Summary
The conference was both an inspiring and educational experience that I would recommend to any visual art teacher, and/or classroom teacher interested in visual arts. The conference was filled with insightful information, including talks delivered by various visual arts professionals and an assortment of visual art workshops were offered.

Sessions attended:
Friday 3rd of August:
Speaker: Lisa Slade, Acting Director at AGSA – Keynote
Carly Grace, Education Manager at Heide Museum of Modern Arts
Penny Griggs, Manager of SALA
Clare Belfrage, Featuring artist for SALA
Anna Hodge, Education manager at Rising Sun
Breakout session – Interactive session - Visual Thinking Strategies

Saturday 4th of August: Workshop (Full day)
Ceramic hand building and surface decoration with Ashlee Hopkins and Ebony Hiedenreich.

Friday the 3rd highlights
The highlights for me were, the six strategies listed (Time travelling, mining minerals, sense of place- understanding your GPS, on this day, learn a new language and snapshot vs screen grab) by Lisa Slade. These strategies reinforced the fact that art can be created out of anything and that visual art inspiration can spring from anywhere. The session on Visual Thinking Strategies delivered by Robyn Carmody was also very valuable, using only three questions to challenge and improve critical and creative thinking as well as “art language in the classroom”. Listening to Clare Belfrage talk about her creative venture and where her inspirations was drawn from for her art work was another highlight, especially in conjunction with the opportunity to view her work in the gallery. Additionally, the opportunity to meet other art teachers and classroom teachers passionate about visual arts to share practices and teaching styles were also valued.
Saturday the 4th highlights
I chose to attend the full day ceramics workshop at the Jam Factory seeing that I instigated the start of pottery and ceramics lessons at our site as part of the Duke Of Edinburgh program. Both the hand-building and the surface decoration sessions were filled with creative and inspiring techniques to create and decorate vessels. We were shown how to use a variety of clay techniques and had the opportunity to create our own. The hands-on tasks gave me the opportunity to work with different clay bodies and discuss other suitable clay bodies with the hosts. This gave me a deeper understanding of different clay options for the best outcome while building.

Throughout the day teachers had the opportunity to share ceramic themed ideas about their clay lessons with students. Another interesting topic discussed during the day was different methods of recycling clay for optimum use wherever possible, I found this particularly interesting as our site and students are recycling conscious. Moreover, as many of the teachers attending the session were from the country I had the opportunity to discuss future suppliers of mud tools, clay and glaze, the quality of the product as well as the freight cost and delivery time. For me day two of the conference was by far the most valuable, and I couldn’t wait to return and share my learning with students. My contribution regarding the conference at the Riverland Special School.

My Art Lessons:
On my return to school I included the visual thinking process and questions in my art lesson. At first the students were reluctant to answer but soon defrosted and voiced their opinion on many topics, and creative processed. I found that the theory was true, the under achievers knew more about the elements of art than I expected and where simply never able to produce valuable responses, as they did not have the writing skills and or the language skills to support their thoughts. Even the “reluctant artists” in in the room became more involved in their learning and their strengths in critical thinking became evident.

DOE Pottery Lessons:
Both the students and I could not wait to order hand building clay to start their hand building tasks and use some newly learnt hand-building and mud tool techniques. The difference in clay made the vessel construction easy even for those students with low fine motor skills. Student were now able to achieve the height in their construction without it folding or slumping.

The DOE pottery students are also experimenting with texturizing method with the aim to keep all the textures natural (seeds from native trees and adding on slab build clay leaves and flowers). Alternative decoration techniques such as carving the clay at the leather hard stage is also popular amongst students. With these decorating methods students are able to show off their creative side more and owing their creativity.

Learning shared with Staff:
After a trail of the Visual Thinking Strategies and the improved lessons and outcomes of the lessons I shared my evidence and Visual Thinking Strategies with teaching staff at a weekly school meeting. During the brief session I also swiftly discussed the 6 inspiring strategies as I previously listed by Lisa Slade. The staff had to give some feedback on the information given during the presentation.
Staff members replied with a positive response and they will include visual thinking strategies in their creative art lessons.

My principal was also very impressed by the results of a session with a class. She commented that the language development and the activity with the input shown, particularly by the “reluctant” artist was wonderful and totally unexpected. This was obviously a conference that benefited the whole school and allowed our students to develop their skills and talents.