



## REFLECTION ON 2017 AATE/ALEA NATIONAL CONFERENCE

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**A**lmost two months after attending the 2017 AATE/ALEA National Conference in beautiful Hobart, I have embraced the challenge to distil my thoughts so I can eloquently share some of my conference highlights with you. The process of having to write my reflections down, aside from being cathartic, has helped me to understand them better and reminded me of some of the golden insights, as I like to refer to them, that crossed my path over the four days. In this brief discussion, I have attempted to share some of my standout moments as an educator, and how these have shaped my educational ideologies and enhanced student outcomes in my classrooms.

Author and lecturer Danielle Woods reminded us of the need to 'ignite the fire' in our students and how important our actual physical presence is, in the learning space in order to have this effect. This honestly was something that I had never thought about before in spite of our technologically-rich era of flipped classrooms. Don't read me wrong: I am not opposed to flipped learning (nor is Danielle Woods), but I had never thought about the tangible human transaction that goes on inside 'live' classrooms. Prior to considering this new perspective, the Adam Smith in me wanted to celebrate the economic benefits of taped lectures – these are common place in universities and soon may become part of regular school practices - and overlook the impact and influence of all the senses and relational opportunities of experiencing learning live. But now, I have new eyes, and I am reminded that we must resist tempting 'economies' that serve the institution and not the people – not just to make Sir Ken Robinson proud, but because English is relational by nature, and to understand relationships we must also experience them. So, I remind myself of little moments in class that I might take for granted – those shared sensory by-products of our learning journey – and delight in the warmth of smiles, the jovialities of witty repartee, and the impact of the silent-glare combination. Priceless.

Cris Tovani presented on making learning compelling particularly with regards to reading. What I have kept coming back to, over the last eight weeks, are her statements: 'The best questions are the ones we do not know the answer to' and 'This changes the role of the teacher from the gatekeeper of knowledge and transforms them to be a learner too.' Consequently, I have tried to stop asking so many questions that second guess where my students are at (not as easy as I first thought), and started to find ways to get them to generate their own. Tovani highlighted that questions drive learning, and the best questions are student questions. To support this, over the last term I have introduced text annotations that were modelled at the conference (expanding upon inferences, making connections, and asking questions that are not answered in the text) as a way of peeking into student thinking, making an otherwise invisible process visible, and in doing so, generating data for me to use to help differentiate the learning. This has proven to be an insightful way to get students to engage with the text whilst providing a glimpse of their critical thinking capabilities.

Benjamin Law delivered an insightful session on the craft of creative writing. He shared ways to frame life writing, for example: a time (a year or a day), a relationship (childhood), message about a topic, a sense. I must confess that I went to this session for selfish reasons only. And yet, truth be told, anything that makes me a better writer, benefits my students. I enjoyed the fresh perspectives on writing and being reminded of a personal goal of mine to read more for pleasure and less for work (it appears everyone else is). *The Year of Magical Thinking* by Joan Didion is at the top of my list.

So, English loving friends, as promised, I have shared a selection of my conference golden insights: some focused on student learning, some focused on myself. All in all, I had a fabulous time, and it is only fitting to thank ETAQ for my scholarship and all my fellow English teachers for their passion, enthusiasm and collaboration; it is a pleasure to be on this journey with you.