

Educators' Opinions

The Importance of Conference!

The recent PENZ National conference got me thinking about the importance of attending such a gathering. I asked myself the following questions: Why was it important that I attended? What did I gain from my attendance? This is my response to these questions.

What 'profession' allows an individual to graduate from a tertiary programme, be employed in that profession, but not continue to engage in professional forums? Law? Medicine? Teaching? Physical Education? At times as teachers we are frustrated by the community's poor perception of teachers, and their view that we are not professionals. Often members of the wider community and our own school communities think that teachers of physical education are simply 'jocks', who know little about teaching and learning. One of the important elements that differentiate a professional from others is their willingness and desire to continue learning about and improving their practice. If as teachers we are not members of a subject association, and do not engage in and experience conference and other professional learning opportunities, then can we truly call ourselves professionals?

Some of the professional development that teachers receive at school, be it primary or secondary, has little relevance to the development of their understanding of how they could better teach physical education. Generic professional development run within the school does not always assist teachers to gain new ideas and resources to better support them in their roles as teachers of physical education. Attending a conference allows teachers to better demonstrate their professionalism, their

understanding of the ongoing need for professional learning and the broader role of educators. Conference attendance can also support teachers to better meet the needs of their students.

The PENZ National conference is consistently designed to meet the needs of teachers in primary, secondary and tertiary sectors. It provides those in the profession with a range of learning opportunities, including:

- Access to, and experience of, a range of innovative games and activities for use in a physical education programme;
- Theory/practice sessions that assist in the developing knowledge of Physical Education content, planning and delivery, relevant to curriculum and the needs of learners;
- Ideas about ways to challenge, excite, and engage students in all areas of a Physical Education programme, including non-traditional aspects;
- Keynote presenters, and discussion forums that explore broader educational issues impacting of schools, teachers, curriculum and physical programmes;
- The latest information relating to national policy initiatives and developments;
- Access to the wealth of knowledge

and experience that members of New Zealand's PE community willingly share.

Of course, a crucial and enjoyable aspect of any PENZ conference is the networking element. Conference provides a range of networking opportunities, both professional and social. Professional networking opportunities involved chances to engage across the education sector, be it with individuals from primary, secondary, tertiary, advisory, or outside agencies, such as RST's. Social networking includes opportunities to catch up with colleagues and old friends, and establish new friendships. Past conference attendees will hold many fond memories of dancing (and some bad attempts at karaoke) into the small hours of the night, with like-minded teachers of physical education. The revitalising experience of a conference with our professional peers can remind us why we are passionate about PE and why we are involved in the teaching profession in the first place.

PENZ National conference is necessary for anyone who considers themselves a professional teacher of physical education!

**Kirsten Petrie
School of Education
The University of Waikato**

