

2015 AGTA NZ CONFERENCE



From L-R: Murray Clare, GTA NSW President Susan Caldis, Shane Giles, Rebecca Guinane, Marilyne De Maere

GTA NSW bursaries for the 2015 AGTA Conference in New Zealand

The GTA NSW Council was delighted to award four bursaries for the 2015 AGTA Conference in New Zealand: Murray Clare (Concord), Shane Giles (Pambula), Rebecca Guinane (ACT), Marilyne De Maere (Murwillumbah).

2015 AGTA NZ Conference Report by GTA NSW bursary recipient Marilyne De Maere

I was selected as a recipient to attend the Australian Geography Teachers' Association in Rotorua, New Zealand on a bursary provided by the Geography Teachers Association of New South Wales. I wanted to attend the conference for many reasons, particularly to engage with other professionals and develop the way I teach Geography in the classroom setting. I went to the conference with an open mind and willingness to participate in any opportunity presented.

The conference exceeded all expectations and what I really felt when I left was a sense of community amongst the Geography educators in Australia. So many experienced teachers shared their wealth of knowledge, understanding of syllabus documents, resources and geographical issues. It was a shame to only be able to select certain workshops as, if given the chance I would have attended all. One of the workshops that stood out for me the most was the "Art and Craft in the Geography Classroom" presented by Claire Lane. It was great to see such a young and enthusiastic teacher sharing her ideas. The hands on learning approach is one which I genuinely seek to use in my classroom and attending this workshop gave me fresh ideas to implement in my classroom. The other workshops I attended gave me fresh ideas for assessment for learning strategies, cross curricular rich assessment tasks, engaging students with special needs and using I pads in the Geography classroom.

One of the biggest concerns raised at the conference was the lack of qualified Geography teachers teaching

the subject. Most schools were concerned that there were very few (one or two out of 50 HSIE) staff with the level of skills to teach the subject. This really stood out for me as it is relevant to the school I teach in. Currently with my Year 12 students I run after school skills sessions once a week. I will encourage any teacher who wishes to develop their skills to also attend. I also want to continue the sharing of resources and ideas through constant discussions especially with new teachers to the school and to the profession. By encouraging all teachers to share their resources on the School Moodle page I hope to achieve this.

In relation to ICT competencies, the conference revealed a whole new platform to obtain relevant ideas and resources. Through the use of Twitter and simple hashtags a wealth of information can be obtained literally at your fingertips. I have also signed up to Scoop-it and I am going to encourage the staff to join up and follow educators in their field to stay up to date with current issues. The effective use of ICT is a particular area of development for the staff at my school.

The AGTA conference opened the door for many networking opportunities and gave me increased confidence in teaching Geography. I have set myself some challenges for my faculty and hope that it will benefit and curb insecurities held by some teachers. I honestly encourage anyone to apply for any future bursaries offered as it was a priceless experience. Thank you to GTANSW and the team at Group Events for hosting a truly rewarding conference.

AGTA Conference 2015: 100% Pure Geography, 100% Pure New Zealand

Conference Report by GTA NSW bursary recipient Shane Giles.



Field trip to a dairy farm during the NZ Conference

Securing a NSW GTA bursary to attend the 2015 AGTA conference proved to be one of the best professional engagements of my 20-year career as a teacher. The Rotorua conference offered experiences as wide ranging as lectures, networking, adventure tourism, seminars, fieldwork and workshops.

Having been out of the geography picture for a number of years, the AGTA conference reconnected me with a love of Geography which I had perhaps forgotten. In recollection it's a love of the disciplined approach to describing the world, its diverse content areas and myriad applications. These enliven teaching and help us to connect young people to a world that changes rapidly.

The first thing that I learnt at the conference was the power of our professional associations to exert an influence over the ways that we engage with the various bodies that shape the curriculum and regulate the flow of information to our students. If we as classroom practitioners are to exert an influence within the process of curriculum design, of knowledge transmission, of currency, we need to remain interested in the process. The best way is to keep building relationships between schools systems, BOSTES, ACARA and our fellow teachers' associations in each of the states.

As classroom practitioners, we might sometimes feel isolated and perhaps harried by the number of influences that place demands on our work. The professional association, in this case, GTA NSW and AGTA, returns to us a sense of agency; a sense of self directed purposefulness; this power and legitimacy ultimately comes from the strength of professional engagement and relationships.

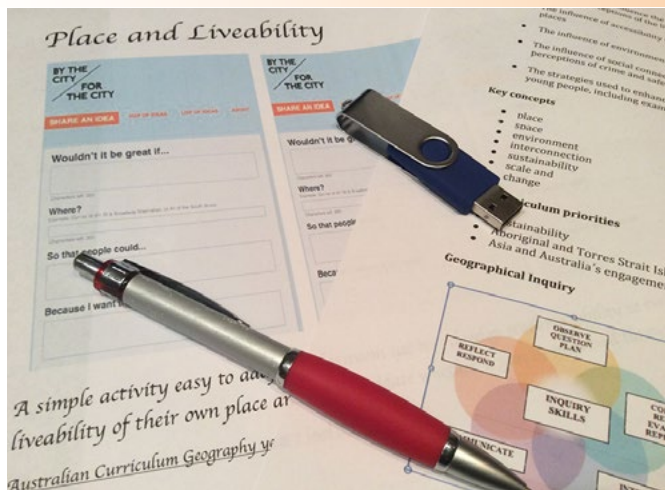
The variety of experiences offered throughout the four-day conference program makes it difficult to report. For me, a few themes emerge that centre around the commonalties shared by teachers, the urgent need for curriculum change and innovation (especially in NSW), and the enriching experience of 'doing' Geography.

In framing an application for the bursary, I discussed the problem of declining Geography enrolments in Stage 6 and the 'loss' of Geography as a senior subject. It seems incomprehensible that in a world dominated by contestable environmental awarenesses, unequal distribution of resources and the growth of global politics that students should view Geography as a subject that lacks relevance. On the contrary, Geography, with its interdisciplinary approach, a focus on data, theoretical underpinnings and capacity for creativity should rightfully be seen as a subject that enhances the study of all of the humanities subjects.

Attendance at the conference told me that I was not alone. Many schools face the challenge of declining enrolments in our subject area along with displaced regard for the importance of the discipline; it is taught, in many instances, by non-specialist teachers. These are some of the common challenges as students are not exposed to the depth available nor to really good teaching of the subject. What we also saw at the conference were a number of solutions presented by passionate educators who were dedicated to this important subject area. In the workshops I attended presented by people such as Susan Caldis, Lorraine Chaffer, Tara Williams, Louise Swanson and Rebecca Nicholas, I encountered great teaching methods, ideas and resources. In all, these ideas emerged: enthusiasm enthuses, good lesson and assessment design engages students, keep current, use technology to enhance your message, and fieldwork, fieldwork, fieldwork.



I take to the air during the NZ Conference 2015



In meeting with teachers and other educators from all around Australia, what became clear was the asset that we have in the Australian Curriculum Geography document. Amazing too was how flexible this could be. It seems that NSW is dragging the chain here and the frustration of NSW teachers in carrying on with a very old NSW syllabus was evident. Despite this, teachers were upbeat about the possibilities offered and sought ways to develop approaches that begin to infuse the current syllabus with AC principles. Workshops that looked at specific elements such as Place and Liveability sought approaches that would help teachers to renovate their lessons and tasks.

Alongside the workshop program, the Conference planners were sure to include an exciting program of fieldwork experiences. We saw traditional Maori culture at the geothermal village of Whakarewarewa, jet boated, free-fell and bungeed at Agroventure Adventure Tourism, visited the SCION forestry research facility, toured a dairy farm and operations perched above Lake Rotorua and walked the trail by steaming lakes and boiling streams in a neophyte ecosystem at Waimangu volcanic valley (image below). Rotorua really packed it in and the ever-present smell of sulphur and cinders served constantly to remind us that we had come to somewhere that was unique. New Zealand was a showcase of the many threads of Geography that we are so enthusiastic about. The drama and activity of the physical forces here is awesome, underpinned



perhaps by the eruption of the Hung Ha'apai volcano in nearby Tonga during the conference. Add to this the rich cultural heritage of the Maori peoples, the niche marketing of landscape and activity for tourism and the challenges of developing sustainable farming, forestry and energy solutions all provide rich studies in the interaction of humans with their surroundings.

The Keynote addresses on the final day brought many elements together and reminded us that our work in classrooms is underpinned by the deep bedrock of research and theory. Dr John Morgan (image below) challenged with his exploration of the social purposes of Geography, asking us to imagine the features of a post-carbon world in the epoch of the Anthropocene age. This is the world in which we have become the shapers of the geological re-formation of the planet, "We are turning rocks into air, reversing millions of years of carbon sequestration. Humanity has become a geomorphic force." He continued to suggest a concept of alternative hedonism, a radical way of recasting our understanding of happiness that involves new concepts of what 'the good life' entails so that sustainability does not simply involve using less, but instead leads us to consider deeply the forces that shape geographical processes. Ultimately, he concluded, we need to develop new visions for Geography that move beyond the normative growth and sustainability narratives of the postmodern world.





Professor Alaric Maude

Professor Alaric Maude's address complemented the radical flavour of Dr Morgan's presentation, as he explored the concepts of 'Powerful Knowledge' and the Australian Geography Curriculum. Powerful Knowledge provides learners with a language for engaging the moral, intellectual and political debates of their society. It refers to enhancing the capacity of learning such that it confers a real intellectual power to those able to access it. The strength in the concept is that it pushes

us to extend the ways that students acquire content knowledge, and what they do next. Powerful Knowledge helps us to go beyond our individual experience and beyond the technical in order to begin to make high level generalisations. Professor Maude argued that the concept gives students some power over knowledge itself allowing them to access new sources and types of knowledge, but also to evaluate claims about knowledge in order to become independent thinkers. Powerful Knowledge allows young people to follow and participate in debate on local, national and global issues.

Throughout the conference there was a buzz of excitement about where we were, what we were doing and who we were meeting. A highlight of the conference was the sharing of experiences via the twitter hashtag #AGTANZ2015. In the variety of activity and experience, this sharing developed a sense of inclusion. We saw what was happening in other workshops and field work, and we were connected to members who could not attend. Looking back as the semester draws to a close, I am very grateful to GTA NSW for their generous provision of the bursary. My school does not have the capacity to resource this type of professional learning, and the bursary enabled my attendance. I think about the ways that I can bring all of this to my teaching and to leading change in the faculty, recasting the image of the subject 'Geography' in our school. I look forward to the implementation of a NSW Australian Curriculum Geography syllabus, but feel a sense of urgency knowing that we can't afford to sit on our hands if we are to keep Geography and its importance at the forefront of our HSIE faculties, maintaining a sense of its power and efficacy for our students.

Scoop. it! – GEOGRAPHY RESOURCES

The following Australian Geography Curriculum resources have been developed by GTA NSW Director, Lorraine Chaffer

General Geography teaching ideas, ICT and Skills

Skills and ICT

Years 7–10: Teaching ideas

Year 7

Place and liveability

Water in the world

Year 8

Landforms and landscapes

Changing nations

Year 9

Geographies of interconnections

Biomes and food security

Year 10

Environmental change and management

Geographies of human well-being

A comprehensive range of member accessible and free resources are available from –

<http://www.gtansw.org.au/resources.php>



White Island, seen from Whakatane NZ. Source: Wikimedia Commons

Conference Report

GTA NSW bursary recipient Murray Clare

The unique fieldwork, informative presentations and workshops combined with the friendly New Zealand hospitality created a great atmosphere for a fantastic conference. This was my first AGTA conference and I found the experience to be very beneficial for developing my teaching skills and knowledge.

The fieldwork on the conference provided an opportunity to experience Maori culture as well as some of the natural wonders of New Zealand. Sites that were visited for fieldwork included Whakarewarewa Maori Village, Waimangu Volcanic Valley and White Island. Visiting White Island was a highlight for me. Seeing an active volcano producing sulphur and gas where I had to wear a gas mask at times to breathe properly provided an extraordinary experience and an interesting story to share back in the classroom.

During the conference I met teachers who were from across Australia, from the major cities and also rural locations such as Condobolin and Kalgoorlie. I found it very interesting to speak to teachers who were teaching in much different settings to the school I teach at in Sydney. The conference workshops provided an opportunity to hear new teaching ideas and strategies from teachers across Australia and it was interesting to learn about resources for the Australian Curriculum. The discussions of the Australian Curriculum by Professor

John Morgan and Associate Professor Alaric Maude were very informative. During the conference I also learnt how the Australian Curriculum is being implemented in the other states and territories, this was very helpful as it gives a great insight before NSW moves across to the new curriculum in the next couple of years.

The conference was also great fun and I enjoyed being part of the Geography Teacher Haka on the final night at the Gala Dinner. As a new teacher to the Geography teaching profession I would highly recommend attending an Australian Geography Teachers' Association conference as it is a very beneficial way of undertaking professional development and it gives you an opportunity to network and share resources with teachers from across Australia.



Maori hut, Whakarewarewa, Rotorua, New Zealand. Source: Wikimedia Commons