



Dr Pradeep Sarda (Chair of the Board, École Mondiale World School), lights the lamp to mark the opening of the AIE conference

Promoting intercultural understanding

Mary Hayden reports on the Alliance for International Education's 2014 conference

Between 10 and 12 October 2014 some 150 participants from around the world gathered in Mumbai for the 7th biennial conference of the Alliance for International Education (AIE). Founded in 2001, the first conference of the Alliance held in Geneva 2002 was followed in alternate years by conferences based in Düsseldorf, Shanghai, Istanbul, Melbourne and Doha. The 2014 Mumbai conference had as a theme Promoting Intercultural Understanding, and what a great conference it was.

From the outset, one special characteristic of Alliance conferences has been their strand structure, whereby participants remain within the same strand throughout the conference, coming together for plenary sessions but otherwise developing discussion and debate around a series of presentations made by strand members. These presentations

act as a focus for the progression and development of ideas with a group of supportive colleagues who have shared in the same experiences over the conference period. Six strands this year were entitled The Nature of Intercultural Understanding, Intercultural Understanding and National Contexts, Intercultural Understanding and Teacher Education, Intercultural Understanding in the Curriculum, Intercultural Understanding in the School Context, and Wider Aspects of Intercultural Understanding. Crucial to the success of such an approach are the strand leaders, and in Mumbai a great team provided tremendous leadership through skilful chairing of presentations and associated discussion. Huge thanks are due to strand leaders Caroline Ellwood, Robert Harrison, Walther Hetzer, James MacDonald, Boris Prickarts and Andrea

Rohmert for the contribution they made to the undoubted success of the conference.

Key to conference success too, of course, are the plenary sessions, and this conference got off to a great start with an opening address by Dr Indu Shahani from HR College in Mumbai on intercultural understanding in the context of India, followed by an entertaining and thought-provoking plenary address by Dr Ken Cushner from Kent State University, Ohio who prompted us to consider The Challenge of Nurturing Intercultural Competence in Young People. A second plenary address from Ann Puntis of Global Study Pass raised further challenging issues with a focus on Developing Intercultural Understanding. The conference was chaired by Jeff Thompson, and central roles were also played by Beatrice Caston, Norm Dean, Darlene Fisher, Mary Hayden, Terry Haywood and Bev Shaklee as the 6 other Alliance trustees actively involved throughout.

As with most previous Alliance conferences, the 2014 conference was school-based. Our hosts on this occasion, École Mondiale World School, pulled out all the stops to make us welcome and were hugely efficient in ensuring that all arrangements ran like clockwork. They did not, though, simply provide a well organised and welcoming venue for our discussions. Nine teachers from École Mondiale made presentations within the strands, while other teachers organised teams of students to play a central role in the conference. One team of older students organised photography, filming and interviewing of participants, while another student team led an impressive plenary session linked to the conference theme of promoting intercultural understanding. A wonderful finale to the conference was provided by students from across the age range, who performed a number of traditional Indian dances which sent participants on their way with a flavour of the richness of the culture and history of India.

The idea of a Gallery Walk as part of the culmination of an AIE conference was introduced in Doha two years ago, and such was its success that it was knitted in as a central part of our conference planning for Mumbai too. On Sunday morning, participants were able to enjoy displays arising



Students from École Mondiale World School performed eye-catching dances at the closing ceremony of the conference





Dr Pradeep Sarda (left) with (left to right) Rajiv Goenka, Nandakumar Venkatraman, Dr Indu Shahani and Prof Jeff Thompson

from strand discussions in the form of drawings, models and other creative representations of the ideas shared during the previous two days. Taken with a final feedback session from strand leaders who each provided a short synthesis of their strand's discussions, and an overall conference summary from Terry Haywood, the Gallery Walk enabled participants to gain a flavour of what had been happening in the other strands running in parallel to their own.

The Mumbai Alliance conference was professionally stimulating, personally enjoyable – and great fun. It has already been confirmed that the Alliance conference 2016 will be hosted by the New International School of Thailand (NIST) in Bangkok, and exact dates will appear on the AIE website in early 2015. We're looking forward to it already!

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Above: Delegates view work from the conference strands

Below: The student panel from École Mondiale

