The conference was attended by approx 130 Tasmanian delegates, plus 2 from SA and one from WA.

CONFERENCE REPORT – Following the program –

DAY 1 - The conference was officially opened by Greg Glass, who is Deputy Secretary of Corporate Services; (the Secretary would be the equivalent of our Chief Executive Chris Robinson).

Greg Glass talked about the declining enrolments in Tasmanian government schools, and the pressure this was putting on individual schools' budgets. Tasmanian State Government priorities are "Front Line Services"- eg Schools, Hospitals and Policing, and schools so far have been immune to a lot of the budgetary pressure put on their corporate services. He talked of the need for Smarter communities; where schools needed to become leaner and more streamlined with their work practices. They needed to learn how to work smarter, not harder. Mr Glass acknowledged the part School Executive Officers (SEO's) played in reducing energy usage in schools, as Climate Change and the Environment were also Government priorities and of critical importance world wide. He congratulated the SEO's for their ability to multi-task and their commitment to achieving their goals.

The Keynote Speaker was Simon Thiessen, who is founder and CEO of The Real Learning Experience TM, a company that grew out of a small consulting business started in 1993.

Simon considers that there are 5 steps to becoming a good leader:
1. **Clear Vision** – a leader needs to be believable and passionate about their vision, and share it with their team. This shared vision can then become a plan when discussion takes place about how to achieve this vision.
2. **Be the Change That You Want to See** - Leaders need to model the desired behaviour.
3. Catch People Doing the Right Thing – don’t be a “Seagull Manager, who flies in, makes a lot of noise, poos on everyone then flies out”. Instead, tell your team when they are doing things right, as well as their mistakes. The ratio he recommended is to feedback 5 positives to every 1 criticism or negative feedback.

4. Take a little less of the credit. Step back and let the sun shine through to the team, take a little more of the blame if things don’t go well.

5. Lead with Style – learn how to lead people who are not like you, adapt your style to accommodate different strengths and weaknesses. Harness strength before it becomes a weakness. It is easier to act or react instinctively; we have to learn to behave in a more appropriate and therefore effective way sometimes, even though it is not instinctive and so is harder for us.

The next speaker was inspirational and one of the most motivational people who presented at this conference. **Wendy Dalton** is an SEO at Youngtown Primary School, who by her own admission is “just an ordinary person”. She became involved in the “Care for Africa – Container Project” (http://www.careforafrica.org.au/projects/80-container-project.html) two years ago, where she involved her own school, local community and business sponsors to fill two huge shipping containers with educational supplies for schools in Tanzania. She had to fundraise the $6000 required to pay for freight of the containers. When they were full (and beautifully decorated by the students of her school), she travelled to Tanzania with a small group of volunteers to deliver the goods to 6 Tanzanian schools. Upon arrival, she learned that the shipping containers were held to ransom at one of the borders, so Wendy drove the second hand ambulance over dirt roads to meet with machine-gun wielding ‘officials’ who demanded $US10,000 to release the crates. Negotiations were frustrating and at times dangerous, but the ransom was finally paid by the Container Project officials, and so the containers could continue on their way. Wendy shared photos of the students receiving such items as pencils, books, uniforms, sporting equipment, hats and drink bottles. Educational supplies such as desks and chairs were also distributed. The first classroom Wendy arrived at housed over 100 Reception children. Upon her arrival, the teacher invited (I) her to teach them Maths for the next 2 hours, and promptly left her to it. The children had no English, but she explained to us that she just played Snakes and Ladders and other games with them as she would have her own children. The students loved it. She would then spend part of the day helping in the mobile health clinics. Because the containers were held up so long, she only had 4 or 5 days to distribute the goods; which meant driving long distances between bush schools, but made worthwhile by the smiles and hugs from the appreciative students. It taught us that ordinary people can do extraordinary things!

After a short AGM and a delicious lunch, we attended 2 workshops.

The first was delivered by **Simon Thiessen** once again, and was entitled “Giving and Receiving Feedback”. We learned that feedback was not just about giving or receiving praise, as this can be seen as condescending. It should be specific and directional. He gave a visual demonstration on stage where a delegate was asked to sit on a chair, and throw lollies over her shoulder with the aim of getting them into a bowl placed on the floor behind her. Simon participated, giving her no feedback initially, then negative feedback, then encouraging comments but without any directions, then finally positive feedback about her performance with directions how she could get the lollies in the bowl. (“That was about 10cms too far, but in the right direction. Throw a little softer in the same direction, etc”). She explained afterwards how she felt; even though it was a contrived situation and she was aware what was going on, she still
felt frustrated and even angry at Simon's initial comments. She was encouraged to achieve when he changed his feedback style. It was a very interesting session which also outlined examples of an employee giving feedback to a peer, and also a line manager. It is not always about a line-manager giving feedback to an employer.

The second workshop was "Effective Strength Based Communication" presented by Caroline Dean, which was an interesting title as she sped through the session just reading her handouts. She is obviously an extremely experienced person who deals with conflict and manages conflict resolution in the workplace, but to be quite honest our heads were spinning when we finished and we didn't really take too much in. We will read her handouts more thoroughly when we get a quiet moment, and we are sure to benefit from these.

Trade show & prize draw. There cannot be a successful conference without the support of sponsors, and this conference was well supported by them. They had more sponsors than ever before, and the interaction between delegates and sponsors was positive and mutually beneficial. As interstate delegates, we were made to feel very welcome and included.

DAY 2 started with a Departmental forum, with representatives from OH&S, Legal Services, HR and Corporate Services. We were very interested to learn that in 2011, their Department of Education is rolling out a new Finance/Student Data management system (like our EDSAS but centralised). As we understood it, it will be web-based, and will be Tasmania wide. For example, when a student enrols in one school from another, the Clerk (SSO) will choose from a drop-down list of names in their database. Each student will have a unique ID number, (as we do here) and this will follow them around school to school. In the meantime and before implementation, each school must ensure their student databases are correct, with the right parent/guardian for each student, correct family links and correct address data. This means that each school must edit all their fields to exclude illegal characters in preparation for data migration. As for training and implementation, their Department's idiom is "Just in Time, Just Enough and Just For Me!". Seriously....

This will be a very challenging time for schools, especially large ones with lots of student and financial records. Ultimately though, and as far as finance is concerned, this new system will result in Departmental managed BAS returns, Bank Reconciliations and all school invoices will be paid centrally. Schools currently seem to move between Cash and Accrual Accounting, as Purchase Orders are an option, not a requirement. It will be interesting to see how successful the implementation of this new system is, and the impact it has on schools in 2011 and beyond. As so much of the finance will be centralised, we wonder what impact there will be on school staffing.

The Keynote Speaker on the final day was Heather Rose, an award winning Tassie author and businesswoman who presented "Creating a Culture of Innovation". She talked about the need to value the creative part of our nature (and that of our students) and not just concentrate on academics and results. Heather is an advocate for education, innovation and creativity; and talked about her own children's school – The Friends School where their Mission Statement includes – "As a learning community, we are concerned for the academic, cultural, physical, social and spiritual development of each person in our care.

We seek to help our students develop into men and women who will think clearly, act with integrity, make decisions for themselves, be sensitive to the needs of others and the environment, be strong in service and hold a global perspective".

She talked about 3 things that we needed to keep our creative juices flowing: Courage, Passion and Imagination. We have been inspired to read her novels "The Butterfly Man" and "The River Wife" and enjoyed her presentation immensely.

The Tasmanian conference closed Friday afternoon on a very positive note!
CONFERENCE FEEDBACK - Organisation/operational observations -

**TSAA Constitution** is a very clear and easily interpreted document. They have Members, Affiliate Members, Organisational Members, Life Members and Honorary Members. Term of service for committee members is 2 years. Executive committee members are elected from 4 sub-branches (4 from some and 6 from one). Sub branches elect delegates to the Executive each year prior to July.

**TSAA Mission Statement** was printed on their pull up banner and was rather good – “The TSAA is a professional organisation which aims to support, mentor, provide professional learning and advice and promote excellence, to liaise with the Department of Education and forward updated information to our colleagues.”

**Venue – Hobart, West Point Casino** – an aging facility, but clean and satisfactory. A walk in shower in our room and being able to open an external window were both pleasant surprises! This venue was enormous, and catered for breakout sessions and plenary sessions very comfortably. It also had a very large foyer area adjacent the main plenary room.

**Delegate handout** was an A4 size heavy duty plastic pocket with a slide/zip up the side and only contained the program. It was all we needed. If we thought we needed a bag, it didn’t take long to collect more than enough from the sponsors!

**Program** was very professionally printed. It contained the following –

- A welcome from the Chairperson (1 page), and the Chairperson’s Report (2.75 pages!)
- Conference Information – who were the committee and conference etiquette – mobile phones, name tags, personal belongings, sponsors, dinner location etc.
- A page on the Keynote Speakers.
- The centre spread for the 2 day program.
- A page of photos from the previous conference.
- The 2010 AGM Agenda and an abridged version of the 2009 AGM Minutes.
- Sponsor information and advertising
- Notes page

**AGM** was on Day 1 for 15 minutes before lunch and was very sharp and shiny! The Constitution, previous minutes and Treasurer’s report were all distributed by email prior to the conference, however, there were hard copies of each available.

The food throughout the conference was very nice. All fresh, and a lovely variety each day. Lunch on the first day was baguettes & open sandwiches, fruit & sliced cake, on the second day was a
selection of hot dishes, rice, pasta, curry and bread and salad, fruit & cake. The hot dishes were really nice. There was only one dinner – it was a large buffet. Once again a great assortment of hot and cold meats, vegetables, salads, breads etc, and the desserts were very good too! Everyone was commenting on how good the food was!

Pre dinner drinks were provided by one of the main sponsors IRIS. This was a very generous offer, which really started the night off well. Everyone was joining in enjoying the atmosphere with many delegates & sponsors dressed up for the "Hollywood" themed dinner!

Sponsors have attended the conference (Trade Show they refer to it as) only in the last two years, prior to this they paid sponsorship, but didn’t attend the event. Some sponsors paid $8,000.00 to support this conference. Sponsorship received this year has increased significantly and has made a big difference to their financial position.

Length of Conference – was 2 days, with obviously, the dinner and entertainment at the end of Day 1. Day 1 started at 8.45am and finished at 4.30pm, then the pre dinner drinks commenced at 6.30pm for dinner at 7.30pm. Day 2 started at 9.50am and finished at 3.15pm. Both days’ agendas were jam packed, an efficient use of time, everything worked out really well.

Entertainment at the dinner was Gypsy Rose, a 2 person band, (male & female). They were really good!

We would like to say thankyou to SASSAOA and our School Principals for providing the opportunity for us to attend the Tasmanian School Administrator’s Association Conference 2010. It was both professionally and personally rewarding,

ALISON SEERY & LEANNE HEMBROW
13 August 2010