

News from the National President of WEF

Colin Power

The Members of WEF are united by the conviction that education has a key role to play in building a world community where priority is given to peace, understanding and co-operation. While we must constantly reassess what our position means in the light of the challenges facing us, our basic values remain the same, and are just as important today as they were when WEF was founded.

Perhaps the greatest challenge of our time is the need to learn to live together, and in particular, to educate for shared values, for intercultural and interfaith understanding. The very successful joint UNESCO-WEF Australia Conference on this theme at the end of last year in Adelaide demonstrates our continuing commitment to the ideals of WEF and our capacity to work with UNESCO and other partners towards the common good. It was good to see all of the key papers from that Conference in the June 2005 edition of *New Horizons in Education*. What is important is that WEF continues to support educational institutions and communities in following up the recommendations and ideas generated at the Conference.

The vitality of WEF depends very much on the energy and enthusiasm of its State Sections. As you can see from the reports of the Sections, each section has generated a solid program of seminars and workshops. WEF Sections are extending our understanding of key educational issues to be addressed within our community including values education; the educational rights and needs of children who are the victims of armed conflict; restoring justice, truth and compassion to Australia's national agenda; the science and religion debate today; the place of technology in education; and educating for a non-violent global community.

While in Melbourne in June, I met with Victorian WEF Members. We look forward to working with its new Executive headed by Geoff Haw as President and Athena Vongalis as Secretary. I then went on to Tasmania to give the first lecture in the 2005 WEF Winter Series ('seven events for all Tasmanians aspiring to understand and improve our world'). My theme was *Towards a Global Community: Educating for Tomorrow's World*, and was based on the outcomes of the WEF international study headed by Jack Campbell and completed by Nick Baikaloff and myself. The book under this title will be out soon (published by Springer NL).

Almost all non-government organizations like WEF face the problem of an aging and declining membership and meagre financial resources. This in turn means that some of the services traditionally provided to members have become very difficult to sustain. Your Executive has tried very hard to find a way to maintain *New Horizons in Education* as our national Journal, but in the end it became clear that we must move to a new format. Thus, sadly *New Horizons in Education* will be phased out during 2006 and replaced by a *WEF Newsletter*, with more substantive contributions such as those published in *New Horizons in Education* available on the WEF website, and on occasion, in the form of thematic Monographs. At the same time, WEF Australia will continue to support our international journal, *New Era in Education*.

WEF Australia and its sections have been pushing for reform of the management of WEF International, our view being that the current structure means that the Guiding Committee is far removed from most members. An international task group has been formed to look into the issue. We will take the opportunity provided by 2006 WEF International Conference in Sophia to renew the organization.

Perhaps the greatest threat to democracy today is the declining willingness of citizens to participate in the process of critical reflection and debate within the "civil society." In an age where power and wealth are being concentrated in fewer and fewer hands, it is even more important that ordinary citizens become informed and join organizations like WEF where key issues relating to peace, security, sustainable development, intercultural and interfaith understanding are reflected upon, discussed and acted on.

It is important that we join hands with sister organizations like UNESCO and UNAA. We do need to renew our organization by engaging more young people and community groups in reflection and in co-operative programs that make a difference.

If WEF is to fulfil its mission, we must rise to the challenge of rebuilding the civil society and if we are to restore the essence of what it means to live in a participatory democracy. Critical reflection and debate involving all groups involved in education, the 2005 new education fellowship, has never been more critical if we are to combat the growth of intolerance, racism, alienation, terrorism and violence in Australia and our global village.

Colin Power
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