I recently attended the national science educators’ conference, CONASTA 63 in Adelaide. I was fortunate to be sponsored by the Teachers Registration Board who covered the cost of attending the three day conference. I learned many new things at the conference and got to see science in action as a part of everyday life. A lot of the main speakers were very interesting. They showed a passion for their work that was inspiring even though some of the scientific information was above my understanding and experience. This showed me that I have a lot to learn and as a second year teacher and a first year science NIT teacher, I know this to be true and anticipate future learning.

The conference started with a very interesting keynote speaker, Professor Bob Hill who is the executive dean at Adelaide University. His speech was titled “Living with fire: why does the Australian vegetation burn and what can we do about it?” What I found fascinating was his passion for his research but also the walk through history that he took us on through South Australia's landscape. I sat there thinking how can I incorporate this into a lesson and share this amazing information? It definitely fits in well with the Year 4 Science curriculum about how the Earth changes and is something that I will pursue in future planning and when finding resources.

My workshop on the first day was about animal evolution and tied in well with the keynote speaker of the morning. What was interesting about it was that it was about a local find of fossils on Kangaroo Island where new species had been discovered. This is another topic that I found very interesting and plan on using some of the information that I learned in lesson planning.

Some of the workshops were interesting however some gave me no new information and were a case of revisiting old topics and adding my knowledge to the discussion. One workshop which I have used was one I attended on the last day of the conference. “Keep Calm and Stay Curious” was about different ways to use sodium alginate, something I had never heard of. The workshop was hands-on and we spent 20 minutes making edible jelly balls from sodium alginate. I used this in Science Week with my two Year 7 classes and while they weren’t impressed with how they tasted, students were engaged and had fun making the balls. This fit in perfectly with the Science Week theme “Food for the Future” and allowed students to experience a scientific way of making food. The facilitators of the workshop told us exactly where to get the sodium alginate and other ingredients needed so it was a fairly easy lesson to organise.

The stalls and booths provided a good opportunity to find out information about what resources and information is out there. I had fun collecting brochures and resources. Some booths even gave out resources on USBs. While a lot of the stalls were aimed more at secondary teachers there was still plenty of information for primary school teachers. It was interesting to learn about agricultural programs that are out there for schools and also to look at resource books. There were some stalls selling resource books from businesses in Adelaide so it was nice to know we were supporting local business and also finding out where to go to get resources.
I had a lot of fun looking at the different physics models and trying to figure out how they worked and what they showed. This again showed me that I have a lot to learn but gave me a good challenge. It was interesting to talk to some of the people there and learn about their experiences, professions and opinions on some of the topics addressed.

The conference was well organised and very busy. There were a lot of people who attended from all over Australia showing that there is a wide interest in science and that it is an important part of Australian society and our future. I would recommend attending the conference to anyone who has an interest in science as it provides a good opportunity to learn new things, network and find information.

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