

ALEA Today

President's Letter

Dear ALEA Member

I began my role as President of ALEA in 2003 at the National Conference held in Melbourne. After eight years it seems the National Conference in July in Melbourne is a perfect time to step down. I've been ALEA's President for all the state and territory National Conferences and I have had a ball at every



one! During the past eight years there have been four Federal Ministers for Education, Brendon Nelson, Julie Bishop, Julia Gillard and now Peter Garrett. Each has put his or her stamp on education, particularly literacy education, often against all educators' advice and research in the field. All have pushed forward strongly towards nationalising education in this country, or to use the political rhetoric, towards national consistency of education of all. This is not the first time federal governments have tried to instigate a national agenda, however it is the first time that it has been achieved to such a degree. Now all key areas of education at all levels, from early years to higher education, are framed by a national agenda orchestrated at the federal level and agreed to by state and territory Ministers of Education through the Ministerial Council for Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs (MCEEDYA). The following diagram best depicts the current national education organisational structure.

The national education architecture



ALEA has been a major stakeholder in the formation of ACARA and AITSL and as I look back over my many past President's letters I have urged members to keep abreast of developments of these bodies by visiting their websites. Only last Thursday at an AITSL stakeholders meeting in Melbourne, we saw the draft website AITSL is developing to inform and support teachers. I urge all educators to visit these sites. They provide useful information, but will also provide teachers with useful resources. Just google ACARA or AITSL to find the sites. There are even 'apps' that can be downloaded via iTunes for your iPhone or iPad. And if you are a Facebook fan you can connect through Facebook too! How easy is all that?

ALEA will continue to play a strong advocacy role on behalf of its members at both state and national levels. There are many challenges ahead as states and territories begin to implement the national strategies. State and national professional development will focus on supporting teachers throughout this period via Local Council and State activities as well as the ALEA National Conferences.

We are again hosting the 'literacy' in National Literacy and Numeracy Week to be held August 29 – September 4 this year. The theme is *Fundamentals Can Be Fun!* A National Celebration of Literacy will offer schools two options this year. Option 1, *Read for Australia*, will encourage schools across Australia to read the same book at a select time. Option 2 will follow similar lines as previous years. The activities will be organised to link to the short-listed books announced by the Children's Book Council. Check out the NLNW website and get involved. There will be great prizes to win. www.literacyandnumeracy.gov.au

It is not too late to register for the ALEA National Conference in Melbourne, July 8-10. There is a very exciting program lined up, including Trevor Cairney, Gay Su Pinnell, Debbie Miller, Maureen Morris and many more. Melbourne is a great city with excellent restaurants too! I look forward to seeing you there. Go check www.alea2011.com.

The organisation for the ALEA National Conference in

Sydney in July 6-9, 2012, is well under way with Steve Lane, Don Leu, Mem Fox, Rob Tierney and Jackie French and many more. The conference theme is *Language, Literature, Literacy and Learning*. Registration will open as soon as the Melbourne conference is over.

The new ALEA website will be launched at the AGM in Melbourne. I am very proud of this initiative. It will be a much more interactive site, with news at national and local levels. Members will be able to log in to their own page where they can update their details so mailouts and emails do not go astray, register for their Local Council professional development activities online, and many other services. It is going to make life so much easier for our members as well as those who organise ALEA activities. Don't forget to come to the AGM at 5 pm on Saturday 9 July for the BIG launch, drinks and nibbles and to say hi to your new President!

My eldest nephew asked me today will I miss ALEA. I quickly replied that I was not leaving the ALEA family and community, just stepping down from the role of President. But yes I will miss the camaraderie of my friends and colleagues on National Council. At our many meetings together and on long teleconferences, we've worked through many challenges, created new initiatives and shared the many ups and downs that impact on us in our daily work in literacy education. It truly is such a privilege to work with such passionate, dedicated and committed educators who give so much for the betterment of literacy education.

My final message – yes membership. Without members there is no ALEA. Our membership has risen over the eight years and for that I am pleased, but we must all make an effort to join up at least one new member this year!

Best wishes to all



Jan Turbill, ALEA President

From the Vice Presidents

Melbourne Preconference Leadership Workshop

The Melbourne conference is almost upon us and we are looking forward to meeting up with local council executive and committee members at the Leadership Workshop on the afternoon before conference registration on Thursday 7 July at the conference venue, the Hilton on the Park Hotel from 2.30 pm–4.30 pm. We do hope every one of our 20 local councils will be represented at the workshop. It is always a great opportunity to connect with others and to share local council initiatives. This year we will take participants

through features of the new Knowledge Management System which we know will be a great asset for local councils. Please email us if you have not yet registered a member of your local council executive for the Leadership Workshop.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ALEA Mentoring Award

In our third year of this scholarship for early career teachers who either teach Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander students or are themselves Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander, we are delighted to announce Danielle Schmidt from the Northern Territory as the 2011 awardee. Danielle is in her second year of teaching and has a 4/5 class at Borroloola School in a very remote part of the Territory. We have appointed Maree Bredhauer as her ALEA mentor. Maree is based in Darwin, so mentoring of Danielle will be largely through communication technologies. ALEA National Council congratulates Danielle and thanks Maree for taking on her mentoring role.

2010 recipients of the award are making plans right now to attend the Melbourne National ALEA conference. Tania Neeson from Karratha in Western Australia and Caroline Zada of Crafers in South Australia have been mentored through 2010 as they inquired into their literacy practice and, as part of the award, they are supported to attend a national conference. Tania's ALEA mentor was Janet Hunter and Caroline's mentor was Joeline Hancock. Congratulations to both Tania and Caroline for their work on their action learning projects and special thanks to Janet and Joeline for their on-going commitment to ALEA through supporting these early career teachers.

ALEA Flood Appeal

Through the last *ALEA Today* in February we launched an appeal to support schools affected by floods in both Queensland and Victoria. As with our Bushfire Appeal, once again ALEA members and local councils have been generous and \$2100 was donated. This money will go towards institutional memberships for 14 of the worst affected schools. While a small gesture to each of these 14 schools, it is a genuine offer of support from members of our literacy community to others in need. We know it will help teachers in those schools to rebuild their professional libraries and connections.

Thank you to all who donated.

Please contact us about any aspect of ALEA National Council, Local Council matters or indeed any literacy learning and leadership questions you may have.

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ALEA Vice Presidents

ALEA National Conference

Melbourne 8–10 July 2011
Hilton on the Park, East Melbourne



ALEA National Conference 2011

MULTILITERATE • MULTICULTURAL • MULTIFACETED • MELBOURNE

If you haven't registered already, make sure you don't miss out! ALEA's 2011 National Conference will be held in marvellous Melbourne. It will be an exciting and stimulating educational event for educators across Australia. The Conference will be held in a premier venue, with hot coffee on arrival, delicious food and wonderful presenters. It will open on Thursday with drinks and nibbles and an amazing production planned in the Hilton Ballroom. We warmly welcome you all to Melbourne, come and share this exciting event with us. Celebrated educators from around the world will inspire and motivate us.

Plenary, Keynote and Institute presenters include:

Gay Su Pinnell, Debbie Miller, Joseph Lo Bianco, Susan Hill, Trevor Cairney, Craig Smith, Elise Hurst, Tony Stead, Maureen Morris, Paul Molyneux, Barry McGaw, David Howes, David Hornsby, Denise Ryan, Lorraine Wilson, Vincent Trundle and Brett McLennan.

As well as a range of outstanding workshop presentations including:

- Michele Anstey and Geoff Bull, Creating Multimodal Texts in a Multiliterate Classroom
- Dr Lawrence Bamblett, Common ground: Indigenous literacy and closing the gap between two worlds
- Brian Cambourne, Jo-Ann Lock, Helen Polios, Extending and applying the principles of Action-Learning at the whole-school level to create and sustain a school-wide culture of effective reading behaviour: An Experiment in Professional Learning.
- Associate Professor Heather Fehring, Literacy Assessment and Reporting: The Impact of the Australian Curriculum
- Toni Noble, Using children's literature to teach resilience
- Cheryl Semple, Teaching and Learning with Islamic students
- Rita van Haren, Shane Gorman, Jenny Loudon, Robyn Kiddy Cumulative, coherent and contextualised: a whole school approach to literacy learning
- Associate Professor Margaret Zeegers, Being Knowledgeable about Grammar

- Lisa Kervin, Jessica Mantei, Kristy Kervin, Michelle Rodwell, Assessing digital reading practices of emerging readers

To register and to find out more visit: www.ALEA2011.com

Local Council News

ALEA Meanjin

The Meanjin Local Council committee has been busy organising activities to promote literacy in the Brisbane and Greater Brisbane area. After a rather disrupted and for some traumatic beginning to the school year, we began with a welcome breakfast on a Sunday in late January.

February saw a loyal band of workers head for the inner suburb of Ascot to support Marianne Schubert, who presented a workshop entitled *Let's Get Critical: Looking at texts beyond their literal meaning*. Newspaper articles, persuasive argument, fairy tales and functional grammar were punctuated by a delicious morning tea and lunch prepared by Marianne herself. To cater for those to the north of the city, Marianne repeated her workshop in March at Caboolture.

In early April, Pat Hipwell presented a fascinating look at vocabulary-building for students. With the intriguing title *'I saw a philanthropist walking down the road' – Practical strategies for developing students' vocabulary*, the workshop used a practical hands-on approach to provide teachers with resources to assist students in developing vocabulary for improved writing. Participants were treated to a scrumptious morning tea and lunch to keep the brain cells working. Pat will repeat her workshop in June at a different venue.

ALEA Mackay

The ALEA Mackay Local Council 'Literacy Heaven' after school professional learning sessions continue to be well supported this year. These workshops are held on Thursdays in weeks 4 and 7 of each term and aim to focus attention on a contemporary issue in literacy. Nearly fifty teachers attended the 17 February meeting, 'Cooperative Writing Assessment' presented by Beata Francis and Leanne Nicholson of Slade Point State School. Attendance was also strong for the 10 March 'Look at a Book' session led by Pat Donnelly of Eimeo Road State School. At this meeting, attendees received a copy of *Proust and the Squid: the story and science of the reading brain* by Maryanne Wolf. Future 'Literacy Heaven' topics include a revisiting of Top Level Structure, a look at *The Book Whisperer* by Donalyn Miller and Beverley Derewianka's *A New Grammar Companion for Teachers* as well as a visit from representatives of the 'Literacy Lessons for Logan Learners' project.

**THE AUSTRALIAN LITERACY EDUCATORS'
ASSOCIATION LTD**

Members are hereby notified that the

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

of the

Australian Literacy Educators' Association
will take place on

Saturday 9 July 2011 at 5.00 pm
at the

HILTON ON THE PARK MELBOURNE
192 Wellington Parade, Melbourne, Victoria

News from the nation's capital

ALEA ACT Local Council continues to provide ACT and surrounding NSW teachers with some wonderful professional opportunities. The first of these was Denise Ryan's inspiring after school presentation for 80 teachers on Thursday 17 March titled 'What did you read aloud yesterday? And then what did you do?' Denise drew upon her publication for ALEA, *Reading and Responding: a guide to literature in the classroom*. On Saturday 14 May, teachers braved a cold Canberra morning to attend a half day mini conference by Beverly Derewianka entitled 'Forcing Grammar out of the Closet: Knowledge about Language in the National Curriculum'. The morning was very well attended with over 150 teachers from primary and secondary, government and non-government sectors. Bev explored explicit knowledge about language including a renewed emphasis on grammar, as presented in the National Curriculum. Teachers were provided with the opportunity to not only refresh their own knowledge of grammar but the importance of teaching grammar through a meaningful context. Following on from the successful 2010 ALEA ACT 'Classroom Chats', the ACT Local Council has had an overwhelming response from inspiring teachers keen to open their classrooms and present a 'Classroom Chat' in 2011. The ACT Local Council is also planning a Saturday mini conference on 13 August with Steven Layne from the USA on 'Igniting a Passion for Reading'.

ALEA Awards

The Australian Literacy Educators' Association recognises outstanding service to the Association and to the pursuit of literacy education in Australia. Nominations are now invited for the ALEA Awards, which should be lodged by 31 March each year. Please check the criteria listed under the Awards tab on the ALEA website www.alea.edu.au and if you believe that one of your Local Council members is worth of recognition, we encourage you to submit an application. Enquiries to the ALEA national office at office@alea.edu.au.

International Literacy Day

Thursday, 8 September 2011



For the last 27 years ALEA members have celebrated ILD, held on 8 September each year, by presenting books to babies born on that day. ALEA has a number of resources that are suitable for the event, including baby t-shirts, pamphlets, magnets and stickers which can be purchased online at www.aate.org.au/bookstore or through the ALEA office.

To find out more about ILD and to get involved, please contact your ALEA Local Council. You will find contacts under the Local Councils tab at www.alea.edu.au or email the national office at office@alea.edu.au.

New ALEA Website

Work commenced in February this year on the development of a new ALEA online presence. Much more than a website, it will enable you, as a member to see and update your own details, will give you exclusive member downloads and allow you to book for your Local Council PDs online – and this is just the start. Local Council Presidents will be able to directly access their own LC information through the system and there will be a combined national events calendar showing all the activities being run by the various Local Councils around Australia. In time we will also incorporate a social networking facility, and it will be possible to add other modules and continue to build and update the system as ALEA grows and the needs of our members change. As you can imagine it has been a huge task and, at the time of writing, the job is yet to be completed. However, we are aiming to have most of it in place by the time we meet at the national conference in Melbourne in July.

Once it 'goes live' you will receive notification either by email or post containing your member login details for the site. We encourage you to go online as soon as you receive it, have a look around and update your membership details. Any queries can be directed to Wendy or Lucy at the national office at wendy@alea.edu.au or lucy@alea.edu.au.

FEATURE ARTICLE

A Tribute to Donald Graves

Jan Turbill

On a cold evening in August 1980 at the IFTE conference held in Sydney University, I sat with some 500+ educators waiting to hear an invitational lecture on the teaching of writing. After appropriate introductions a stocky balding professor from the USA came to the lectern.



'Children want to write!' he began. 'For years we have underestimated their urge to make marks on a paper. We have underestimated that urge because of a lack of understanding of the writing process, and what children do in order to control it. Without realising it we wrest control away from the children and place road blocks that thwart their intentions. Then we say, "They don't want to write. What is a good way to motivate them?"' (Graves, 1981 in R.D. Walshe, p.17).

Until that evening I had never heard of Donald H Graves and knew nothing about his meticulous research undertaken in New Hampshire, USA which involved hours observing young children as they began to write. I listened attentively as Don (as I soon came to call him) shared his message. The hour passed so quickly that I felt cheated. For someone who hated the traditional 'composition' lesson each Wednesday even more than the children I had taught, Don's research made so much sense. And what young five-year-olds could do when given the opportunity and support to write was simply mind-blowing. I was hooked. I wanted to know more. I had so many questions that I wanted to ask this jovial, quietly spoken man.

As we filed out of the hall, I was determined to try and put into practice what I had just heard. With the support of my superiors in the NSW Department of Education, we began the St George Writing Project in three schools, eventually moving into ten schools in its second year, and involving some 70 teachers. Two books published by the Primary English Teaching Association spread the work of these wonderful teachers. The writing revolution had begun and children were writing from day one of school. During these two years, I became a friend and colleague of Donald H

Graves. My many questions were mailed to him (these were days before email and even fax!), and he quickly sent back responses, comments, and articles to support us.

Donald H Graves was a truly amazing man. His death on September 28, 2010 shocked us, although many of us had known he had been ill for some time. Don's scholarly work into writing was his fifth career. He had been in the US Coast Guard, a Presbyterian minister, a counsellor and a teacher-principal. Yes, we lost a friend, colleague and scholar, but his legacy lives on in the many pages he wrote in his fifth career (26 books in all).

Many young teachers of today most likely have not heard the name Donald Graves and are therefore unaware of the impact he has had on the teaching of writing. Yet their teaching of writing would reflect many of the key principles that Don's research gave us.

It seems timely therefore to identify those key principles that I believe are now simply 'basic truths'. In doing so I unashamedly write using the words that Don wrote. I want to be sure not only to share his message but also his voice with my readers. For those who knew Don you too will hear his voice as you revisit his words. I have taken 'bits' from the various books I have of Don's writing and melded these into text and written in a different font. The relevant references are all listed in the reference section.

Children want to write

Children want to write before they want to read. They are more fascinated by their own marks than by the marks of others. They leave their messages on refrigerators, walls, moist window panes, sidewalks and even on paper.

Writing also contributes to reading because writing is the making of reading. When a child writes she has to know the sound-symbol relations inherent in reading. Auditory, visual, and kinaesthetic systems are all at work when the child writes and all contribute to greater skills in reading.

Children need to take greater control of their own writing

Children who are fed topics, story starters, lead sentences and even opening paragraphs as a steady diet ... rightfully panic when topics have to come from them. Writers who

do not learn to choose topics wisely lose out on the strong link between voice and subject. A child writes about a topic because he thinks he knows something about it ... Writers who learn to choose topics well make the most significant growth in both information and skills ... The child exercises strongest control, establishes ownership, and with ownership, pride in the piece. When children choose their own writing we can expect more from them.

Although students can choose a topic for most of their writing, they are expected to write. They must produce. Sometimes topic assignment is helpful and even necessary. When *you* show students how to 'read the world' by writing with them, you also demonstrate how to deal with many of these issues. You may even find it useful to ask students to assign you a topic in order to show them how you work on assignments.

Provide time for children to write

Teaching requires us to *show* students how to write and how to develop the skills necessary to improve as a writer. And showing students how to write takes time. They need daily writing time to be able to move their writing along until they accomplish what they set out to do.

Teachers need to examine the amount of time their students have for writing. They need to rethink the way time is used in the classroom in order to have four days a week when their students can write.

Write with the children

Students can go a lifetime and never see another person write, much less show them how to write. Yet it would be unheard of for an artist not to show her students how to use oils by painting on her own canvas, or for a ceramist not to demonstrate how to throw clay on a wheel and shape the material himself. Writing is a craft. It needs to be demonstrated to your students in your classroom, which is a studio, from choosing a topic to finishing a final draft. They need to see you struggle to match your intentions with the words that reach the page.

Teachers don't have to be expert writers to 'write' with children. In fact there may be an advantage in growing with them, learning together as both seek to find meaning through writing.

When teachers compose before the children ... they speak as they write. Children need to hear the teacher speak aloud about the thinking that accompanies the process: topic choice, how to start the piece, looking for better words etc.

Provide real readers for children's writing: teaching writing as a craft

Writing only becomes truly writing in revision. Young writers need to learn a whole repertoire for messing up their first drafts as they change pieces, insert, take out, reorganise. When children stop erasing and instead cross out, draw lines and arrows, they show awareness that the draft is malleable, temporary, meant to be changed. They begin to understand the craft of writing and the role of audience.

Writing is learning

Writing is most important not only as a tool, but as a contribution to the development of a person. Writing contributes to intelligence. The work of psycholinguists and cognitive psychologists show that writing is a highly complex act that demands the analysis and synthesis of many levels of thinking. In addition to contributing to intelligence writing develops initiative. In writing, the learner must supply everything: the right relationship between sounds and letters, the order of the letters and their form on the page, the topic of the writing, information, questions, answers, order. We need to let children write!

My final comment

The principles I have listed above are but a few of the many that Don introduced to the writing classroom. It is time that we revisit these and reflect on our teaching of writing. Several 'road blocks' such as a strong focus on 'text types' and NAPLAN have the potential to thwart the young writer's development and growth unless teachers find detours around them. We want our children to be confident writers who understand that reading and writing support each other and know what it means to craft their writing to serve the purpose and audience for that writing. We want children to be writers.

Thanks Don for all you have given us. You will be remembered.

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