

HASS SA 2017 Conference – Lucinda Wilson

The HASS SA 2017 Conference, held on 25 February 2017, was well attended by a wide range of teachers and pre-service teachers from Primary, Middle and Secondary settings. The day featured Keynote speaker Malcolm McInerney followed by sessions on a variety of topics. Attendees nominated three sessions in areas of interest and relevance. The day also offered the opportunity for teachers to build connections through discussion with peers from other settings, sharing ideas and experiences.

Highlights from the conference were drawn from multiple sessions during the day including the Keynote address, *The Place of HASS in Curriculum, Time to Argue Our Case*, and the attendees' selected sessions. McInerney commenced the conference by reminding all attendees of the crucial role that HASS subjects play in the curriculum and education of our students. This presentation was filled with thought provoking ideas and research that justified and defended the place and value of HASS within the curriculum. Key components included discussion regarding the learning of 'soft skills', those related to team spirit, communication, social skills, a trustworthy nature, etc., and 'hard skills', technical skills, and their association with workplace success. According the Harvard research referred to by McInerney, these 'soft skills', mainly taught within HASS subjects, comprise 85% of those skills needed to succeed in the workplace. This key point was a highlight of McInerney's address validating the important role of HASS and the need for teachers to demonstrate this importance to students, parents and colleagues. This opening address set an enthusiastic tone for the conference that continued throughout the day.

The nominated sessions included other highlights. The session *Creating Rubrics that Actually Work*, by Adrian Cotterell, presented a step-by-step process to develop rubrics for any year level. A key point of this session was the selection of appropriate language for rubrics in order to make them clear to students and teachers. In order for rubrics to be an effective tool for assessment both students and teachers must clearly understand the expectations for each level of the rubric. The time given to the practical component of developing rubrics allowed for plenty of discussion with other teachers about the challenges of planning and assessing tasks and creating suitable rubrics. This practical session incorporated instruction, practice and feedback as well as collaboration. It was a highlight of the conference not only due to its useful application to teachers across all year levels, but also because of the opportunity to build connections with other teachers. This was particularly useful as its placement in the program before lunch allowed for many conversations to carry over into the break.

An Introduction to Aboriginal and Torres Straight Islanders Histories and Cultures (R-7) was a session filled with information to assist in integrating this topic across the entire primary school curriculum as the Australian Curriculum intends. Beginning with an explanation of the purpose of a Welcome to Country and following through to include ideas across the curriculum areas of History, Geography, English, Science and Maths, Christine Reid shared her vast knowledge with the group demonstrating how easily this content can be included into everyday classes. As such an important area of Australia's heritage it was wonderful to have so many ideas and resources recommended by such an experienced educator. This session deconstructed the large concepts of Aboriginal and Torres Straight Islanders histories and cultures to present it in a more approachable manner.

Nature-Based Learning within the Adelaide International Bird Sanctuary (AIBS) provided an overview of this new educational resource. Presented by the AIBS coordinator, Ian Falkenberg, and the Natural Resource Management Education Officer, Julian Marchant, the session focused on the establishment of the sanctuary and the initial education programs that they have been running. After opening in October 2016 the AIBS has established educational programs using the Natural Resource Management model that aims to change the culture of schools towards conservation. Starting with schools in close proximity to the sanctuary, the programs focus on engaging with nature, youth voice and education with nature. This involves students being given information and responsibility about conservation and learning through engaging outdoor games.

The HASS SA 2017 Conference was a wonderful Professional Learning opportunity. The sessions were informative, engaging and practical, presenting many ideas applicable to the classroom. The presenters were generous with their time and resources, each making their resources available online. I would like to thank the Teachers Registration Board of South Australia for their sponsorship. I have gained a greater understanding of the HASS curriculum area and will be able to use this knowledge to contribute more effectively in the classes I work with as a Temporary Relief Teacher.