

33rd AAEE NSW 2017 Conference review

I am being deadly serious when I say this is one of the best conferences I have ever attended. There were so many highlights it is hard to work out where to start.

It was really refreshing that there was a conscious effort made to incorporate creative arts and other areas of environmental education such as music, with the conference song performed live on the first evening and Pat Shirvington's visual artwork.

Kaleb shared the warmest welcome to country and smoking ceremony held in the sacred cave on the edge of the spectacular Lane Cove River. It is going to be very hard to ever forget the amazing connection to country I shared that evening.

A pre-conference presentation by Dare Kavanagh from Reverse Garbage which showed us how to bring out the creativity in your group by thinking of another purpose for an item and sharing it with the group. We even communicated this with simple miming which even Kindy kids could enjoy. I will be using this the very next time I have to run icebreaker activities for a group.

Not to be satisfied with including creative arts, we were also introduced to some amazing culinary art skills demonstrated at the beginning of the conference dinner using Australian native species such as warrigal greens, which as a pesto I really enjoyed.

I was impressed at the presentation by Kim Louw from Premier and Cabinet on Behavioural Insights. The memory activity we participated in confirmed people remember the things that come first and last in any learning activity. If your goal is to change someone's behaviour for the best you need to think EAST.....Easy, Attractive, Social and Timely.

Josh Gilbert showed us what an inspirational young man he is. Very worthy of being named Australian Geographic Young Conservationist of the Year 2016. You must check out his video Australia's Young Green Farmers, seen by over 100 million people over 75 countries.

Mike Bartlett, John Hunter and Shirley Gilbert presented an amazing uplifting video and discussion on Murama: Standing Tall Walking Strong, an indigenous youth summit aimed to build cultural understanding and pride at an on-country urban camp. If you missed this then you need to attend the Youth Eco Summit organised by Sydney Olympic Park Authority (SOPA) for primary school from 16-17 November 2017 to see some of the outcomes of this program.

Peter Dawes from the Botanic Gardens Informed us about two amazing citizen science projects we can all get involved in. The first is Hollows as Homes, where you can register a hollow or nest box online and record its visitors over time. The second citizen science project he encouraged us to get involved in is Restore and Renew. The Botanic Gardens is collecting thousands of leaves from approximately 200 species across NSW and send them in. This is to try to work out the genetic variation across species and help to take the guess work out of what species should be used for re vegetation in different areas.

A new network and Facebook page was set up for the newly formed AAEE Western Sydney Network, thanks to Kate who was quick with the IT.

Shannon Foster and Dr Marrienne at Bicentennial Park' Koori Classroom introduced us to Dharawal stories which can be accessed online. They showed us the importance of the oaks and mangrove trees and helped us make raffia bracelets. We were even inspired to make tiny bark canoes which would make a great STEM project.

The display on Act for Bees was fantastic and came with many resources we all could use to provide for bees. Check out their amazing website.

The Nature Play informal play area developed for the local preschool was unbelievable. What a fantastic set up, and very empowering for the kids aged 2-5 years old. Who needs fences, when you have an amazing accumulation of natural resources to occupy the kids all day? And if they get tired, why not let them have a nap outside! Well done to the staff at this centre who are just amazing with the kids, and have taught them how to risk assess for themselves.

Then Peter Rutherford's silence and imagination workshop had some of us in tears with his very moving hang drum music playing while we were visualising and sharing our visions of an ecologically better world. Peter, I am an ecologist, and I promise to take care everywhere I go.

Jem, Mel and Erica had us working on building on effective environmental education networks, and helped us clarify the how, why, what, who and when of our networks.

And don't forget Take 3 for the sea or wherever you go. It is such a simple but very easy and effective concept everyone can do.

There are so many sessions I would love to attend including Sam Crosby's Tracking and Trail Making. I would have loved a full 3rd day to the conference.

After talking to AAEE NSW Chairman Grahame Collier, he asked how we keep the momentum alive on the year between conferences, as the state conference is run every two years and the Australian Conference is not accessible to everyone, especially when it is held in another state. My idea is to run the NSW conference in parallel to or adjacent to the annual Youth Eco Summit (YES) at SOPA. It would increase the attendance to YES and allow more cross pollination of ideas. Anyway, just an idea.

Thank you AAEE NSW for sponsoring me to attend this year. As a result of attending this conference I have volunteered to help on the AAEE NSW Sustainable Schools subcommittee, so I hope you catch you all again somewhere across AAEE in the near future.

Julie Overton