

The Association for Science Education Annual Conference in January 2019, set in the impressive campus of the University of Birmingham, was, as usual, a buoyant and energetic affair. Reflecting on it, a number of things occurred to me about the importance of professional bodies such as ASE.

I remember the first conference I attended: it was in Reading and now a number of years ago! I recall what it felt like to see and meet people who, up to that point, I had only read about, referenced in my own work and held in high regard despite not knowing them.

The very first session I went to, I sat down and Wynne Harlen sat in the seat next to me. I didn't have the nerve to even look in her direction, which now seems ridiculous! This year at the conference I sat with someone who was attending for the first time, catching up over a coffee. She was asking who various people were and she was experiencing that same sense of 'wow' that I had however many years earlier. I realised how far I had come in my own journey as I was doing the introductions and sharing knowledge of those I knew.

The ASE has given me so many opportunities to network, to build upon a social capital that is created through making connections with people and developing them. I maintain that the reason I am able to do all the wonderful things I do in my professional life stems from writing a book review back in 2007. From there, I co-wrote an article before feeling I could write one myself. I then went to an ASE New Zealand conference and did a presentation there, again meeting some fabulous people along the way who have continued to influence my career.

The opportunities have continued to come and at each stage I have met more and more people who have offered something new and different in my professional life. I realise

that as teachers we are not very good at this networking thing: I think the nature of schools means that we rarely have the opportunity to really widen the net and meet with people who do different but complementary roles to ourselves. But at events such as ASE Annual Conference (and even more so at local events) there is that potential. The challenge is to go and not just speak to those we already know but to aim to seek out those links and make the connections that will support you going forward.

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There is a great deal of emphasis at the moment on science capital and I think that professionally developing this social capital is also extremely important. It has the potential to open doors that you didn't know existed. Without making use of professional bodies such as the ASE, the chances of remaining somewhat isolated, either as an individual or within a cluster of schools, are high. It is important that as professionals we face challenges to what we think and what we know. Doing so helps us to form more secure knowledge and understanding and allows growth.

There is a lovely saying that I used to use with children in the classroom: *'If you always do what you've always done, you will always get what you've always got.'* I didn't think it could also refer to me and, I suspect, many other teachers. So my challenge to you is to grow your network – look for *TeachMeet* events, *BrewEds*, regional ASE conferences. Consider where you can contribute – to a committee, a national science body or by writing here. Everyone who has contributed to this varied issue has just changed their future a little: they have made connections with people through their words whom they otherwise would never have touched. It is not just about what the ASE and other bodies have to offer you, it is also about what you have to share.