

*2011 AADES National Conference - Crossing Borders, Shifting Boundaries: designing, delivering and leading effective learning.*



I was recently fortunate enough to write a successful application for a Network of Education Associations of Tasmania (NEAT) scholarship to attend the 2011 National Australasian Association of Distance Education Schools (AADES) Conference held at the Wrest Point Conference Centre, 15-17 July.

The provision of flexible learning programs and the meaningful integration of ICT technologies are not just two of the greatest challenges for today's (English) classroom teacher; they are quite possibly both the answer and the question. Despite being a competent user of technology, I was – and am – determined to improve my ICT skills and knowledge in order to cater for the diverse needs of the wide range of students in today's secondary English classrooms.

The list of speakers was impressive: internationals included Teemu Leinonen, Professor of New Media Design at Helsinki's Aalto University and Julie Young, President and CEO of the award-winning Florida Virtual School; Federal Minister for Education Peter Garrett also made a short address whilst the final session for the conference was a plenary panel led by former Premier, proud Tasmanian and "gadget nerd" David Bartlett.

In addition, a number of distance educators from schools right across the country presented workshops on a range of topics. There was some vocab being thrown around that I wasn't quite used to (the element of 'design,' holding a somewhat different meaning in the DE context, was an oft-mentioned aspect of online teaching, as was the distinction between synchronous and asynchronous learning tasks) but it was from these workshops I found the most useful information

and ideas to inform my pedagogy and assist me in identifying a path to pursue as the influence of, and access to, technology continues to grow in our schools.

A twitter 'hashtag' was established for the conference and all delegates were issued an open invitation to participate in it. Venturing in to the 'twittersphere' for the first time, I found delegates reflecting on the ideas being shared by keynote speakers, whilst during workshop sessions tweets about the key points of their chosen sessions could be read. Perhaps the most useful aspect of the twitter page was when links to sites, resources and research papers mentioned by speakers were posted by delegates for the benefit of all.

Whilst distance educators and classroom teachers face some vastly different challenges in their daily work, our primary goal is always the same: engaging our students in meaningful and purposeful learning programs. As a result, I found there was much I as a classroom teacher could gain from the range of speakers and sessions at the AADES conference.

Even though, as always seems to be the case, I left the conference with more questions in my head than answers; my conference experience was a most rewarding one. I would like to thank NEAT for the opportunity to attend this conference and encourage other educators to apply for similar scholarship opportunities should they arise in the future.

For those after some further reading, a number of keynote speakers' notes are available under 'presentations' on the conference website: <http://www.aadesconference2011.net.au/>.

Finally, from a delegate's point of view, how professionally organised the conference was and how smoothly it ran as a result. As I am writing this report for the TATE journal, it would be remiss of me not to mention that the Conference Organisers were Charles Morgan and Ian Morgan – former TATE Presidents both, TATE Life Members both and driving forces both behind the most successful joint AATE/ALEA National Conference ever (Hobart 2009). What else should I have expected?

By Daniel Howard