



# A WORD FROM THE PATRON

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It seems hard to imagine that ETAQ has been going for 50 years. It seems only yesterday that my erstwhile colleague, Dr Wendy Morgan; one of the founders of ETAQ and then patron, was cutting the 40<sup>th</sup> birthday cake. As we move forward from our birthday celebrations at this state conference, what do we anticipate for the future? It has become *de rigueur* to discuss the uses of technology in schools and educational settings, but having been active in the research field in this area for many years I want to address some of the issues around this idea by way of reflection on some of the discussions arising from the recent AATE national conference in Hobart, to frame what lies beyond this point. In Hobart there were many papers and workshops on the uses of technology in classrooms, and there seems to have been a shift. Melissa Kelly from Kelvin Grove State College and I co-presented a workshop titled ‘If digital spaces were neighbourhoods how could we show up there?’ The workshop was based on a combination of Melissa’s excellent research dissertation and some of my recent research on technology and multimodality in schools. Our presentation focused on the possibilities for studying representations and visual grammar in English classrooms (Jetnikoff, 2015) to make in the online identities young people curate in their virtual lives on social media through ‘signalling’ and ‘customisation’ (Kelly & Jetnikoff, 2016). We also attended other presenters’ sessions on ways of reading images and using twitter as a means to analysing news and as a springboard into writing and a cutting edge short fuse talk from Tim Nolan, in Victoria, who discussed the uses of Kahoot and mobile phones in classrooms. In many of these sessions the topic of ‘digital conduct’ in classrooms was integral to the presentations, especially the use of mobile

phones and digital device access and use in classrooms. There is always a tension between, on the one hand, the desire to bring the virtual and cyber lives of students into classrooms; and on the other, the challenge posed by the ubiquitous distractions to the members of the classroom afforded by the worlds outside the classroom whether their digital devices are allowed or not.

Yet internationally there has been a shift in the last few years away from the virtual in classrooms back to the real in terms of face to face contact and communication. In a 2014 Danish article from the conversation titled, “Facebook fight: why we banned laptops, iPads and smartphones in lectures” (<http://theconversation.com/facebook-fight-why-we-banned-laptops-ipads-and-smartphones-in-lectures-32116>), a frustrated professor applied Benedictine rules of ‘working and thinking’ to the secular classes and banned the laptop from his tertiary business classes. He documents the experience as follows:

First, attendance is mandatory in all classes, a practice hitherto alien to Scandinavian students. As we can’t yet formally punish failure to meet the rules, it is all still based on voluntary submission to them – just like in a real monastery. Furthermore, all students now need to equip themselves with nameplates and accept that they may be called upon by the professors at any time to answer questions or participate in discussions. On top of this, no laptops, iPads or smartphones are allowed during class. They may be consulted during breaks.

The immediate reception of the rules did include some surprised faces and one or

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two laptops closed very reluctantly. Yet the response by the time the first evaluation came around after two months was unison: 'This course's ban of computers is a tremendous relief!' From the professor's perspective, the change in the lecture hall is palpable: students are now physically and spiritually present and seem to be relieved not to be contributing their labour to Facebook's coffers any more. They are all ready to listen and partake, down to the last row.

The experiment returned teaching and learning to the face to face contact and exchange that seems so vital to engagement. Interestingly, this was in the business faculty so they were able to gain some credibility with the students by couching the change in terms of not feeding Facebook's considerable coffers.

Novelist Danielle Moore gave a thoughtful pre-conference plenary in Hobart about the demise of face to face contact and feedback in university teaching and learning due to recorded lectures and online assignment submission and virtual platforms changing (or could we say eroding) the role of the teacher. I concurred with so much of what she said about university teaching. Danielle teaches creative writing (as many of us in English classrooms try to do). She argued that part of our role as teachers is 'to light fires' in our students and to give the kind of personal feedback on their creative writing that becomes impossible when it is limited to online comment banks devoid of tone. The impetus for these changes from real contact to virtual access is not just that the technological platforms afford it, but that they are cheaper for universities than employing real people. The decisions around delivery are couching in 'access' terms, but more often than not such moves are fiscally inspired. Keep a look out for her article which will be published in the final issue of *English in Australia* at the end of this year.

I was engaged by an important discussion around the exchange of knowledge in the English teaching professional journals which arose from the AATE matters session chaired by our own Fiona Laing. If you are a member of ETAQ, you are also automatically a member of AATE, the National body for English teachers. If you are an institutional member through your school, however, it may mean that only your HOD gets a copy of the journal *English in Australia*. If you are in this position, and you don't usually get to read the journal, ask your HOD if you can read it. There is always a plethora of cutting edge ideas and articles in this journal and some of the work you are doing, either research or practical (or both) may be important enough to be published in the national journal or indeed in this journal *Words'Worth*. Professional sharing is part of the generosity of spirit I have always seen in teachers who engage in professional learning communities outside their own school. ETAQ is obviously your 'go to' place, but think beyond that to considering attending the National conference every once in a while – a fascinating brewing occurs at those big sessions. New ideas are always offered through wide thinking and sharing beyond our time poor lives as teachers. We may lack time, but English teachers always have a plethora of ideas and loads of imagination.

### References

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