As a relatively recent graduate and having not been in the profession for very long, I was honoured to attend the 2014 ACHPER International Conference sponsored by the Teachers Registration Board. Working predominately as a temporary relief teacher, opportunities for me to broaden my knowledge and network with fellow educators around the globe is not easily accessible and this conference was an ideal opportunity. The theme for this years’ conference, “Values into Action – A Brighter Future” provided me with endless opportunities to expand my own existing values and ideas and apply them to my future practices.

After a beautiful indigenous welcoming performance by Jack Buckskin, Professor Richard Light from the University of Canterbury in New Zealand opened the first keynote session. He discussed how game based approaches to games and sports teaching were positive from the participant’s perspective, the social and emotional engagement and the fun and enjoyment factor but also how it provides a deeper learning through that engagement that occurs.

We also heard from Professor David Walsh from San Francisco State University who talked about the fact that PE teachers aren’t entertainment. We need to get kids to dig a bit deeper and actually understand a little bit more about what they’re doing and why in order for them to meaningfully engage in physical activity. He challenged me to think; am I inspiring, am I proactive and am I progressive in the way I teach and how I ask my students to learn. He showed me the importance of making values teaching explicit because physical education is focused on providing a certain type of citizen, not just an active and healthy citizen but someone who is able to contribute meaningfully and positively to the society/community that they live in.

Professor Jo Salmon was another keynote speaker and afterwards I had the privilege of attending her session on the Transform-Us! program. Jo brought to light the fact that seventy percent of the school day was actually spent with students sitting down. I found this to be quite alarming as many teachers, including myself don’t actually realise how much time is spent sitting during school hours, let alone when students get home and engage in sedentary activities. Jo challenged me to think about ways in which we could address that. The fact is that an increase in physical activity and improved physical fitness doesn’t decrease the delivery of the curriculum, it in fact enhances it. Movement increases blood flow, making sure the brain is continuously oxygenated which in turn improves concentration.

Her following session looked at ways in which we could increase movement opportunities throughout the day. Working predominately as a temporary relief teacher, I find it quite difficult to get kids to concentrate for periods at a time, so I was really looking forward to this session and what would be discussed. Jo talked about Deakin University’s Transform-Us! program that had been implemented in various schools throughout Australia. Starting with classroom strategies the program included one thirty minute standing lesson a day, where students used standing easels to
work at as well as two minute active breaks for every thirty minutes of class time. These breaks were light intensity and classroom based, such as a simple “stand and discuss” what was learned with a classmate. The students’ physical environment was also altered, there were line markings and signage placed throughout the yard and sports and circus equipment outside classrooms. This encouraged the children to be more active during break times. The final part of the program talked about their home environment which included communicating with parents and giving students ‘active homework’. This could be as simple as getting students to count the number of letterboxes in the street or using steps as a form of measurement. For me I found this session reiterated the fact that physical education can be cross curricular and doesn’t have to be confined to designated lessons.

Having very limited experience with disabled children, Phil Doecke’s session on inclusive PE was one of the most valuable I attended over the three day conference. Working as the Director of the Bachelor of Education in Primary Education and Disability Studies at RMIT University, Phil’s experience and knowledge was unquestionable. His session focused on the inclusion of students with physical, intellectual and social disabilities and how we could get kids to understand the learning needs of their disabled classmates. From the very start of the session Phil got us thinking. Giving each delegate a random number, we had to line ourselves up in numerical order without any verbal cues or use of our hands. Right away we had that language barrier that most of us had never really experienced before. It was highlighted during the session that around 7% of students in Australia have a disability and as physical educators we need to ensure that what we do is inclusive to all students. He suggested various ways that we could modify our physical education lessons through the use of the TREE principle; adjusting the Teaching strategy, the Rules of the game, the Environment (surfaces, net height, space etc.) and the Equipment used.

The final session I attended for the day was a change of pace as it involved being physically active. As a temporary relief teacher of primary students I am always looking for fresh, low organisation games to play with classes of all ages and Kirsty Crouch’s session provided me with a whole new range of ideas. Having years of experience at one of Adelaide’s leading independent schools, Kirsty knows what young students enjoy and engage in. I have already had the chance to use of few of her ideas at various schools and found that they appeal to all ages, genders and athletic abilities whilst also encouraging a higher level of thinking.

Day Two opened with Rob Randell from ACARA (Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority) talking about the need for teachers to give energy to the curriculum so the curriculum document has life and makes meaning; not just to the teacher but within the school, within the broader sweep of curriculum subjects and the community in which that curriculum is being delivered.

Andres Olascoga’s session on ‘How to engage more students in early years PE’ was by far the most entertaining and enjoyable session of the conference. His eccentric personality had delegates engaged almost immediately; by simply placing a Buzz Lightyear figurine in his sock he had everyone’s attention. His use of funny names and noises as cues to games and rules was refreshing, only emphasizing that it’s the little things that get young children engaged. Something that I really liked about Andres’ lessons was that music played a big part in his warm up activities; from songs you’d hear on the radio, to silly chicken dance tunes, keeping things continuously new and
interesting. As a conclusion, Andres explained his ‘rule of three’ philosophy. This encompasses the idea that children are multitaskers, they can watch television, play on their smart devices and socialise all at once and hence we should use the same rule when it comes to delivering instructions, by doing so in threes.

Myself and other delegates at Andres Olascoaga’s session after discussing his ‘rule of three’ philosophy.

The final day of the conference saw keynote speaker Griffin Longley from Nature Play WA talk about the importance of revaluing human motion, especially with the rise of technology. He stated some very alarming statistics, the most eye opening being that the average Australian child gets less physical activity than the minimum time prescribed for those who are in our maximum security prisons. Our guidelines here in Australia also promote no more than two hours of screen time (out of school) a day in order to maintain a healthy lifestyle yet 68% of children aged 3-7 have smart phones and use them in excess of 20 hours a week. Griffin discussed finding new ways to get students outdoors as sport and physical education just isn’t enough. Engaging students in ‘play’ with appealing play spaces such as nature playgrounds and making technology an ally in this are just a few ways schools can promote children to be more active. I was actually lucky enough to work at Sheidow Park Primary School for a few weeks last term and witnessed firsthand how their own nature play space helped to stimulate active ‘play’.

Professor Kevin Norton delivered an insightful lecture on the importance of coaching to match how sports are played now rather than coaching to how the game was played when we ourselves were juniors. Games are constantly evolving which means one of the challenges to our teaching, coaching and pedagogical knowledge is to ensure that we are current with the evolution of the games, not only tactically, but technically and politically also. As a temporary relief teacher at many different schools, I have seen how dated physical education programs can be disengaging, not only for athletic students who wish to develop their skills, but for the whole class. It is a reminder to myself as a physical educator that by keeping up with the evolution of games I am giving my students the best
possible opportunity for them to develop and succeed, in particular for those who wish to pursue it at a higher level.

Jan Stirling, highly respected former Australian women’s basketball player and coach, provided an inspiring presentation affirming the work that we do as health and physical educators and acknowledging the role we play in leading the lives of our youth. That we influence people’s lives beyond the classroom by how we are and the relationships we forge with our students. She also talked about leadership in sport; that it isn’t just about having the title role; it needs to be demonstrated through the four C’s. It’s commitment, confidence, composure and character that defines a true leader, in particular what we do when we think no one is watching.

Jan’s following session titled Positivity v Honest and Direct Feedback discussed effective ways in which we can provide feedback to students and players. When it comes to providing honest and direct feedback in schools and physical education in particular, I believe it’s something many teachers seem to avoid, instead always coming back to the strictly positive feedback. For myself, and most likely many others, it’s the fear of students misunderstanding and taking things to heart that stops us from being honest. Jan emphasized that giving honest and direct feedback is pivotal in the success and resilience of our students. We can be effective in our feedback by not making it personal and focusing on the specifics rather than general behaviours. It’s about making students and players accountable rather than blaming them.

Overall the 29th ACHPER International Conference has provided me with many valuable and insightful concepts and experiences. It has broadened my knowledge in many difficult areas when it comes to physical education and has given me the confidence to approach things differently. In alignment with this year’s conference theme, it is now important that I take the values I have gained from this experience and put them into action. As a temporary relief teacher it’s difficult to make a huge impact on students with the little time you have with them, so it’s vital that I make that time count. Starting with the delivery of my content, keeping things fresh and new, in activities that are inclusive will ensure my students are actively engaged. By incorporating technology with students’ outdoor play and physical activity time, that constant battle of getting students to “put down their devices and go outside” will become easier. I will make sure that students are receiving that ‘deeper learning’ through game sense approaches and values teaching in physical education. Finally by being a positive role model, through the active demonstration of life skills such as respect, honesty, resilience and diligence I can support the development of not only an active and healthy citizen, but someone who is able to contribute meaningfully and positively to their society. When students can see that it’s not just about the games we play, it’s all of the necessary life skills that come with it; I know I have made the right impact.

I would once again like to take this opportunity to thank the Teachers Registration Board for their generosity in allowing me to attend the 29th ACHPER International Conference and hope that they continue to make opportunities like these readily available for South Australian educators.