



SWIMMING AGAINST THE CURRENT

Building a SoulFULL foundation for life...

*Or in other words,
the insider's
"what if..." guide
to choosing an
alternative form
of education.*





FOREWORD

Speaking to the Principal of our primary school early in the year of my daughter's grade 6, the conversation got around to the subject of what "legacy" her class was going to leave the school. To explain, at our school, the tradition was/is for the class moving on from the school to leave a legacy for the students, teachers and parents following for many years to come. A beautiful gesture, and one taken rather seriously.

My daughter's class decided on completing the decoration of the wonderful outdoor pizza oven they had built in grade 3. So all was decided. The conversation continued where we shared thoughts of what the parents were saying, given that a number of us were leaving the school forever. What eventuated was that I/we the parents would also look to leave a legacy, a lasting reminder of the inspirational time we had at the school. That is what led to this, what you have in your hands!

Because of the fruitful experience we had through our time at our school, we wanted to share the good stories, what had worked particularly well for our children, our family and us. Quite often, the only time any alternative education got a mention publicly was usually in the negative. We wanted to leave something that could be used as a reference for new parents that was sourced from old parents and students! By that I mean, stories directly from the "horses mouth", real, heartfelt and honest. So this is it. Your warts and all account of our primary school years, coupled with some commentary from those a little younger who had a primary school alternative education, but then went into a secondary mainstream school. They share they're insights also. Yes, there is plenty of information available, especially via the Internet, both good and bad. There are plenty of facts and figures, whys and wherefores of alternative education. But not from those who participated, the good, the bad and the ugly! Not in the one place where the thoughts and feelings of both children and parents are captured... until now.

It has been structured using the "what if..." answering scenario to help open your thinking. The responses are based on representing these scenarios as realistically as possible. A true legacy, as a gift, from those who came before you...

Denise Hall

Coordinator and

Editor-in-chief

Contributing parent



When asked to try to make sense of about 93 survey responses about alternative education choices (aka progressive and as it turned out, more specifically the Our choice stream) I thought it would be an overwhelming task, a little like herding cats! But as I read through the answers to questions such as why the particular school was chosen and whether it met expectations, it was amazing how likeminded all the respondents seemed to be, regardless of age. In fact they seemed to be speaking in one voice, a voice that expressed a shared and unequivocal philosophy, set of values and the vision of what education could and should be.

Please believe me when I say I did not want to over simplify nor detract from the unique and personal answers I am trying to summarize here as that would, above all other concerns, be totally

unacceptable to alternative ways of seeing and representing the education world. However, in the interests of flow and brevity, I have constructed a response one person speaking, liberally quoted from the actual responses received. I have made sure though that I have included all degrees of responses, from the exuberant to the not so.

In terms of structure, I have addressed the answers making the following assumption - "OK, so you're definitely interested in exploring alternative education, what if..."

An apology upfront, but to those who participated. If I have quoted you but have not named you in particular, sorry! **Quotes are in pink.** Not intentional, but then I'm no journalist either! Having said that, all contributors (who gave us permission to) are listed, back towards the last pages.

Where this is a reference to a particular choice trait, I have left it if it made sense to do so. For example, the Steiner stream has the teacher with the children from years 1 to 6. This may not apply to all streams.

All photos/pictures included are of a personal nature, and therefore real!

Some schools have dual curriculum ie government-run schools that run both mainstream and alternative options, and others only the one. I've attempted to reflect a blended and balance viewpoint from both. I hope I've done them justice.

I trust that what follows is an engaging, informative and helpful guide to your "what if..." questions that you might have considered if you head down the path of alternative education.



WHAT IF...

You chose an alternative education stream?

We were looking for an education that had a rich, meaningful, balanced curriculum.

Addressing this question is the hardest. What if you get it wrong? This is usually where the fear comes from. BUT we think it's the wrong question. A better one to ask is, what if you get it right?

However, what's important to address is why choose an alternative school option? What were you looking for? Why are you looking for it? What does this choice offer that others do not? These are what we've attempted to answer here...

In our view... It was really important that our children become part of a community. The school is small, and very warm, friendly and supportive. It followed on from playgroup and a wonderful experience in kinder. We like belonging to a community of likeminded people. The school is a State school, which means it is mainly free and accessible to a wide and diverse population that we value. It's fantastic that it is a mainstream public school that offers the choice alternative so our kids keep grounded and in touch with what their peers are doing; **it seemed like the best of both worlds** – Alternative choices in education available to any family regardless of financial means.

We also chose this alternative stream because we really wanted a holistic education that is based on the developmental stage of the kids, rather than a competitive treadmill, rote-learning approach. We were **looking for an education that had a rich, meaningful, balanced curriculum**, including a solid basic education in reading, writing and maths that followed the natural development, needs and motivation of the children at each stage. We wanted our children to be able to work

at their own level and not be held back or pushed forward to fit in with the pack. **We did not want to rush them into the adult world too early.**

Alternative education prides itself on addressing the whole child physically, intellectually and spiritually; **we think the idea of a balance of head, heart and hands makes sense.** It is also appealing that this stream helps kids look at things from different perspectives and appreciate them in the context of the wider world. The children are encouraged to be individuals and to think freely due to the differently structured approach than in the mainstream, while encouraging them to see themselves as part of society, and the greater community at large. We couldn't find this anywhere else.

The curriculum is arts based but well rounded, developing creativity and imagination through story telling, dance, music and art and craft; there are **real musical and creative possibilities and a beautiful learning environment equipped with hands-on, concrete materials as opposed to photocopied tasks and chalkboards; the classrooms are visually inspiring. It instils a genuine love of learning and wonder of the world, not just in childhood, but also to carry through all the way into adulthood.** Imaginative play, works particularly well for kids who struggle with the mainstream approach. We love that the philosophy values nature and the environment, which is very important to us and reflects our values; it is based on **a reverence and respect for life** and a real appreciation of beauty. We also love the emphasis on culture and history.



It was important to us to delay the use of technology, including television and high tech toys so that our children's creativity and imagination could be nurtured first. The teachers seem really dedicated and are also inspiring. Having the same teacher for six years fosters stability and meaningful relationships, which is as important to us as the academic concerns. There is also a benefit in that the teacher knows the child's strengths and weaknesses very well and can cater to them, as it is in their best interests to do so. They can't fob them off to the next teacher next year!

Children we have met that have been educated via alternative methods are well balanced and have great self-esteem. What more can you ask for of a developing

member of the greater community and global citizenship in general? Were there concerns going into this? Did it take a leap of faith? Of course! Was everyone supportive around you? No. Did it stop us from making the choice? NO.

How does that saying go? "Feel the fear, and do it anyway".

Our thinking was, it's the best we've discovered, that ticks nearly all our boxes. We also know that no one school can really tick all the boxes, not really. And if for any reason the choice did not live up to expectation then new choices can always be made. Fortunately our kids are up for anything and this was another adventure, full of wonder, great learning in and of itself.

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WHAT IF...

Your choice met your expectations and requirements?
What would you value?

Any small concern I had disappeared on my son's first day as I watched him happily embrace his school day activities.



Assuming your choice was the best you can make, what is it you would value as a result? What would you want to see expressed in the child?

Any small concern I had disappeared on my son's first day as I watched him happily embrace his school day activities. My enthusiasm for this teaching method now grows with each term that passes. It has allowed my son to fully explore his childhood years and develop a creative and enquiring mind...There has not been a single day I have regretted my decision to choose Our choice education for my son... In fact I regularly say it is the best decision I have ever made!

Our expectations have been met and then some! **We love the emphasis on "holistic" education; a threefold education that has at its core the philosophy of learning with "head, heart and hands".**

We value the wonderful friendships that our children will have for life and the small,

caring environment and community they are part of. They have more friends than they can count and have never been separated from them through the years. The same friends and teacher are very important to them. The personal growth they experience and being exposed to many beautiful artistic creations **has made this not only an education but also a way of life! In our view some schools have no soul** but this one has. The school only survives and blossoms because of the generous and gracious involvement of the parents which more than compensates for the financial limitations. **The school is rich in community, and you cannot buy that sort of experience.**

Our children developed an inner confidence and had a diverse range of skills such as using initiative, having enquiring minds, being able to work in teams or by themselves, being skilled in the three r's, and so on in a well-balanced education. They also developed personal skills and self worth to take to high school and you see a real groundedness in these children. Everyone is

an individual and with the wonderful insight into child development their need are addressed.

Our choice offered great things like craft, Eurythmy, critical thinking for students and sense of commitment. Our children have maintained their thirst to know and understand. The method of teaching develops an ability to keep learning. It opens their minds to all ancient cultures and religions and nurtures their imaginations; we have loved the celebration of festivals, bringing richness to our children's lives and we have loved the depth the children have studied subjects in. Not only do the stories of (historical) epochs fulfil the child's intellectual and emotional developmental needs, they also result in the child having a deep seated understanding of who they are and why they think, act and react in the way they do, in the greater timeline.

The amazing kitchen garden project helped them learn what and how to grow their own food, then how to cook and to love cooking.

Oh, and especially how to eat it! On top of the regular curriculum including a lot about History, Maths and Botany (which is taught in a way that the children can readily assimilate into their world) the children learn a language from prep, an instrument from grade three plus art/craft and expression through movement and verse is incorporated throughout each day. Having the choice of both alternative and mainstream at the school was excellent. And the beauty is that the nest of both streams rub off on each other.

Children are given time and space to grow and learn in a respectful, peaceful environment. Their friends are mix of independent, individual, free spirited children who appear comfortable and free to be who they truly are and not conforming to social norms. Our children love going to school and they love their teachers. They are respected and valued by all. It is full of life and colour and laughter. We feel very involved with the community and have a sense of connection and belonging. We are inspired.

“They have learnt so many ‘life’ skills: cooking and baking, gardening, having classroom pets, revering nature and its cycle, being given real creative freedom to express themselves, boys and girls, learning to knit, sew, crochet, weave, paint, draw, work with ceramics, wood and metal and be part of a like-minded community. Being able to learn an instrument and have the pleasure of playing in a class orchestra for 4 years. With the same children year in and out, they have to learn about communication and sorting out problems. All this and much, much, more. Brings tears to our eyes, really....”.

We couldn’t ask for a better education for them. The school has given my children many gifts among which are an environment where they do not feel threatened. The children are encouraged to speak out loud and all opinions are valued. We’ve noticed that the children are gentle, caring and considerate of others. Our choice has given a great foundation for intrinsic motivation and not one, which is based on approval and competition. We’ve loved being part of our children’s learning experience.

But on the negative side...

It has truly been down to the quality of the teacher (**but isn’t it always!**). Some classes were not so fortunate in terms of having teachers who were prepared to stay at the school in stormy circumstances, and who were strong and mature enough to negotiate intelligently with departmental representatives during the VELs-mapping stage.

Where there is dual curriculum at the one school, the alternative stream has been watered down due to pressure from the government department looking after the school, with a lot more testing which is not what our choice is about! It’s only going to get worse. Also some teachers

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do a better job than others in delivering a true curriculum (again, isn't it always). We have become a little disillusioned with the school and the delivery of the curriculum, as time has gone by. We would rather have our children be in a specific private school with less mainstream influence and greater commitment to the philosophy, and to recruiting appropriate teachers.

We have been disappointed also that other parents don't embrace the philosophy out of school hours (such as letting their children watch M-rated movies in class 3) or with regard to the clothing their children wear to school. Unfortunately we feel the school has not fully supported its dual education stream. It has suffered unprecedented attack from other non-alternative parents who made their fight incredibly public, personal and vicious.

As a result, it's been a rough 5 yrs. We have gained many things we weren't aware we would appreciate and many of our expectations have not been met, but then some have, and even exceeded. We've compromised, changed some expectations and requirements, created new expectations.

We are disappointed that sometimes there has been a lack of consistency in the teacher student relationships granted. But then we know we can't guarantee that elsewhere either. In the academic section the school has failed some children requiring them to receive expensive out of school tuition just to get them to an English & maths level where they ought to for their grades and age. Also, there was not much Physical Education. Again, this is dependent on the actual school. This is one overlap where the dual stream option works well, as one stream enhances the other. This is similar for the access to the technology too.

While the school has a lovely community feel, it too has issues that mainstream schools have, which we do not address as effectively. For example, there is a distinct lack of acknowledgement, and by therefore pro-activity to reduce the number of bullying incidences. Although the dual stream schools have bullying policies, it's not always evidenced in the execution of the process. As we know, it's not what is written that makes the difference, it is how it's handled that will indicate the success.



WHAT IF...

You have any reservations about your choice?

Our choice is sometimes considered a bit too airy fairy and there is a worry that a philosophy would have priority over an education.



Having one teacher for six years meant we were concerned about what would happen if the teachers didn't suit the kids. That has not been the case. In fact, it turned out to be a great learning experience in itself. Neither teacher nor peer tolerates poor behaviour. Given the class is not split at the end of each year, all matters have to be dealt with by all class members. Excellent life and relationship skills blossom as a result of such practice.

To be clear though, the one teacher does have full "homeroom" type responsibilities ie they do the bulk of the main lesson teaching. However there are specialist teachers rolled in regularly, for the speciality subjects like learning a language for example.

Though we researched many schools and teaching methods before choosing a school, the selection of Our choice was still a "leap of faith" for us, particularly when others questioned the decision. No one else we knew was going that way and many had never heard of our options. There is a perceived and biased lack of clear and

credible information available about the benefits of Our choice education so we had to piece things together. People who had a mainstream education and knew little of the Our choice teaching style waged a fear campaign suggesting there would be delayed literacy; some even suggested this was a cultist education; a number of people told me stories about schools where children were told off for having shop bought yoghurt. Before we looked into it fully we didn't like what we thought was the religious connection, but we soon realised that religion isn't taught in Our choice school, rather many beliefs are looked at, which we like. Many friends and family questioned our wisdom in choosing this education. But here's the thing, they couldn't guarantee that their own choice absolutely met their expectations either.

It was different. This was definitely out of our comfort zone. **We are not people who are burned with desire to self teach our children or be involved directly in how they are educated; pick a good school and let the professionals do their thing.** However, we

realised that it was nothing too alternative or extreme and other parents are just average "normal" people wanting something more for their kids.

Our choice is sometimes considered a bit too airy fairy and there is a worry that a philosophy would have priority over an education; because of the delayed academic outcomes there is the concern about whether the children would achieve academic milestones required to compete externally, such as conventional maths, and how well the kids would manage the transition to a mainstream secondary school having had less formal structure with our choice. What did become apparent is that there is a structure; it's just not the one we were used to. We worried that our choice might not push the children hard enough to do their best work and then the children's ability to get into and succeed at university with a similar secondary schooling. One reservation is around computer literacy; it's hard to get over the feeling that the kids might be missing out on something there. However, learning how to learn seems to



work well in this system so we have relaxed a bit about "missing out" on some things" because the kids are learning all the time - generally the important things first. We've since come to realise that the technology is but a tool, and has its place no question, but does not need to be the platform for true education delivery.

Dual stream schools have been subjected to a very damaging campaign by a group of mainstream parents who do not want alternative curricula being taught in government schools. Sadly, the campaign brought the attention of the Victorian Education Department onto the school and our curriculum has been compromised and watered down in order to conform to mainstream expectations for learning outcomes and to keep our critics quiet.

Perhaps government schools cannot really cope with an alternative stream or diversity in education; look out for the National Curriculum, which is on its way. We worried that the pedagogy might be compromised by governmental expectations of early literacy and IT engagement.

Our only real reservations were that we have to drive to get to school although we'd love to walk them there and that they would not have friends in the local area. We have worked around this by car-pooling and organising care after school with grandparents living close by. They have friends everywhere, which is the main thing. And having seen them now move on to secondary school, and where some catch the train, they are forever running into their old mates everywhere!

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WHAT IF...

You are displeased? What does that look like?

One of the best things about our choice is the student has the same teacher from Year 1 to Year 6. One of the worst things about our choice is the student has the same teacher from Year 1 to Year 6. It is a concern that if your child does not like or thrive with the teacher s/he is stuck with that person for a long time, and vice versa.

Having said that, the choice of school is as with any other choice – one you can change and find another.

It may be that our choice of education needs to grow and change with the times. Whether we like it or want it or not, our children need to work in a computerised society, it's important that our children are computer savvy and they are not disadvantaged because of their parent's choice of alternative education.

Being a government school we have not had support from the state government for our alternative stream and they keep imposing mainstream requirements into our choice education that do not respect our choice way of learning. The education department needs to have much clearer guidelines about how alternative education fits into the mainstreams schools so that parents know what they are entering into it at the outset. We are constantly being forced to adhere to mainstream requirements that are philosophically incompatible. And compromises why we made the choice in the first place.

For example, the kids' reports are modelled on a mainstream structure and really are not relevant to the type of education being provided. If you have an Alternative stream then the reports should suit the style of education not only the mainstream style.

Overall, we would certainly make the same choice again.



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WHAT IF...

The outcome was as you desired? What would it look like?

WHAT IF...

You achieved what you set out to do?

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Assuming your required framework is around having them excel in higher forms of education (and in life) then many core elements have to be included like...

My girl is developing into a champion, of Life that is. Not only is she one hell of a kid, she is genuinely interested in Life. Has the school and the education been the sole contributor to that? No. But it is providing a wonderful basis from which we can build a layer of further educational experiences outside of the classroom e.g whilst enjoying our overseas adventures, a real richness is further developed based on her inquisitive questioning and lust for learning and participating.

Upon testing our choice in the outside world...

Learning

The appreciation of other cultures, of story telling, visual arts, dance, music and the ability and desire to make things beautiful

are all outcomes. The freedom of expression is a great plus, as well as the opportunity to learn a musical instrument and play in an orchestra, to learn languages and craft skills. They have completed pieces of great beauty, performed the most complex plays using the language of the ages and they have been provided with a curriculum and teaching style that embraces the child and immerses them in the learning process resonating deeply and meaningfully. Learning recorder in class and the teacher singing in the class has helped give them an ear for music and a love of practicing – again, they are intrinsically motivated. **It was not just about the teaching of it as an instrument – there was a whole process behind it. Making the bag for the recorder, polishing the recorder and decorating their recorder book, then a learning piece of music, practising it until locked in, and then playing in front of parents and at school assemblies.**

They also develop an appreciation of nature; it is an holistic approach to education.

Academically the children are definitely well positioned for secondary school education. The kids have a lovely time in class with lots of imaginative, creative play and fantastic opportunities for narrative building skills. They also receive a very sound grounding, albeit it taught unconventionally, often achieving higher levels than mainstream students. The education philosophy nurtures a love of the environment and a love for things that are natural and in keeping with the seasons of the year. There is a love of reading that has come from learning how to as a more natural gradual process to learning rather than a forced, outcome based method; children begin to read when they are ready and when they do it's like the floodgates are open, and they devour everything in sight!

Some of our children find the work at mainstream high school boring and struggle to see the relevance of a sheet of information presented completely out of context, which has to be simply remembered and regurgitated for a test. Our children love



The children growing into well-balanced, independent adults is a great outcome. In fact, isn't it what every parent wishes for their children?

going to school – we are really pleased with their love of learning and the way school nurtures their imagination. They achieve academically, due to our choice of primary education that develops learning skills and a learning culture. Many excel at university, re-kindling and thriving in that in-depth learning that comes to them so naturally, but sadly appears to be lost in mainstream secondary school.

It can also be as simple as the children having had the chance to use life skills like knitting at school. The classroom is a colourful, comforting space and the children are surrounded with beauty. So far, the best outcome is that the love of learning is left intact. Craftwork is loved by both genders where they bring home once a term things they have used and have pride in for example, a pencil case, a knitted pot holder, and the knitting has involved stories and songs.

Another noticeable outcome is the ability to communicate with all ages, which is again encouraged through story telling. There is the care taken in the classroom itself and the pride that is encouraged with various tasks and activities, including great camps and learning many outdoor skills including

cooking. All these skills are encouraged in mainstream and other forms of education but our choice method is a lot gentler, and more rounded in its delivery.

Personal

The children growing into well-balanced, independent adults is a great outcome. In fact, isn't it what every parent wishes for their children? The stable class environment and the strong, supportive, caring and compassionate community helps kids come out of their shells, develop good social skills and the ability to deal with new situations. The children, teachers and parents love and respect all children even with all their quirky ways. We all feel very connected and committed to the community and have a strong sense of belonging. We find the kids to be caring and intuitive, very aware of their world and others around them and academically developing sound life and education skills. They seem to be happy, settled, enthusiastic to learn, self-motivated and creative. There is an ability to **keep internal boundaries intact despite the pressures of peers and society. The lasting legacy is a continuing connection and friendship with the community of families from the school.**

Having one teacher through out the whole 6 yrs certainly works even though many question it. The teacher becomes a close friend not only for the child but often to the parents as well. The teacher gets a true picture of the child over time, knows year to year what she needs to offer this child not only academically but also personally and spiritually. We get to practice on relating to an adult, outside our family group, on a much deeper level, setting us up in readiness to relate to others as we move through our various stages in life.

The academic level is above average, but we don't really emphasise that as it is not the main outcome that we desire, as opposed to other forms of education delivery. The main outcome we desire is happy, independent and fulfilled children with a lifelong passion for learning. They have forged strong bonds with classmates. They question and challenge in a constructive way. They can sing a story, play imaginary games and make something out of nothing. This may be the same if they had attended a mainstream school, however we believe the stability of having the same teacher as a focal point, facilitates the process even more so.

One of the best things about our choice is the student has the same teacher from Year 1 to Year 6. One of the worst things about our choice is the student has the same teacher from Year 1 to Year 6.



The education and self-awareness enables our kids to not only to survive challenges but thrive. They have self-confidence based on real achievements like, for example, the Class 8 major project; one boy built an electric guitar, the other designed and built a bicycle, and it all works. They develop a rich use of language and self-expression, appreciation of beauty and the environment, a pride in their work and a genuine enthusiasm and interest in learning.

There is a groundedness (a spirit that is nurtured in this style of education) that comes from within cannot be explained in words. They are part of a strong, supportive and vibrant community who give back in bucketloads what they receive, elevating the standard of overall education the school provides. The emphasis is on oral language, social and communication skills. This provides the opportunity and confidence to perform roles of responsibility willingly and positively; we are very proud of the children's willingness to be involved.

The kids love going to school and have to be made to stay home when they are sick. They have wonderful imagination and can easily entertain themselves without the aid of television or computers.

Children are free to wear non-uniform clothing, and there is an acceptance of differences regarding styles of clothing, beliefs etc. and about the exercising of choice, which is OK. A knitted hat that may be laughed at or ridiculed by others is welcomed/loved/enjoyed. Isn't that what choice and thinking for yourself is all about? There is less competition regarding academia. Children of all ages and different classes mix and get to know each other and become friends.

Career/future

We have found that most children transition as smoothly as possible to mainstream high school. There is always the odd child/school mix that just does not work, no matter what. Any transition type concerns are real in spite of which stream they are leaving and/or going to. Year 6 to year 7 is testing, regardless.

With a strong will to see things through striving for excellence in what they do, they follow their dreams. They seem to really value their primary school education. Many achieve top career jobs because they were well skilled in academic basics, had great

personal and social skills, could not only do the work required but also train others to do it, and see and advise on the future outcomes if certain paths were followed. People in the business world report they are impressed with the confidence and knowledge the young people bring to the workplace.

Just about all the kids we know who have gone through say that they adapted well to mainstream schools after finishing primary. Some said it helped as they were more sure of themselves and had sound academic, life and social skills. Some do say they found mainstream high school boring, but many also say they valued the fact that they were able to make a real go of it because of the way they had been taught to learn.

FROM PAST STUDENTS

I finished grade 6 and went on to high school. I had no difficulties in the transition to high school. I finished high school and graduated as a top business student and I am now at University on my way to becoming a human resource manager.

I'm a happy adult with a hectic and fulfilling family life. Academic success? I hold several University degrees. I have empathy for others, a wonderful rich awareness of humanity. Sometimes these outcomes are not evident until one has had the time to separate from the education and experience life.

I just loved the way it all worked. I got to develop good relationships with peers because I had 6 years with them and developed a good relationship with my teacher. In certain aspects of my education I am far above others who attended a mainstream school. I developed good musical skills that I have been able to apply to other instruments. I have also learnt some things that I definitely would not have learnt at other schools (some were things that I didn't learn in class).

The outcomes have been an opening of my mind. As one said, "I am now confident and ready to give anything a go."

"I am now confident and ready to give anything a go."



WHAT IF...

You attribute qualities/strengths to your choice?
What would they be?



*There is a love of life,
a love of discovery,
love of thinking, love
of story telling, love of
camaraderie, love of
being part of something
good and whole, love of
learning, love of colour,
love of hand created
work, love of the exotic.*

The sense of purpose, values, spirit, evolution, kindness, beauty, goodness and mystery are attributable to our choice of education. Oh, and us as parents played a key role too! Also, an understanding of self, a desire to know and to understand, and the ability to be still with oneself. We also attribute a love of reading and the ability to develop deep relationships with people. Past students say they believe it helped them be creative and think for oneself and develop their imagination.

Our choice equips our children with an understanding of a wider range of ancient cultures and religions than same age children at mainstream schools. **There is a love of life, a love of discovery, love of thinking, love of story telling, love of camaraderie, love of being part of something good and whole, love of learning, love of colour, love of hand created work, love of the exotic.** But there is also perseverance - sticking with a project for a long time to finish it. There is a respect for all things green and natural and for art, music, craft and skills of all sorts. The children learn to know their abilities and take strength from the many skills they have acquired, including whole of problem thinking and an appreciation of the context of things in the broader world.

An appreciation of how to be part of a team is also well developed, with a greater awareness of self, others and the world

we live in. Individuals who are capable of making great contributions to society, not just selfishly for themselves. The same can be said for having a much better understanding of how to interact with other individuals, how to respect others and how to communicate effectively, as they have been given innumerable opportunities to practice throughout their school years.

Resilience, teamwork, creative problem solving, a deep learning experience, a joy of dance, music and art that they can work into their everyday life.

Our children are able to fill free time with creative play and activities rather than needing to be entertained by others, computers, TV, etc. Wide and independent thinking is not restrained by what "most people think and do" and they are not afraid to be individual. Creativity and individualism are great strengths in alternative education.

Alternative education meets the same academic milestones and outcomes as the mainstream, but through a different journey, one that is steeped in wonder, story, song and great exposure to many historical periods and traditions. We love the emphasis on learning through making, doing, experiencing with all senses (taste, aural, dance, voice) not just the cerebral and academic. The qualities of mindfulness and experience of the soul are particularly emphasised.

WHAT IF...

You've made the choice, how do you expect to feel?

We are **very confident in saying that our choice of education has been the BEST choice.**

Nothing can replace what it offers a young child in a beautiful homely environment which enables the child to just play, imagine, and be comfortable in their space with no pressure to perform in any way, something that is greatly missing in our lives. The education has made them think out of the box and enables them to be confident in forming their own opinion. Our choice is a wonderful foundation to life pathways.

Children report that they feel good about going to their school.

The experience has resulted in advocating more strongly the importance of trying what feels right and being brave enough, against all opinion to the contrary, to see it through. The more of us that share the good the bad and the ugly will be doing all a favour, by opening up new possibilities for the masses.

It is sometimes not an easy road with lots of expectations to set and reset both for the immediate family and the broader family and amongst non-alternative choice friends, for example having to explain why a kid cannot not yet read and write at the end of grade 2 and how that is OK. It's just as big a life lesson and learning for the entire family, not just the child at school.

When your children are thriving and are turning out to be amazing people, you know you've done the right thing. Sometimes it does feel like a 'social experiment' but these foundational primary years definitely nurture a loving and imaginative spirit which makes the journey seem a very wise choice and one we will never regret.

Choice and diversity is some of the most important thing in education. A teacher knowing their students is one of the standards they are assessed by and the importance of this is proven by the wonderful relationships we observe.

The work ethic, musical ability and love of subject matter may not have been as developed in a mainstream education; the absolute dedication of the teachers to the children and the reverence they bring to their teaching inspires the children to achieve every single day.

We hoped for a more accepting loving environment which was more about the children than achieving academic results; a school that focused on the crucial emotional and social development rather than ignoring this and merely focussing on academic levels reached. We received this and are very happy with the choice.

Negatives:

There is more awareness of children's needs in this philosophy. Whilst the education is an holistic and appropriate way to teach children however it is clear that a self aware teacher and tight school admin are paramount. Where there is dual curriculum however, the government department makes it more difficult and there has to be some compromises, which we did not really want, we were able to live with them, but it's not ideal. But then life's like that, right?

It can be a concern that for some children having the one teacher all the way through is a weakness. You know yourself what it's like when you get used to someone... A different teacher each year may assist when same children are viewed through fresh eyes. Mind you, we are talking the "homeroom" teacher here only, as other speciality teachers feature daily also.



WHAT IF...

You and your children feel alternative education is the right choice?

The value of free thought, the wonder of childhood and the incredible uniqueness of each human being and the planet we live on.

Many want to stick with Our choice

Kids can fully explore their childhood years, develop a creative and enquiring mind, conviction in their opinions and a solid self-esteem on top of a sound academic education.

ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION WAS THE RIGHT CHOICE FOR ME BECAUSE...

Our choice education has allowed kids to explore their true nature and interests, others and the world around them and to celebrate being creative and individual.

It's like being in a big family

It's a great way to learn

Not caught up in the stress and competition of academia of mainstream schools. Children have time/place to be children and not be pushed into learning they are not ready for.

They are so happy and have such a huge range of interests. They are allowed to follow these interests for as long as they need to, based on their own needs, not another adults plan. Alternative education considers the individual, as opposed to a factory assembly-line style education from the Industrial Revolution era.

Our choice methods encourage growth and learning in a caring and unique educational environmental, allowing children to reach their own true potential both personally and educationally.

WHAT MAKES YOU MOST PLEASED ABOUT YOUR CHOICE?

That we took the punt,
went with the flow, and
are well and truly
justified that the
decision has been the
right one. Like any
though, the proof will be
when they get out in the
adult world...

That I was able to
have an alternative
education within
the public system.

Probably that they have
had a wonderful start to
life - it's given them a
rich foundation that I
hope will hold them in
good stead over their life.
It's an education I would
have liked to have had
when I was a kid!

Giving my children
something different
from the norm.

Happy successful
children –
achieving and
grounded

All the things they
learnt- and the way
they learned it

The children were nourished
and received what they
needed to develop, rather than
being taught what a
government system wanted
them to learn and remember.

WHAT IF...

There was one particular thing that sticks in your mind? What would it be? And if it was special?

Following are few of the memorable aspects of the alternative school experience expressed in the words and phrases that kept appearing in the answers to the survey question:

The sense of community is encouraged with teacher home visits, emails, calls, family class camps, class carers organising things for the classroom, there are lots of things that encourage the community of parents and children.

Class performances with a depth and beauty
The work they produced, their craft and main lesson books, were a joy to look at - the beauty and standard of their work never ceased to amaze me.

Supports my personal beliefs about what is good and nurturing and supportive for the healthy development of children, as opposed to TV, X box, Bombardment by advertising etc etc.

Very creative and imaginative and it brings a richness into one's life.

When I got my first crayon! It was like when Luke in Star Wars when he gets his light sabre.

The festivals, the colours, the wonderful people we have met, building a pizza and bread oven. The kitchen garden, chickens running free and enjoying a weekly market.

Each child is considered as a special human being, worth taking time over and developing their gifts, while ensuring their weaknesses are not ignored.

The high academic achievements were a part of this self worth, not the other way around. Because they believed in themselves they believed they could give anything a go.

The life skills that the kids learn are extremely important. We don't need to know everything in life, we just need to have a process to work through everything in a calm way.

Excellent exposure to drawing and painting that is not confined to an hour or two of specialised classes.

Things like growing wheat and baking bread are part of third year curriculum, and craft is an integral part of their primary education, so they are exposed to learning patience as well as being creative with their hands in ways other than writing, drawing or computer work.

Who wouldn't love learning when your classroom is beautiful?

We love the seasonal celebrations to mark the year and we also love the songs and activities associated with everyday living.

There is quite a bit of parental input and the encouragement of class meetings once a term with the teacher and parents. The likeminded of the parents in the classroom - interested and motivated about their child's education, kindred spirits so to speak. Also parent teacher night isn't a 10 minute job, it is a real discussion of at least 30-40 minutes going over and looking at your child's work and discussing their progress.

The festivals make it special. A day to come to the school with the whole family and extended family and friends. To share each others food and craft and musical talents. To sing together and play. To share recipes and craft tips. To admire the veggie gardens and wonder at the culinary delights the children have made. To smell the pizzas from the community built pizza oven. To sing the songs about the earth that unite us. To belong!!

In the Our choice preschool the group of teachers used their love and instincts to approach a reserved child's needs extremely gently and laterally. Their patience led to him accepting himself, accepting his difference and gaining self-esteem and respect. They helped him come out of his shell and treated him as a worthy individual.

What made this special for us was the understanding of the individual. That there is not one way that everyone learns, that learning happens through so many different mediums and that it is ok to be different and that there is no pressure to conform only to be your best.

*Friends. Community.
Our Choice is like having
a huge family.*

*A community who care
about children. I felt like
I belonged.*

*Always learning
something new.
Workshops, Singing
groups, Community
markets, Social
gatherings, Exposure
to the arts, Many great
mentors, Dedicated
teachers who are very
passionate about the
education...*

WHAT IF...

You could contact someone who contributed to this report?



The following is the list of participants that gave permission to be included.

| | | | |
|-----------|----------|-----------|-----------------|
| Cath O'B | Armin G | Trish T | Julie McC |
| Deborah A | Frances | Tracey Y | Sarah K |
| Brendan D | Paul S | Siobhan | Robyn L |
| Fiona A | Karena T | Anne F | Kathy |
| Roxanne P | Leanne J | Anthony M | Vicky K |
| Phillip | Ellen R | Jenny A | Gail |
| Zenya S | Amanda T | Cat S | Denise McD |
| Magnus S | Zora S | Morgan W | Kim B |
| Ireland H | Paul | Alex C | Jane L |
| Erin O'B | Jude | Bel M | Marion C |
| Hannah MA | Jayne J | Sal C | Vicki A |
| Denise H | Helen G | Tim S | Sharron M |
| Monika H | Mark J | Tahnia T | Tonya & Bryce G |



This survey was distributed to 93 respondents who represented different perspectives made up of a mix of parents of students, primary school students, secondary school students, past students, teachers, and even a grandparent. This demographic information was gathered in the first few questions of the survey.

The schools represented were:

East Bentleigh Primary School VIC,
Mumbulla School Bega NSW,
Waldorf School Mt Barker SA,
Sophia Mundi Steiner School & MRSS VIC,
Collingwood College, VIC,
ChCh, NZ & Sydney NSW,
Footscray City Primary School VIC,
Silkwood, Clagiriba, Gold Coast QLD,
Albury Free School, NSW
Blackwood Comm. School NSW
Forestville Montessori School, Forestville NSW
Ballarat and Footscray City VIC



Respondents were asked if they were happy to be quoted and only those who answered yes have been included. We thank them again for their generosity and spirit in providing these insights.

There has been editorial discretion when combining of responses to more than one question to avoid repetition and in the interests of fluency. If you want to access the complete and raw data, please email enquiries@dozsee.com.au



IN SUMMARY

What a journey! What an experience!

Wouldn't have missed it for the world.

Not everyone's cup of tea, granted. But to muster the courage to swim against the current is one adventure that will not be regretted, however you look at it.

If it doesn't work, so be it. You tried, because you believed enough in what was being offered and it matched the type of upbringing you were wanting for your child. It didn't work, but at least you tried. Rest assured that not all forms of education fit all forms of children!

BUT, if it does work, what a gift!

You'll be the envy of your circle because you have the most beautiful children ever, on the inside as well as the outside.

When you think about it, what have you got to lose?

And even more importantly, what have you got to gain?

We hope this has helped your choice, and we congratulate you in doing so, we wish you and your family the best of luck!

When you think about it, what have you got to lose?

And even more importantly, what have you got to gain?

