

Looking back – looking forward. New Zealand Association for Environmental Education bi-annual conferences.

The 2008 Bi-annual conference “Connections and Actions” took place at Otago University, Dunedin.

A good conference is like a revivalist meeting is to the “faithful”: inspirational speeches, inspiring workshops and great companionship among over 200 like minded individuals, all singing from the same hymn sheet. Add some exciting explorations in the local environment and you have the NZAEE conference held in the country’s southern capital city over 3 days in the middle of the summer holidays. If this sounds like extreme devotion to the environmental cause bear in mind that in whichever city the conference has been held there are some very tempting environments to explore before or after the conference. Environmentalists in New Zealand tend to plough the same lonely furrows as those of us resident in the UK, so that the chance to share ideas and beliefs is important. Although New Zealand has only 1/15th of the UK population, who are spread over a similar area and enjoy magnificent scenery, it also has many of the same issues to confront in terms of education, society and sustainability as we do.

The title “Connections and Actions” was chosen to reflect an approach to dealing with global climate change. That is how environmental educationalist/practitioners can connect and work with the people in their communities to enable further understanding and actions on these issues (connections) and how we can all make further behaviour shifts, through heightened knowledge, towards our own sustainable living practices (actions). The Key speeches gave plenty of ideas of good examples.

Rather than give a “ball by ball” commentary, below are a few of the memorable statements that give “Food for Thought”, not all original but part of the overall message.

At the time of the conference the whole country was mourning the loss of probably their greatest hero, Sir Edmund Hillary, and reflecting on the best values in New Zealand's life that he embodied. One observation in particular resonated for me. It was that, at the age of 10, when he first went on a school camp on the slopes of Mount Ruapehu, he experienced the awe-inspiring magnificence of the environment. To develop a love for the environment you need to experience it. The school where I taught, out at Whangarei Heads, still takes the year 5/6 pupils there each winter. The important message of the need for Environmental Education could not have been more clearly made!

By the time this article is being read by our extensive network of readers worldwide, the 2010 conference planning will be well advanced. It is being held at Lindisfarne College, Hawkes Bay, in the sunny Napier - Hastings region of North Island. Half way through the United Nations "Decade of Education for Sustainability" the conference aims to look back at what has been achieved and what might be achieved in the next two years. To make these considerations relevant there will be co-ordinated sector group workshops for early childhood, primary, secondary and further education and for government and NGO departments.

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