

## Gould League Scholarship Report

By Lisa Siegel (Bellingen, NSW)

It was with anticipation and excitement that I arrived on the Gold Coast for the AEE 20<sup>th</sup> Biennial Conference in late October 2018. Although I had been a regular attendee at the NSW conferences over recent years, I hadn't been able to participate in a Biennial Conference since Canberra in 2010. Thanks to the Gould League Scholarship, I was finally able to attend another AEE Biennial, and took full advantage of this to participate not only as an attendee, but also as a Research Symposium organiser, a Research Symposium conversation convenor, AND a Conference workshop presenter. Accordingly, the anticipation was about fulfilling all of these various roles adequately, while the excitement was about meeting up with friends and colleagues, learning heaps, and getting that buzz that comes with "being part of the tribe"!

The Conference got off to a wonderful start with the one-day Research Symposium, which took place on Sunday, 21 October with over 50 participants. As a PhD student researching environmental education, the opportunity to spend the day delving into the ideas around "Power, Praxis, and Playing with the Posts" with my fellow environmental educators/researchers was extraordinary. The format of the Symposium was a series of interactive conversations convened by groups of researchers, bracketed by an opening panel that included a 50 year retrospective of environmental education research, and a creatively inspiring closing forum that explored the "post" theories (post-humanism, post-colonialism, post-structuralism, etc) via an interactive game show format. A highlight for me during the day was the opportunity to co-convene a symposium "conversation" with two of my fellow PhD students; being able to share our passion for our learning with interested and interesting colleagues was a priceless opportunity to create connections and deepen understandings. In fact, the experience was so enriching for us that we decided to follow up by co-authoring a journal article about our topic and experience. This collective writing experience over the last few months has been rewarding and enlightening in and of itself, and we hope that the resultant article will be useful in our field when it is (hopefully) eventually published.

The next day brought the opening of the conference itself, in the sparkly bright auditorium of Southern Cross University, Gold Coast campus. Throughout the next few days, the campus hosted environmental educators from all sectors, from all over the country and even the world, as we participated in keynotes, interactive workshops, peer learning sessions, research paper presentations, and exhibits. It was often challenging trying to choose which workshop to attend, and the variety was astounding – as exhibited in some of my choices during the first day alone, which included "*Choreography In Dance Education As Embodied Activism*", "*Nannagogy: Social Movement Learning Meets Older Woman EcoActivism*", and "*Feast (Food Education And Sustainability Training) Program*". This very full program

was rounded off by a Conference dinner, field trips to a number of fascinating local sites connected to the natural world and/or sustainability, and an abundance of socialising/networking during breaks and meals.

As environmental education is a truly multi-disciplined field, it would come as no surprise when I say that the learning gained from the whole conference experience was multi-layered. Of course, there was the ever-important opportunity to build my knowledge about facts and figures, programs and practice; I came home with a great list of ideas to include while facilitating this year's events and activities in the not-for-profit community environmental education organisation I help run. Perhaps more important though was the chance to expand my understanding and ideas around theories and possible solutions to the many "wicked problems" that we face today, which also affected my community work – but at a deeper level – and added greatly to my PhD studies as well. A third level of learning was the amazing networking and relationship building that bloomed at every break and within the interactive workshops and additional activities. As I mentioned in my opening paragraph, that feeling of "being part of the tribe" is a really affirming feeling – whereas sometimes one can feel quite isolated doing environmental education work, here we were with a whole group of people with similar values and ideas about working towards planetary balance and wholeness. The new connections I made and old connections I strengthened were a highlight of the experience.

I would like to extend my sincere gratitude to the Australian Association for Environmental Education NSW Chapter for the opportunity through their Gould League Scholarship to attend the AAEE Biennial conference – it was an experience of wonderful learning and connection that has greatly supported me on my ongoing path as an environmental educator.

*Lisa was the 2018 winner of the Australian Association for Environmental Education NSW Chapter's Gould League Scholarship. Find out more about the scholarship at <https://www.aaeensw.org.au/our-work/gould-league-scholarship>*