-ability, learning to live.



Stuart Hill

Change can seem daunting and scary. Sometimes we cannot articulate what needs to change.

Stuart encouraged us to LIE, yes LIE! Lie about what you have done about.....?  
His claim is that when we do this we reveal what we really would like to do! Try it!!

He developed the ideas around social ecology strategies for working with change, "Enabling learning for life which emphasised the process of our ongoing psychosocial co-evolution moving from the socialising stage in which one generation largely determines the learning agenda of the next aiming to socialise them with predictable conforming and or rebellious responses to an emerging enabling stage in which the reality that we are already a social learning organism is acknowledged and educational efforts are focused on enabling learners to actualise their social and learning potentials on their own agenda not that of the educator.

We looked at living sustainable lives and teased out the implications of thinking clearly about sustain-ability and sustain-able. We have to acknowledge our past and present sustainable initiatives, publicly celebrating them and communicating them and make them contagious.

Stuart looked at Althea Solter's principles of learning which resonate strongly with those we espouse. Children are born with the desire and ability to learn. They do this best when learning is SELF-INITIATED from own curiosities and interests, through hands on experience and PLAY, in a rich environment

Stuart is a gentle agent- provocateur. He does not shirk from the difficult challenges but with humour and sensitivity he encourages "acknowledging, celebrating, imagining, visioning, deciding, choosing" and he enables each person to believe they have the capacity to begin the process of change. He highly recommends taking "small meaningful initiatives we, individually or in small groups, can absolutely guarantee to carry through to completion."



Thank you Tim for welcoming many of us to Monday Night Dinner !

Tim Berryman, Principal of Fitzroy Community School in Melbourne led us in discussion about funding and its role and effects in our schools. He presented information and opinions about current funding models and suggested a different model for AAPAE members to consider and support. The fundamental principles he emphasised are diversity and equality of opportunity. He asked the question, "whose money is it – the government/s or ours the taxpayers and members of the Australian society? He gave a brief overview of the workings and flaws of the present SES system and concluded that nothing works at the moment to enable poor families to be able to come to our fee paying schools. It is also very difficult for families to gain access to special grants and allowances. Tim advocated the use of a voucher system where every child is given the same funding based on the real cost, not the current AGSRC which omits many significant factors, of educating a child in the government school. Parents and students would choose where to spend that money. AAPAE schools would be available to all.

Where elite schools charge fees above this amount they would proportionally lose their government funding. There was also discussion about AAPAE supporting the idea of seeking integration as schools of special character with full public funding along the lines that Denmark and New Zealand follow. These areas need further thought and debate within the association and it was suggested that this was an ideal topic for a PHD research and would enable us to thoroughly examine the potential benefits and flaws in these proposals. This is my summary of Tim's proposal so may not reflect accurately all that he presented. He hopes to put together a formal proposal and circulate it. For more details and supporting material please contact TIM at FCS.

**Derek Sheppard**, Elected Staff at The Booroobin Sudbury Democratic Centre of Learning followed with a paper.

'Why democratic values and human rights are so important and worth fighting for'.

This discussion looks at some of the fundamental issues at the heart of the ongoing negotiations Booroobin is having with the Qld Government and Education bureaucrats and puts this in the broader context of the place and value of human rights in education.

Derek's paper highlights relevant parts of international human rights law as contained in Conventions and Treaties ratified by the Australian Government and how in particular Booroobin Sudbury Centre of learning complies with these.

"Human rights underpin everything....All our rights are vital to ensure we benefit from democratic values of freedom, responsibility, equity, justice, respect and fairness. The values are meaningless unless we have our rights...the denial of rights has been very costly. At the same time it has been liberating – the government has helped some, if not all of us, realise real independence. It will lead to a sustainable future"

A copy of the full paper will be available on the AAPAE website, [www.aapae.edu.au](http://www.aapae.edu.au)

Tuesday was an extremely full day. We began with a session on IDEC2006 which will be hosted by AAPAE in Sydney 10<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup> July 2006.



(I know this photo is blurred but I am including it to show that it really did happen)  
(Jenny with Leah, Kelly, Gary, John and Gab of Blacktown & Bidwill Youth Colleges)

We put **Jenny Macklin**, Shadow Federal Minister for Education and Deputy Leader of the ALP in the 'sunlight' (rather than the spotlight!) which was pouring into the space!

Jenny covered a range of subjects including the place of alternative schools, her connections and support for alternative, diverse approaches to education, the current debate about national curriculum, resources, funding, differences in educational values between labour and liberal, the existence and effects of the politics of fear on parents and students.

Jenny reiterated Labor's policy of redirecting funding on the basis of need as a way of redressing the inequities in the system, though she said that they were looking at the policies again. She listened intently to Tim's funding proposal discussed the previous day and asked some clarifying

questions about the voucher system. We need to put together a coherent proposal for her to study. She introduced the idea of the integrated schools, which we had mentioned at the initial meeting, and suggested that was a definite option to pursue.

She emphasised her passion for education to eliminate disadvantage and to support kids who are struggling in their lives and learning. It was a special opportunity for Gary, Kelly, John and Leah to be able to present her with a copy of the collection of poems written by the Blacktown and Bidwill kids.

Her reply to the question "How can we be better allies to enable Jenny to be the politician she wants to be?" focussed on such things as  
"present your successes – don't hide them"  
"use the media"

### LIEING LIBERATES!!

Stuart's second session looked specifically at Change. He challenged us to consider the ignorance and denial we all experience. He inserted another one of his quips which I find myself a few seconds later saying 'what did he say?'  
'de – Nile is not just a river in Egypt!'

My notes say things like

world in which there are no enemies  
awareness and acknowledgement  
understanding and competence  
effective action and project-based initiatives

Good ideas are always RIDICULED

Then ADOPTED

Then "Of COURSE!"

"Look for what is good" - Work from existing knowledge and competence

What are you doing to take care of....?

What do you want to do next?"

What do you need to do it?

What are the barriers to doing it?

SIGNAGE: "Working for the planet- ask me what I do!"

Socialising in schools and society is about manipulation of others through an imposed agenda and often the solutions to problems are to go for efficiency, substitution, curative homogenising solutions. For real change we need to RE- DESIGN

We need integrity to solve internally and enable well being and learning.

If we hope to RE-DESIGN alternative, democratic schools we could regard

Phase 1 as Democracy. What would Phase 2 be? Co-operacy?

We want to enable root level, radical redesign and design and create perhaps participatory co-operacy

Work from the empowered spontaneous aware loving from the inside out rather than the adapted, patterned, dis-empowered, unaware fearful outside in.

Many people in the 7-11 year group experience this debilitating "bashing in" of their real self and so many of us learn to "swallow the shit to get the love!"

Rebellion and Conformity are different sides of the same response.

Where change is taking place learn from what is working move from de-colonisation which involves resistance, expression of anger, protest to re- inhabitation where we embrace, fall in love, connect, transform(Change) and conserve (keep)

Stuart looked at Rachel Lauer's work and epistemes

Clever People solve problems - Wise people avoid problems.

There needs to be paradigm shift and radical change - provisional understanding moving from knowing to unknowing.

Change can be at global /institution personal.

Learning = expression it is more damaging to not have your love received

What is your agenda? Who are you? What are you about?



**John Fien** ran the session after lunch. John is Innovation Professor of Sustainability at RMIT University, where he is responsible for “facilitating collaborative research in the social, ecological and economic dimensions of sustainability. He has a broad, interdisciplinary background in environmental and education policy and he has been at the forefront of developments in capacity for sustainable development. He has been appointed by The Australian National Commission for UNESCO to coordinate the Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (DESD) strategy and activities.”

John began his session by challenging us to play a ‘game’ matching world expenditure with particular items and ranking these from greatest to least.

There were 13 items. The greatest expenditure was 780 billion on the world’s military spending, the least was 6 billion on basic education! In between were narcotics, alcohol in Europe, cigarettes, Japanese business, pet food cosmetics in USA and so on.

John gave a brief history of the world deliberations since 1992 in Rio leading to the declaration of the current Decade of Education for Sustainable development 2005-2025.

The definition of sustainable development he uses is that which meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of the future generations to meet their own needs. We have to live in ways the children 6-7 generations can be proud and which honours our ancestors. He spoke about the sustainability compass which includes

Natural systems

Political systems

economic systems

Social systems

The value of indigenous systems and learning

Our common Future – the Bruntland Report

The Millenium Declaration – “We the Peoples”

1. Poverty is pain – aim to cut it in half
2. Every child has a right to education – 1 in 3 are not completing 5 years
3. gender equality in education
4. infant mortality – improve water and air and reduce gastro and respiratory disease
5. maternal mortality – health of children depends on well being of mother
6. reproductive health – development is best contraceptive
7. environment- better management improve lives, increases productivity
8. need adequate finance to pay for all the above

John also spoke about the sustainability covenant which articulates many of the principles which alternative and democratic education hold dear.



Vince Dobbs

**Vince Dobbs** from Unlimited Paenga Tawhiti, in Christchurch New Zealand spoke about the development of the school. He put together a 10 point plan which shows a new approach to secondary education in New Zealand..

1. **a group of interested people who wanted education to be different**
2. identified potential opportunity under section 156a for Special Character School which enable 21 families who identify a need to specify special character and start a school
3. identify special character
4. demonstrate public support
5. work with Ministry of Education on process of applying for a new school
6. new approach to property to allow leased rather than owned buildings
7. full submission – evaluated by MoE, amended, approved by minister, gazetted, opened school end of Feb 2003 with 40 9-10 students
8. Establishment board approved by minister with 5 members of the Learning Discovery Trust
9. Key appointments made
10. Property development short and long term.

The special character of the school includes student controlled learning with independent learning plans, non-hierarchical, and using the facilities of its inner city location. There is an emphasis on saying yes to kid's inquiry, relationships of trust and respect, no institutional cajoling or bullying, kids and adults are learning advisors, home base has 12-14, students, science technology, entrepreneurial skills art music all have strong focus based on the kids interests.

This is very much a summary and the full text of Vince's talk is available if anyone wants to read it.

Freya Thomas, a student and Kay Hann, art teacher from Preshil, showed a video and spoke about their visit, travel and humanitarian work in Cambodia. The Preshil students raised money for the materials for a house and then as part of their visit participated in the building and construction of the home. As part of their studies the students had been moved by the suffering and lives of characters in a book. Meeting people, living and working in such a different culture and climate made a profound impression on the students and they experienced a sense of reality of how others in the world live and cope with great suffering and minimal resources. If anyone would like more information about this project please contact, sandy, Freya or Kay at Preshil Special thanks again to Sandy Barnes and all at Preshil for enabling us to have such a great time together.

We finished the day with a second **IDEC2006** session, updating plans and looking at ways that the wider AAPAE community can participate both in the organising and holding of this event. There is a need for renewed energy and focus on ways to make IDEC happen. Tim encouraged people to consider whether they could raise \$1000.00 towards the funding of IDEC. We hope that many AAPAE schools can become involve in fundraising, especially to enable poor and disadvantaged students in Australia and internationally to be able to attend. The following working parties were discussed – roles, responsibilities and calls for participants were made.

Programme  
Sponsorship and Funding>  
Marketing/Communication - includes website?  
Students  
Social/Entertainment  
Management and Logistics

Most of the conference participants pledged a “small meaningful initiative they would absolutely guarantee to carry through to completion” related to IDEC2006 and one or more of the working parties above.



Bob Bob(NZ) Tim



Di John Gary Kelly Leah Marlene Queen Gab Sharon

Our third day together began when Gary, John, Leah and Kelly, four students from Blacktown and Bidwill Colleges in Western Sydney, through poetry, song and words, gave powerful testimony to the changes in their lives. School refusal, disengagement with learning and schools, trouble with families, police and the law, issues of drugs, alcohol and racism, living in poverty are changing for them through relationships with caring adults who empower them to believe in themselves and change the direction their lives. All of them spoke passionately about how they could now begin to learn once the pressure of conventional expectations was replaced with genuine listening and participation in the decisions about their lives. This was a very emotional and moving experience for many of us.

Stuart led us in the final session of our trilogy. The central message for me was 'communicate from essence to essence.'.

Other powerful thoughts –'when we teach a 'subject' we are teaching ourselves'

'Another's agenda is second best to our own'

'Wisdom is the product of experience and emptiness'

Among many other points, including a spirited debate about the place and expression of anger,

Stuart developed the differences between the

I/You	and	We
Power struggle, polarism, defensiveness,		caring, nurturing, softness
Avoidance, blaming, criticism,		recognition, respect, safety, enjoyment
Cynicism, joking, grief,		sharing listening, insight
Anger, fear,		sense of relief, comfort, ease
Generalising, absolving,		peace, hopeful, energising

Change of the self and ways of relating is integral to change in society and community and leads to transformative learning.

Stuart has many handouts and papers which he 'gifts'. If anyone would like copies please contact Cec.

AH - HAAHHHH!!!

Our final session became a wonderfully creative review of our time together. Elizabeth, Gail and Vivienne, all working in Art Therapy, devised an experience for us where after a relaxation time doing Tai Chi we were invited to choose, from a vast array, a few postcards which spoke to us of the past days together. When we had done that we gathered in small groups and explained the significance of the cards as symbols of our days together, while others in the group drew, coloured, doodled etc on paper. We were then invited to share the whole group's work of art in any creative way we wished. Much fun and hilarity accompanied this session as well as the expression of deep emotion and contact, understanding and communication. Have you received your postcard to yourself??

Feedback of the most sustaining kind!



The 2005 AGM for AAPAE was held during lunch time  
Please see minutes and President's Report for more details.

AAPAE Committee for 2005/2006

Cecelia Bradley (ACT)– President

Chris Price (NSW)– Secretary

Ian Dodd (SA)– Treasurer

Com Members

Kirsty Dodd (SA) Tania Heine (VIC), Juli Gassner-Gering (NZ)

AAPAE 's Website!

[www.aapae.edu.au](http://www.aapae.edu.au)

**IDEC 2005 in Berlin was attended by**

**Tim Perkins from Sydney, Ben Sheppard from Boorobin Juli Gassner-Gering and  
students from Christchurch (NZ).**

**We hope to hear their impressions of the experience when they have had time to settle  
back to routine.**

**IDEC2006 UPDATE**

Since the conference and the finalising of this newsletter there have been 2 organising meetings.  
There has been renewed energy and interest in planning and working for IDEC2006 and this is  
great to see. One of the strategies tried was to have a conference call for interstate members to  
the meeting and Kirsty from SA and Cecelia from Canberra were able to take part in the meeting.  
We hope to do more of these so if anyone from other states wants to join in please contact us.  
Please contact your local and state politicians, media, and mainstream schools to spread the  
word about IDEC2006.

For more information about how to become involved in any of the working parties, the following  
are ways to make contact.

[orgcom@idec2006](mailto:orgcom@idec2006)

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

[www.aapae.edu.au](http://www.aapae.edu.au)

Please renew your AAPAE membership and spread the word

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