



P&C QLD/ACSSO Conference Report

The Conference was held in Brisbane from 11-12 September, and Rob Wood and I represented CSHS, funded by P&C QLD with a small contribution from our P&C. It was a fantastic experience, with impressive speakers, useful workshops and excellent opportunities to meet with P&C QLD staff, P&C executive members from a range of QLD and interstate primary and high schools, and also to meet representatives from IPS schools in Qld and other states, and talk and share ideas about the role and operation of school councils in IPS schools.

Guest Speakers

The conference commenced very appropriately with a presentation by Networking to Win's Robyn Henderson about the value of and ways to utilise networking – really an invitation to us to get as much out of the meeting as possible by talking to lots of people. It made me more aware of how important it can be for us all, as part of the school community, to link up with individuals and organisations that may be able to assist the school in any way in the future, by providing advice, services, time etc.

Kate Jones opened the Conference, with an inspiring and informative speech about her goals as QLD Minister for Education. I was impressed by her articulate, balanced arguments, and her genuine interest in resolving problems. My main thought was that QLD Education is in very good hands!

The other - all excellent - speakers included Dr Jim Watterson, QLD DG of Education and Training, and David Gillespie, author of the book *Free Schools* and a member of Brisbane State High's School Council. David has done significant research into what he refers to as 'the things that make a difference in schooling', and what parents should be looking for in schools. I did a little research about him before the conference – he also has written a book *Sweet Poison* about the evils of sugar – and I was a bit sceptical about some of his ideas, but he raised a lot of interesting questions about the quality of the Australian education system in comparison to some other countries, and put forward some interesting ideas about where we should be heading. I definitely think *Free Schools* would be worth looking at from both a parent and school administration point of view.

Ishi Singh, Head of Global Partnerships at Google, spoke about 'IT in the Classroom', and focussed on the necessity for our education system to adjust so that it is teaching

for the future, creating a generation of innovators and entrepreneurs who are flexible and creative problem solvers.

The keynote address 'Global Megatrends' was delivered by Dr Stefan Hajkowitz, Principle Scientist at CSIRO. His presentation was centred around the question: how the world will change in the coming 20 years, and why education might remain policy makers' only 'silver bullet'? This was a riveting address – he is a futurist, who looks at trends and tries to predict change and how we should prepare for it before it happens. He has presented on Tedtalks, and CSIRO have recently published his book *Global Megatrends*. He is an in demand speaker, and the issues he raised were incredibly relevant to our rapidly changing society and to our education system and ways of teaching. I'm hoping that the transcript of his presentation will be added to the P&C QLD website, along with many of the other addresses and workshop powerpoints. I understand they will be doing this soon. Everyone should definitely look him up on Google – there are videos of some of his talks at other conferences. The issue that was skirted around in all these presentations was how to change systems not just by changing school curriculums and utilising technology in schools, but also by ensuring that teacher education courses are aligned with and ready to make the changes and meet the challenges required to keep Australia up with world best practice in school education.

There was also an interesting Q &A panel session, including Kevan Goodworth, CEO P&Cs QLD, Margaret Leary, President of the Australian Council of State School Organisations, and the DET Director of State School Administration and the Regional Director, Metropolitan Region. This mainly focussed on P&C issues, with most questions about problems that arise from DET rules and regulations governing P&Cs.

Workshops

I attended four workshops, the first on Professional Development for School Councils presented by Kevan Goodworth. This was an excellent opportunity to not only revisit the information he covered when he spoke to our school council earlier this year, but also to listen to the experiences of other, mainly newly formed school councils, and also to some school council members from interstate schools. A major issue discussed were how P&Cs and school councils could work together and with school administration. This was clearly a perceived problem area for new school councils, and I was able to give some information about how CSHS manages this very effectively.

The second workshop was on 'Creating a truly Engaged School Community'. This seminar rotated through a group of individual presenters, all high school principals, including from Lockyer District High School and the brand new Highfields State College. There was a focus on both the difficulties of engaging parents and on sustaining this engagement, and there were some quite innovative approaches. There was a general agreement that utilising technology in schools to make parents feel included as a valued and respected part of the school community is very important, but there are problems with negativity from parents on social media sites. The notion of setting up strong

avenues of personalised communication between teachers and parents is a way of possibly minimising these problems, and creating stronger and more positive relationships that help to prevent escalations in problems.

The ACARA workshop on The Australian Curriculum and NAPLAN presented by CEO Robert Randall, while very informative, left most attendees feeling a little preached to. There was little opportunity for questions and discussions, which made it all feel quite inflexible and lacking in innovation – like a must fit all formula. This was a bit disappointing especially when looked at in the context of the overall conference speakers and themes. For me, there was a definite wall between what is happening in this area, and what needs to change to meet future needs. Questions about how the curriculum can adapt to meet future needs, and how the education system itself may need to change to fit the sort of changing of curriculum required for the future were not addressed or answered.

The final workshop I attended was on Harnessing the Power of Social Media. I thought this would be really useful, but it was presented at an extremely simplistic level, so I quietly slipped out and ended up ‘networking’ with the conference organisers including Kevan Goodworth, and having a look at all the stalls set up to promote goods and services to P&Cs. There were some really interesting services, including vocational training, charity fundraising and tuckshop supplies that could be relevant to CSHS, but I think Rob Wood will follow up on this via the P&C.

Independent Public Schools and School Councils

The final presentation to the conference was titled ‘Independent Public Schools: What’s in a name? Best-practise case studies from QLD and the nation.’ The very polished and enthusiastic presenters were Jeremy Chetty, School Council Chair of Willetton Senior High School in WA, and Clayton Carnes, Principal of Hermit Park State School in Townsville. The WA IPS experience is different to QLD – school councils are really like boards in private schools, and have control over budgets etc. The Willetton School Council has established very strong business and tertiary education links, and have successfully secured significant private and state government funding for large scale building projects. For example, they have a large astronomical telescope at the school as part of their science program! It was all very impressive, but the IPS system operates quite differently and Councils, along with the ability to innovate and facilitate changes in their school, also take on considerable responsibility and risk. However, what Willetton High has achieved did make me reflect on Kevan Goodworth’s comments to us at our seminar in March – that we need to look at the bigger picture and think about ‘what is possible’.

Hermit Park State School’s principal gave an excellent talk about all the positive changes the school has made since becoming an IPS school. As a small primary school, it has made quite radical changes to some of its programs and spaces, with considerable success, especially in engaging parents as part of the school community. This includes creating impressive garden areas and an outside pizza oven. I talked

with Clayton after his presentation, and we both thought it would be good to try and create a North Queensland IPS school group of some sort, where representatives, including principals and school council representatives could meet perhaps annually, to share successes and ideas for how utilise IPS status for the benefit North QLD school students.

Conclusion

Overall, it was a great opportunity to see what a strong and active organisation QLD P&Cs is – I spoke with attendees from interstate who were very impressed by the relationship between the organisation and the State Government, and by the very proactive role it plays in our state education system. I listened to some amazing speakers who got me thinking very hard about the future directions of school education in Australia. I met passionate, involved parents, innovative and enthusiastic school principals, intelligent and caring politicians and dedicated and forward looking education administrators. It was a very positive experience, and I recommend attending next year's conference to all Council members.

Virginia Cullen
School Council Chair