

Alice Miller and Candlebark Schools: Annual Report, 2016.



Time for another round of boasting about our brilliant, wonderful, outstanding school, sweeping any ugly incidents under the nearest rug, and asserting our right to exist for another twelve months.

Annual reports of schools have much in common with annual reports of public companies: lavish use of euphemisms to disguise anything that is not working effectively, token apologies for disasters, and meaningless forecasts of a brilliant future.

So, fair reader, having given fair warning to you, I will now plunge into this official account of 2016.

The major development in the history of Candlebark was that, in a strictly legal sense, it ceased to exist at the start of the year, and became a new entity. It is now two schools, on different sites, and is under the auspices of a newly formed company called Blyton Pty. Ltd., named in honour of the distinguished Enid. Candlebark continues to be called Candlebark; we named the other school Alice Miller, to honour the Swiss writer and psychotherapist, who probably did more for the betterment of the world than did Enid Blyton. (Correspondence on this topic will not be entered into...)

The structure of the schools is as follows: Alice Miller is a secondary school spanning Years 7 to 11 in 2016 (7 to 12 in 2017), and Candlebark has students from Prep to Year 7 (Prep to 8 in 2017). Thus, both schools have had a Year seven class this year, and both schools will have Years 7 and 8 next year.

Alice Miller is on a 75 acre campus at Macedon, replacing a Protestant school, Macedon Grammar, which closed at the end of 2014.

After that very dry and boring introduction I'll begin this report by dealing with Alice Miller and Candlebark separately.

ALICE MILLER SCHOOL

Alice Miller was established to cater for secondary school students who wish to specialise in drama, art and/or music, but also to cater for students following a more conventional path... and to encourage synthesis between these paths.

A generation ago, young people who were foolish enough to express an interest in a career as an artist, potter, musician, author, actor or dancer were likely to be chloroformed by their parents, placed in a sack, and left on the doorstep of the School of Dentistry at the University of Melbourne. I know, for example, a man who was offered places in both an art school and a teaching hospital when he matriculated from secondary school, back in the mid-60s. His parents said they would pay for him to do Medicine but if he chose Art, he'd be on his own. He selected Medicine, and has regretted it ever since.

The reality is that the arts is now a multi-billion dollar industry in Australia, and parents whose children aspire to be rock singers or sculptors should rub their hands with glee. That may be a little overstated: I would imagine that 90% of dentists earn a good income, compared to 10% or 20% of rock singers and sculptors. But the most successful rock singers and sculptors make far, far more than the most successful dentists.

However, putting aside the crass topic of money, it can truly be said that every human being needs to express himself or herself creatively. The creative forces which operate so powerfully (and uniquely perhaps) in humans should never be denied, for if they are, profound emotional and spiritual damage can result.

Almost universally however, schools marginalise creative subjects, treating them as footnotes in the curriculum.

Victorian secondary students who have a passion for the arts are poorly served by the schools of this state.

To cater for these young people, we established an extensive program of electives at Alice Miller. For example, a Year 9 student could, in 2016, spend nine of her 24 periods a week in music classes, and even more if she chose to add a VCE music subject to her timetable. Or he could do between six and 12 periods of art. Or she could do at least eight periods of science. There was a palpable sense of delight and satisfaction at the start of the year as students recognised the possibilities offered by this timetable and adjusted their studies accordingly.

It can be seen then that choice is at the heart of the Alice Miller experience. But it's not an either/or approach, where students have to choose a creative or a "non-creative" path. Head of Alice Miller, Sarita Ryan, argues that 'The world will be a better place if there is much more communication between science and the creative fields – the lack of action on climate change, for instance, has been attributed to a failure of imagination amongst policymakers and the public'. She quotes Professor Martha Nussbaum, who in her book 'Not for Profit: why democracy needs the humanities', writes that the arts are essential for preserving democratic citizenship and developing empathy and understanding... even if we were to focus purely on economic growth, the arts remain indispensable... Innovation requires minds that are flexible, open and creative; literature and the arts cultivate these capacities. When they are lacking, a business culture quickly loses steam"

Nussbaum says that 'Without people with a liberal arts background, the world would be filled with narrow, technically trained workers, rather than complete citizens who can think for

themselves, criticize tradition and authority, and understand the significance of another person's sufferings and achievements'.

Therefore we encourage and support all fields of learning at Alice Miller, explicitly and implicitly urging students to think broadly and imaginatively, to approach all aspects of life creatively, to develop not just a body of knowledge but also to achieve intellectual and personal growth.

Other key elements in the operation of Alice Miller are the pastoral care of students (an apparently ever-expanding area of a school's responsibility in the 21st century), the constant challenging of students in every area of their lives, and the encouragement of an adventurous attitude towards the world. We do not believe that the boundary fence of a school campus should confine students, but rather, that the campus should be a base from which expeditions into the world are launched.

To further the school's aims we set up a program for 2016 which would not surprise those familiar with Candlebark. So, for example, our Year 10 students spent six weeks in Greece and Montenegro; our Year 9 students spent six weeks in France and Montenegro; Year 10 students also had a Melbourne camp; Year 9s went to WOMAD in South Australia; Year 11s had a week in Sydney; Year 7s had a week in Canberra; Year 7s and 8s also went on a five-day bike camp which took them on an epic journey around the Macedon Ranges and Daylesford; and various groups did the Overland Hike from Cradle Mountain to Lake St Clair in Tasmania, went canoeing on the Barmah Lakes, went to the French Film



Festival, toured the Archibald Prize exhibition in Ballarat, went to Preshil for a day of shared music-making, visited a Banksy exhibition, went to the opera La Boheme, went to the VCE Dance presentation, saw plays like The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui, Peddling, and Picnic at Hanging Rock, hiked to Mount Feathertop, went to a Melbourne Symphony Orchestra Dvorak concert, saw the Warhol/Wei Wei exhibition at the National Gallery, visited the

Hellenic Museum at the University of Melbourne, and went to the Magic (cards) Grand Prix. Year 8s went to the MONA Gallery in Hobart, most of the school were kindly invited to occupy the magnificent Alton mansion on Mount Macedon for two days for an alternative timetable of creative activities, art students were invited into Frederick McCubbin's old home on Mount Macedon, and so on and so on.

People who visited the school and spoke to students, or performed for them, included candidates for the federal election, a blind piano tuner, a teacher of refugees on Nauru, a brilliant young piano accordionist from Italy, radical Russian performance artist Irina Danilova, Sunbury police officers LSC's Jason Azzopardi and Margaret Bosidis (to talk about cyber bullying), cabinetmaker Sam Fitzmaurice, Property Manager Bob Mitchell, music staff and students from the Victorian College of the Arts, and entrepreneurs Ellie Harris and Robin Masih.

Ellie and Robin, along with Sharon and Peter Sammut from Clearview Homes, offered a large amount of money to underwrite the two students, or teams of students, who could come up with the most successful ideas for an entrepreneurial venture. The winners of this contest were Tia Weiss and Bodhi Anderson-Barbey, but the standard of entries, from a huge number of students, was astonishing, reflecting well on their ingenuity and business sense, and auguring well for their adult lives... lives in which university and traditional career paths may not play such a significant role.

The creative arts program at the school was supported by an outstanding group of music teachers, and was on show several times, including at one soirée featuring superb jazz and a brilliant drama presentation, and a second one featuring a range of utterly captivating performances. But the highlight of the year was probably "Shakespeare at Alice", a dazzling night of theatre, music and pyrotechnics, produced by Anne Browning, performed in the stormy darkness, and lit in a variety of novel ways. A Midsummer Night's Dream, Macbeth, and Romeo and Juliet were combined to make one of the most brilliant and sophisticated school shows I have seen in forty years of teaching.

Chess reared its elegant and at times ferocious head as soon as Alice Miller opened, and the strong chess program, spearheaded by Basil Eliades and Brennan Garcia, saw our players compete at tournaments far and wide, culminating in a strong performance in the National Championships at the end of the year.

Year tens went out on work experience, and their employers commented on them in glowing terms:

Student 1: "She's awesome. An absolute legend. She contributed far more than most university students. Did many 'grunt' jobs without complaint."

Student 2: "An absolute delight."

Student 3: "We loved having her. Incredibly mature, friendly, very capable."

Student 4: "Warm, helpful, very engaged, up for just about anything."

Student 5: "Produced some truly excellent work, coped very well with the late nights and large workload, and mixed well with the rest of the team."

For a school which aims to develop resilience, strength and a solid sense of confidence, this feedback was very pleasing.

We were delighted that Year 10 student Matilda Reading was selected for the Kwong Lee Dow Young Scholars Program at the University of Melbourne this year. 1800 people applied for this honour, so it was a credit to Matilda that she was among those chosen. The Kwong Lee Dow Young is an enrichment program which includes leadership training, VCE coaching, overnight stays at residential colleges, entrance to the University's undergraduate program (subject to conditions), and the likelihood of an overseas study scholarship at a later date.

In among all the so-called extra-curricular activities at Alice Miller this year, classroom teaching proceeded apace, and I want to acknowledge the outstanding standards achieved by our inaugural teaching staff: Anne Browning, Basil Eliades, Brennan Garcia, Carla Kankindji, Bettina Lythgoe, Hartley Mitchell, Skye Myers, Amy Naivasha and Anna Van Veldhuisen. Although Basil and Bettina had been at Candlebark and so knew many of the students, and had a good idea of how Alice Miller was likely to operate, the others were new to this 'model'. Unlearning and learning had to happen simultaneously as they strove, successfully, to create a school culture that would best serve both students and staff.

We also benefited from learning support provided at Alice Miller by Cathy Snowdon and Lola Hill.

Candlebark marches on its stomach, and food was always going to be at the heart of Alice Miller, to mix metaphors in an anatomically confusing way. Maddy Scott, ex-Candlebark student, started the food program at Alice and was loved by all for her generous spirit and kind, patient nature. We feared the difficulties of finding a replacement for her when she floated serenely away to have a baby, but up popped Veronica Galvan, a chef with a Brazilian/Argentinian background, and 15 years kitchen experience. Veronica quickly established herself as a wonderful cook whose personality and integrity were immediately recognised by students as authentic. She has become an integral part of the Alice Miller scene.

Penny Gronset joined the staff in the second half of the year, to run the office, and soon made herself indispensable. And the Magnificent Men and Women of the Maintenance Mob would medal in any Olympic event, subject only to a few slight adaptations. Synchronised Swimming comes to mind, as the coordination of their activities under Property Manager Bob Mitchell was beautiful to behold. Martin Barry, Catherine Day, Mitchell Gandolfo, Wendy Higgins, Luke Mitchell, Mandy Murdoch, John O'Rourke and Murray Tucker between them, working part-time or full-time at one or both schools, covered activities as diverse as painting, gardening, bus driving, plumbing, carpentry, bus maintenance, cleaning, mowing, garbage disposal, chain sawing, building, demolishing, animal husbandry, and in between times could be relied upon to talk philosophy, politics, sport, or tell bad jokes.

Major refurbishments and ongoing maintenance at Alice Miller were urgently needed for the school to open and operate successfully, and the dedication and skill brought to these tasks by the maintenance crew has been at the highest professional levels.

The aforementioned Head of Campus, Sarita Ryan, is the inspirational figure who has been responsible for the school's rapid growth into a major educational feature of the Macedon Ranges landscape. Sarita has been a strong, stable and creative leader, able to bring together a diverse and idiosyncratic group of staff and students – so successfully that the atmosphere of

the school towards the end of the year was almost euphoric. Her dedication to this enormous task has meant many long hours working nights and weekends, but the school could not have succeeded without it.

A whole new set of registrations was required for Alice Miller, particularly because for the first time we were offering VCE, and so we had to deal with the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority, a playful institution who engaged us in a long correspondence, and criticised us for such catastrophic errors as calling an assessment task ‘Structured Questions in a Short Answer Test’ instead of ‘Structured Questions’.

Equally, horror was expressed when the phrase ‘Theatre Studies Stagecraft Examination Specifications’ was used instead of ‘Theatre Studies Stagecraft Examination’.

However, they were endearingly honest about their own mistakes:

From a senior bureaucrat: “My apologies for not selecting the Maths Methods for you, I didn’t read the document correctly.”

From a curriculum manager: “Thank you for your time this morning. My apologies if I have the wrong documents.” (She did.)

I have to say though that the VCAA staff were noticeably more human and more helpful than some of the staff from other regulatory bodies with whom we have dealt.

And so we arrived, successfully I think I can say, at the end of the year. A parent wrote to us recently with the comment “The culture (of Alice Miller) is eclectic and nurturing, an unheard-of mix in most schools.”

And a teacher doing some casual teaching towards the end of the year wrote: “It (the school) is truly extraordinary... very nurturing, and the teachers and the kids are evidently both talented and kind. From an intellectual perspective, it is also very interesting for me as the school does away with what I perceived as the most problematic structural issues in main stream education, notably the authoritarian structure which is objectionable both on ethical and practical grounds, age grades, the misuse of teacher time and the size of schools.”

And yes, I think I would agree that, whilst we are not a democratic school, we have removed the authoritarian structure which so many educators believe is essential to hold a school together. Some may be surprised to know that we were able to do so without the edifice collapsing.



CANDLEBARK SCHOOL

In its eleventh year Candlebark bounded gracefully forwards, undeterred by the loss of Years 8, 9 and 10 students to Alice Miller.

If the redoubtable ska band, organised and led by Taran Carter, is a symbol of the vitality and energy of the school – and there is good reason for thinking it is – then I’m happy to say that the band hardly missed a beat, adjusting to the loss of its senior members and continuing to rock on. At their final appearance for the year, on the last day of Term 4, they again brought an audience to its feet, grooving and clapping and dancing.

Other musical activities in 2016 included performances at the Beat Concert in Kyneton, the Megafauna day at Lancefield, the Harvest Festival, as well as combined music-making days with Newham Primary School on one occasion, Braemar College on another, and Preshil in Melbourne on another. As well, we had more memorable soirées; one of which was held at the Lancefield Mechanics' Hall, where we broke the attendance record for the building.

Once again this year we innovated in every direction. We combined Grade 5 and 6 kids, splitting them into three classes, to change the group dynamics and generate a bit more social energy. This seemed to work well. We also launched a new programme for kids in Grade 2, 3 and 4. Each term, a small number of students from each class got together with teacher Andrew Blizzard and worked on a particular theme/topic/project. In first term they explored tribal societies; in second term, space and the universe; in third term, the underwater world; and in fourth term, archaeology, and the history of the Tye Estate and surrounding district.

This exciting approach to education brought great benefits, and we will continue it next year, but just with children from Grade 3 and 4.

We ran two four day camps at Bright, two Overland hikes from Cradle Mountain to Lake St Clair in Tasmania, and three bike camps. Even our Preps were involved in a Bright camp and a bike camp, living in tents for three nights and two nights respectively.

It would not be hyperbolic to state that Candlebark teacher Sam Ford established, in 2016, the most adventurous outdoors program undertaken by any primary school in Australia. As well as the activities listed in the previous paragraph, groups of our students hiked over Mount Macedon, hiked to Mount Feathertop, hiked through the Grampians, hiked through Wilsons Promontory, canoed the Murray River, did the Great Ocean Walk, adventured over Hanging Rock, did practice hikes and then tackled the Overland Walk in Tasmania from Cradle Mountain to Lake St Clair, and canoed on Lake Eppalock at a camp run in conjunction with students from Latrobe University.

Meanwhile a group undertook marine studies at a Queenscliff camp; Year sevens spent a week in Canberra; and different groups went to a Melbourne Symphony Orchestra Dvorak concert, saw the Warhol/Wei Wei exhibition at the National Gallery, visited the Bunjilaka Museum in Melbourne and visited ScienceWorks.

Innumerable sleepovers were held at school, some of which were in conjunction with NaNoWriMo, an innovative writing program designed to encourage young people to become more fluent on paper. The program has been adopted at Candlebark by teacher Donna Prince, under whose enthusiastic tutelage 70 students wrote 592,119 words in one month.

Donna also organised sleepovers for her Explosions Club, a clandestine activity supported by pyrotechnics genius John Sanderson. For security reasons I can say no more.

Ian de Silva's Prep class was deeply immersed in pirate activities for many weeks, culminating in a mysterious expedition to Melbourne. For security reasons I can say no more.

The chess program, so much a part of our culture, has been continued mega-successfully by teachers Andy Moffat and Cameron Kerr. Chess tournaments in 2016 were held in places as diverse as Mount Alexander, Box Hill, Ballarat, Windsor and Dandenong, and culminated in the national titles at the University of Melbourne. Our students have become ferocious yet courteous chess players, and are regarded with fear and awe by other schools. They

performed splendidly in the national titles, as they did in all their competitions, coming home laden with ribbons, medals and cheap fake-wood trophies..

Fencing, run by Aleksey Danilov, is also integral to Candlebark life, and it was heartening in 2016 to see a group of young stars emerging to continue the tradition established by students who are now fencing at Alice Miller.

There are always so many highlights at Candlebark that it's hard to cover them all. The Preps, led by the indomitable Kate Tucker, dressed as storybook characters before setting off to buy books and have morning tea in Woodend. The Night of the Notables showed a depth of research and a confidence in presentation that was deeply impressive. STEM Week – an innovation in 2016 – resulted in wonderful projects, like the construction of a geodesic dome by Sam Thorpe's group and beautiful body parts by Andrew Blizzard's group. The fête was bigger and better than ever, with a unique collection of stalls and activities. Steve Pollet's Fashion Week, featuring such glamorous events as Monster Monday, Tutu Tuesday and Fabulous Friday brought out inner monsters, inner celebrities, etc. in staff and students alike, in ways that were sometimes deeply disturbing.

Steve also continued the Stephanie Alexander kitchen garden and cooking program which has been so successful for some years now. The healthy, intimate contact with the earth, and the unique satisfaction that comes from making meals from products one grows oneself, contribute to children's development in powerful though intangible ways.

Towards the end of the year the teaching staff took the 22 Grade 6 students to dinner at the Macedon Wine Room, to acknowledge their forthcoming graduation from primary school. Each student made a short speech, and very generous and gracious they were. It was nice to see young people who are normally running around in old clothes, often smeared with mud, dressed (reasonably) formally and (more or less) fashionably. You can judge for yourself in



the accompanying photograph.

Another remarkable continuing program at Candlebark is the equestrian course run by Jess Liston. Recently augmented by the thoroughbred Jorge, our mob of horses continues to teach kids and be taught by them. As well as interacting with horses, our students help look after pigs, sheep, chooks, goats and one solitary Highland cow named Hettie. Sadly, our last guinea fowl was killed when a tree fell on it a few months ago. (Its name was not “Sadly”, as the lack of a comma after “fowl” indicates. In view of the manner of its death however, “Sadly” might not have been an inappropriate name – whoever heard of a bird killed by a tree falling on it?)





...Anyway, back to business (although I think I could say anything at this point, as it's unlikely that anyone is still reading.)

We were sorry to lose Sharon Healy, who had been helping Fiona in the kitchen for so long. Having successfully avoided falling trees for several years, late in 2016 Sharon had an offer from her previous employer that 'was too good to refuse'. We appreciated her cheerful energy and great work ethic. Kitty Schembri has now joined Fiona, and has made a terrific and immediate impact.

Alannah Rice, who was a key member of our learning support team left at the end of 2016, to move to Melbourne. A great contributor, armed with her ukulele and sense of humour, we will remember Alannah's moving farewell speech for a long time to come.

In sport, Candlebark students continued to compete in a wide variety of events, with disproportionate success for the size of our school. Our netball team, for example, made the regional finals at Bendigo. Charlotte Fowler won the tennis singles title for the Macedon Ranges Primary Schools Association. Lauren Bourke was in the top 50 in the state in cross-country running, and in the state finals came equal-first for the Loddon Mallee region. We participated in cricket, basketball, athletics, tennis, softball, soccer... occasionally we got smashed, but more often we made the semi-finals or finals, defeating much bigger schools along the way.

The nicest thing though is the spirit with which the kids played, which was (almost) invariably generous and supportive, and might go a long way towards explaining their success. They also got great encouragement and coaching from staff members like Sam Ford, Andy Moffat, Jess Liston, Cameron Kerr and Sam Thorpe.

I don't often mention individual achievements in these reports, but I do want to highlight two from 2016 which were exceptional. Our much loved learning support teacher, Cathy Snowdon, after many gruelling open-ocean swims, achieved a long held ambition by becoming part of a relay team which successfully swam the English Channel. And Year 7 student Hugo Lobb won the National Archery Junior title over Easter, breaking a long-standing Australian record with his score. (He also came second in the axe throwing and third in the knife throwing...which I personally find a little unnerving.) Later in the year, in the World Championships, Hugo smashed his own Australian record by nearly 30 points, with a score of 536 out of a possible 560. He was just eight points short of breaking the world record. Unfortunately, the event was rained out for its last two days, with Hugo in second place but prevented by the weather from challenging for first.

I also want to emphasise the importance of the roles played by several other people at Candlebark. Fiona Halpin (I have had to battle spell-correct at this point, as it was very keen to spell her name as Hatpin) is best known to the kids for supplying wonderful food every day. But many adults in the Candlebark community are well aware of the complexities of Fiona's role. As well as planning menus, catering for a variety of tastes/idiosyncrasies/allergies/so-called allergies, placing orders with a large variety of suppliers, picking up food, organising food for camp/sleepovers/excursions/special occasions, preparing food, cooking, serving food, keeping the kitchen and eating area clean, taking phone calls, changing bus lists (in consultation with Michelle), providing first aid for injured and sick students and staff, Fiona also somehow manages to cater for the all-important CAKE DAY every Thursday. She does it with good grace, never losing her temper, always calm and smiling and able to exchange a few cheerful words with the endless flow of people through the Amenities Block.

Fiona also finds time to keep an eye on what kids are eating, so that if I or other staff check with her on whether a child is eating too much, not enough, or eating unwisely, she is immediately able to give us a good account of the child's food habits.

Business Manager Michelle Mitchell covers such a wide range of duties that I would need an appendix to this report to list them all. They range from the frustrating business of checking rolls and following up on absentees, to paying wages and salaries, ordering goods and services needed by the school, checking deliveries, picking up and distributing mail, amending bus rolls on a day by day basis, and extremely complex interactions with accountants and various regulatory authorities to make sure that the school's finances are prudently managed.

It is a tribute to her that we will be able to maintain the 2016 school fees unchanged through 2017. I was not surprised by the long applause which followed my public thanks to her at the end of the year, at Kyneton Town Hall: applause that was richly deserved.

In recording the progress of Alice Miller School earlier, I described the achievements of the Maintenance staff in their work there; and the same comments apply to Candlebark, where they show such skill and cheerful courtesy in their care of the school's infrastructure and grounds.

The Candlebark year ended, insofar as a year can ever be said to have ended, with a production of our own script of Animal Farm, at Kyneton Town Hall. Taran Carter tied this spectacular show together with a great score, rehearsed students in their musical numbers, and conducted a terrific band on the night. Andrew Blizzard and Joanne Croke created brilliant masks and a wonderful set, and Donna Prince coached students in their parts,

choreographed the show, and managed the stage crew and lighting, amongst a few other things.

We packed 150 kids onto the Kyneton Town Hall Stage. We won't try that again!

It could be seen as mordant or morbid or both that our Christmas play ended with the actors who played the pigs eating an actor who played the role of a horse.

It should be stressed however that the actor was not actually eaten, no animals were harmed during the production, and no transubstantiation was involved.



I want to finish by mentioning one particular member of the Candlebark community, whose presence at school has been a win-win. At the end of 2016 Erica (pictured here on a hike), daughter of teacher Donna Prince and her husband Dave, was two and a half years-old. She has been at the school four days a week since she was six months old. What this has meant for our students is described by Donna, in an article she wrote for a mothering magazine in 2015:

“I have had my students feeding her solids, walking her in the pram and playing with her. I’m saving them from nappy changes! None of them have volunteered for that for some reason! The patience and tenderness my older students show towards Erica is amazing, my students are fantastic people. Kids who don’t normally get to hang around with babies have no idea how

to act with babies, but hell, I know plenty of adults who have no idea how to be comfortable with a baby. I remember being twelve and being made to sit still between two adults and watched like a hawk when I had my five minute hold of my baby cousin...

“My students are responsible, capable and caring. When handing out ‘baby’ jobs I usually favour the kids who don’t have much contact with babies at home. They quickly get over their nervousness. A touching example of this is my crack babysitting crew! We have staff meetings once a week and there are four boys, three in Year seven and one in Grade five, who look after Erica during this time. Last staff meeting I heard a noise and ducked out to investigate. The boys had popped her in the pram and were dancing around her with a full dance routine singing ‘Let it go’ from Frozen. So very cool. They are amazing babysitters.

“So I breastfeed in my classroom as well. This has to be one of the most important benefits of bringing her with me. I have a lovely chair in my room and when I am going to give Erica a feed I just let my students know. Her feeds have mostly happened during recess and lunch anyway, and if they want to hang around they can. I had a lovely discussion with some Grade twos and threes the other day while Erica was having a feed. They were curious as kids are and we just talked about Erica’s favorite drinks and food and then they told me all about their Lego party on the weekend. Oh the horror!

“I think I am the luckiest Mum/Teacher in the world. I get to bring my baby to work with me which helps me maintain the relationship and the breastfeeding relationship, my classes adore Erica and the other staff members are such a wonderful support. If raising a child takes a village, then I’m pretty stoked about the village I’m in!”

Now that Erica has been in the school for two years I feel I can make some comments to go with Donna’s. My comments relate not to the benefits Erica’s presence brings to the school and its students, but to the effect on Erica.

Erica has been fortunate in having two wonderful parents, but a lot of kids are in that happy situation. Erica has had something extra. She has had, as Donna says, the advantage of being raised by a village. Her life in this regard is exceptional in 21st century western society. It shouldn't be, but it is.

And what is the result? Well, I have never seen a happier, more serene child. Erica is charged with positive energy. She is surrounded every day by 150 people who love her, who have her best interests at heart, who involve her in their games and activities. The benefits show in her sociability, her keen interest in life, her obvious delight in her surroundings, her resilience and sense of adventure.

I know Erica is a sample of only one, so therefore not really valid for statistical purposes, but she is the third toddler we have had at Candlebark and I believe the experience has been similar for all three. I know all three have benefited this community by being here. I have always been grateful to our wise friend Tim Berryman from Fitzroy Community School for first making me aware of the value of having babies and infants in schools.

I will postulate that there are two lessons in Erica’s situation. Firstly, as Tim has said to me, every school should have some babies, for the great benefits that they bring to the students of the school. Secondly, every baby should be raised in a village of some sort, whether it be a cul-de-sac in a suburb, a retirement home, a country town... or a school.

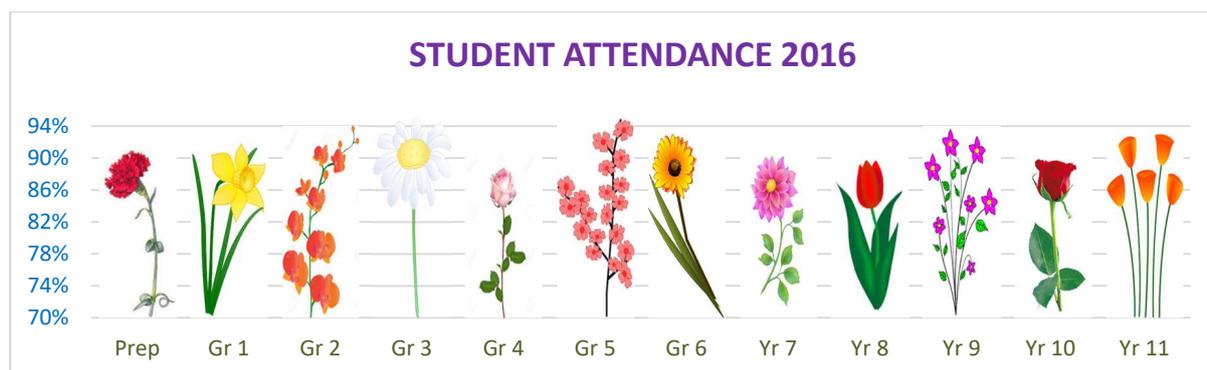
The artificiality of schools, which for centuries now have been taking children and adolescents away from the world and raising them on islands of immaturity, with just a few adults (often ill-chosen and ill-equipped) to look after them, does not attract enough of our attention. There is nothing Candlebark or Alice Miller does which could not easily be replicated in other schools and school systems. Yet although we have almost daily visits from educators from all around Australia and overseas, and although they invariably leave singing the praises of what we are doing, they are also very quick to explain why they couldn't possibly change the practices they are currently following – practices which essentially have not changed in more than a hundred years.

One of the most powerful changes we could make to schools is to restructure them so that, demographically speaking at least, they are microcosms of society, rather than institutions that bear little resemblance to the "real world".

John Marsden

Photos by Stephen Mitchell, Sam Ford, Jess Liston, Cameron Kerr and Donna Prince.

OFFICIAL STUFF:



YEAR 9 NAPLAN RESULTS		Reading	Writing	Spelling	Grammar & Punctuation	Numeracy
2016	% of students at/above National Minimum Standard (Alice Miller)	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
2015	% of students at/above National Minimum Standard	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
2014	% of students at/above National Minimum Standard	100%	91%	100%	100%	100%
YEAR 7 NAPLAN RESULTS		Reading	Writing	Spelling	Grammar & Punctuation	Numeracy
2016	% of students at/above National Minimum Standard (Candlebark)	100%	100%	89%	100%	100%
	% of students at/above National Minimum Standard (Alice Miller)	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
2015	% of students at/above National Minimum Standard	100%	100%	58%	85%	100%
2014	% of students at/above National Minimum Standard	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
YEAR 5 NAPLAN RESULTS		Reading	Writing	Spelling	Grammar & Punctuation	Numeracy
2016	% of students at/above National Minimum Standard	100%	93%	94%	100%	100%
2015	% of students at/above National Minimum Standard	100%	67%	100%	100%	100%
2014	% of students at/above National Minimum Standard	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
YEAR 3 NAPLAN RESULTS		Reading	Writing	Spelling	Grammar & Punctuation	Numeracy
2016	% of students at/above National Minimum Standard	91%	100%	100%	84%	100%
2015	% of students at/above National Minimum Standard	100%	100%	86%	100%	100%
2014	% of students at/above National Minimum Standard	100%	93%	93%	100%	100%

