



REFLECTION ON 2017 AATE/ALEA NATIONAL CONFERENCE

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The opportunity to attend the 2017 AATE/ALEA *Cutting Edge: margin to mainstream National Conference* in Hobart was, for me as a young teacher, a very inspiring and professionally rewarding experience. Teams of respected educational consultants, researchers, poets, authors, teachers and those seeking professional growth in the field of education, came together to share ideas, strategies and creative pedagogies that would enhance student learning and engagement in literacy and English education.

Oral reading is truly captivating and this was very evident when an auditorium filled with hundreds of adults was silent, except for the amazing and compelling voice of Steven Layne, as he narrated an extract from Libby Gleeson's novel, *Mantab's Story*. His following presentation on *In Defence of Reading Aloud* (and the heart-warming examples given) resounded loudly with all present, and provided explicit evidence that all teachers should be reading aloud to their students – no matter what their students' ages or ability levels. All students like to be entertained and reading aloud is a wonderful way to capture their interests and attention.

Layne insists that reading aloud is an excellent teaching strategy. It enables students to listen, think, wonder, create images and it will ultimately give them the power and skills to connect fully and engage with written texts. Reading aloud can motivate reluctant readers and writers and those students who are auditory learners.

I have always read aloud to younger students and decided to employ this strategy with a group of diverse Year 9 students. The change in their attitude to the novel was amazing. They wanted to listen! They listened and listened. They actually listened to the spoken words and the following discussions were amazing. New pathways for reading, writing and vocabulary extension were appearing and widening! One hopes it continues!

Although reading aloud is not a new strategy, it is important that as time-poor teachers, we do not forget the power of spoken language and

read aloud often. As educators, we have been given the responsibility for creating lifelong readers – even if it is a student reading an Instagram post!

Cutting Edge Talks was a new, innovative part of the conference. One particular eight minute presentation which stood out was that delivered by Alison Davis. She highlighted the critical factors for consideration when asking students to write, including: 'Do they have the desire? Are they motivated? Do they understand how or what to do? Can they visualize and sequence?' Davis also discussed students' self-concept and self-efficacy as writers and reinforced the fact that those with limited reading and writing skills or motivation do not have the desire to write. We, as teachers, must provide, along with engaging and authentic topics, support or scaffolding in the form of graphic organisers for students. By providing simple graphic organisers, as suggested by Davis, students will be able to develop an 'I understand ..., I can ..., I will ..., I know how to ...' attitude to reading, writing and research tasks.

Throughout my teaching career, I have found graphic organisers to be an invaluable resource when asking students to write – be it the simplest recount or a detailed analytical essay. Graphic organisers are the frameworks which enable students to build, create, organise, reorganise and discuss ideas, eliminate and/or develop findings and later, create well organised, sequenced and soundly structured texts. I am always pleased when I find students creating their own 'adapted' graphic organisers – modified to suit their own particular style!

As a classroom teacher I have always endeavoured to create learning environments that are positive and engaging, where every student is valued and respected for his or her own special gifts and talents and for his or her contribution to the classroom and to the school community. After reflecting on Elizabeth Birr Moje's presentation – *Navigating Literacies, Navigating Power* – I was reassured that I am following positive classroom practices. In particular, I was interested in her detailed

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explanation of the 'E Framework' (Engage, Elicit, Engineer, Examine and Evaluate), and her personal experiences illustrating that all students, regardless of their background, want to learn and have the ability to learn.

As teachers, we work with students with a wide range of abilities and learning styles, and from an ever-widening diversity of social backgrounds. It is therefore our responsibility to, through the selection of engaging literature and the careful examination and implementation of strategies such as the 'E Framework', provide stimulating programs and experiences that will open pathways to learning for ALL students and not to typecast or pigeon-hole those students who are different. I will continue to refine and enhance my pedagogies and develop innovative ideas now, and into the future, to ensure I always provide the best learning environments for my students.

Although analysing, appreciating and creating poetry has always been part of mainstream English programs, sadly it has not always been the most popular element with students. Many struggle to understand the concepts presented and the figurative language used. How exciting would it be and how more engaged and responsive students would become if the cutting edge elements of Red Room Poetry were embedded into the English curriculum!

Red Room Poetry promotes the love of poetry reading and writing and provides a variety of unique programs and resources for students, teachers and community members, it embraces all forms of poetry including written, performance, hip-hop and visual and it promotes and publishes poetry across a range of languages, mediums and places.

Poetry allows students the freedom to create, express feelings and write without fear or condemnation. It can open up the files of a young person's mind. This was clearly illustrated by Tamryn Bennett and Kirli Saunders during their explanation of Red Room Poetry and they encouraged all present to 'create, play and publish in poetic margins.'

Poetry writing can take the pressure off students where they do not have to write paragraphs, structured narratives or lengthy essays. They can produce true masterpieces by writing just

a few words or thoughts meaningful to them. Statements on a particular topic can create a thought provoking communal poem or dance as groups of students contribute to a given topic.

Poetry creation and writing can become the vehicle by which even the most reluctant student begins to read and write and feel the exhilaration of positive achievement – something as teachers we strive for every day. I enjoy teaching poetry to my English classes and intend to use Red Room Poetry as a learning resource and publishing outlet for my students in the near future.

Another inspiring presentation was that conducted by Libby Gleeson – *Tools of the writers' trade*. She spoke of the detailed research, fact finding investigations, interviews and travel she had undertaken when writing her latest historical narrative, *2018:1918*. It is the story of Ned and Les and their 'Cooee' march from Gilgandra in 1915 to enlist in WWI.

Historical narratives are excellent resources for both teachers and students. They provide realistic and meaningful opportunities to extend students' reading and writing skills and to develop content knowledge not only in history but in other curriculum areas including: science/technology, geography and the arts.

Because they are such valuable resources, where possible, I intend to correlate and embed historical narratives into my teaching and to encourage my students to read those pertaining to the courses they are undertaking. I will also discuss with my colleagues the possibility of selecting suitable historical narratives as texts for classroom study.

Thank you for your generous sponsorship which allowed me to attend the 2017 AATE/ALEA *Cutting Edge: margin to mainstream National Conference* and gave me the wonderful opportunity to listen to, and engage with educators, leaders and colleagues. I came away from the conference with a wealth of knowledge that will allow me to continue to provide engaging learning programs and activities for my students – programs that will encourage creativity, problem solving, intellectual risk taking and reflection by catering for the variety of learning styles and multiple intelligences of my students.