

## News from the Victorian Section

Geoff Haw and  
Athena Vongalis-Macrow

### May Forum

Our very successful forum held at RMIT University in May was on the topic of *Education for Sustainable Development*. A healthy turnout of teachers, lecturers, health workers, nurses, post graduate students, student teachers and community workers made for an engaged audience.

Guest host for the forum was Professor Colin Power, the national president of WEF. Two keynote speakers presented at the forum. The first speaker was **Dennis Cunningham FACE**, Deputy Principal, Victorian School of Languages; Secretary of the Australian Federation of Modern Language Teachers' Association, and President of the Federation Internationale des Professeurs de Langues Vivantes. Dennis told us that up to 90 percent of language may disappear in this millennium, which threatens many people's identities and ways of life. Language is critical to self and national identity.

**Professor John Fien**, from RMIT, was our second speaker, and referred to the UN Decade of Sustainable Development. John presented the result of an international study that studied youth attitudes to environmental issues in the Asian Pacific Region. The aim was to reveal a snapshot of the environmental attitudes of these future leaders and then explore the implications for education and teaching. John stressed the need for a more integrated way of thinking about the environment and how critical values and attitudes can be fostered in educational thinking and practice. Professor Power then moderated an interactive discussion in which issues related to language and sustainability were further explored.

### Celebrating International Teachers' Day

Our next major event is a high profile public forum for International Teachers' Day on Friday 27 October at The University of Melbourne, a day originally initiated by Colin Power during his time as Assistant Director at UNESCO. The recurring international date of 5 October coincides with some vacations in Australia so is celebrated locally on Friday 27<sup>th</sup> October. While we articulate teaching as '*A Passionate, Privileged and Proud Profession*', we are addressing a provocative topic, given the reported exodus of Australian teachers heading overseas, and many others turning away from the profession after graduating. We have a panel of highly respected and influential teacher educators and practitioners each giving their perspectives on answering the question: *Is Australia losing the race to keep its most talented teachers?* This event will focus on grass-roots educators as the focus on the profession of teaching—a wonderful privilege and an awesome responsibility in these very challenging times. We are being somewhat adventurous, holding the forum over lunchtime, to draw a high level of media involvement to raise awareness of teaching.

### Future Directions

WEF Victoria has held some 'Conversation' informal meetings since May, and certainly developed a stimulating forum for discussion of contemporary education and society. We promote WEF as a truly global project in education, whereby participants can explore 'big picture' issues.

WEF in Victoria has been seriously considering the most effective way in which to fulfil the aims of WEF in a time when educators (and most people) are time-poor and able to choose from an extensive range of

highly commendable professional organisations. This has increasingly challenged many groups such as WEF over a long period, and we want to therefore seek solutions.

We have asked ourselves: Why would people want to affiliate with WEF? How can we be relevant? What should our priorities be? Should we try to follow the tried and trusted 'forum' style of gathering? What is the best time of day that suits most people? We don't have all the answers, and probably don't know all the questions. But ask we must.

In this final edition of *New Horizons of Education*, we are setting ourselves the challenge of increasing our relevance and rates of participation, and should NHE ever rise from the ashes, we would hope that we could point to a satisfying growth and development in WEF Victoria.

WEF Victoria endorse Colin Power's words: '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 cooperation.' Through a range of activities WEF Victoria aims to influence the thinking and disturb the mindsets of all persons who have an interest in educating our youth for a future of hope, aspiration and accomplishment. We want to improve educational leadership, teaching methodology, and student learning outcomes. How do we make WEF relevant? How do we make WEF different to other professional associations/networks?

We are considering several options, including a series of more informal 'conversations' each year, with perhaps a larger 'round table' annual event. We are even considering holding a biennial (or triennial) Assembly of Educators focusing on specific global issues and linked to UNESCO. We may even consider membership at both the individual and institutional levels.

As we gear up to face these challenges, we invite educators to join us on this journey of learning as together we seek common ground that will enhance educational opportunities for those who need it most.

As for *New Horizons in Education*, we simply salute its editorial team and say, 'Thanks for the memories!'

## **Contact**

Geoff Haw

[geoffhaw@optusnet.com.au](mailto:geoffhaw@optusnet.com.au)