

32nd NSW Environmental Education Conference – Tamlin Mackenzie

I recently had the honour of being awarded the Gould League scholarship to attend the 32nd NSW Environmental Education Conference.

The conference began at with a group of young Aboriginal men dancing and signing their culture strong and proud, joined by the chorus of evening birds as the sun set in the eucalypt trees.

Seasoned delegates rubbed shoulders with new enthusiastic conference goers as we sipped Hunter Valley vine in the Kurri Kurri TAFE vineyards, surrounded by kangaroos. We were in for three days of keynote presentations, workshops, resource sharing, networking, fieldtrips and... if I remember correctly... a little bit of poetry, interpretive dance and a flash-mob thrown in for fun!

This year's theme was 'Connecting for the Future' and that we did. AAEE Patron Costa Georgiadis, with his boundless energy and contagious enthusiasm, gave a very entertaining welcome speech, sharing his ideas on how environmental issues could get onto the radar of the masses by focusing on it as a health concern. We explored a range of techniques for environmental education in the 21st century, like learning about using technology to engage students with the natural world and using GoPros to observe our students in fieldwork. Workshops ranged from exciting citizen science projects to learning more about AAEE's 'Make the Change' framework

We were inspired by the keynote presentation from Niki Harré about effective ways to make change and the psychology needed for a better world. Lesley Hughes shared her research interests in the impacts of climate change on species and ecosystems, and facilitated a discussion on possible alternative energy systems.

The overwhelming feeling I got was that we environmental educators are an awesome energy system for change. It was the energy that 200+ conference attendees (representing over 200 different environmental organisations) can generate when we touch base, gain inspiration from each other's work and feel supported in our common goal, so we can go back to our organisations dotted across this vast land and make the much needed change for a better world.