

## How do we communicate?

The 8th biennial AALL national Conference - How do we communicate? - was convened by Kate Chanock and the La Trobe University ALL team in November 2007.

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### OverAALL 2007 conference reflection

**Annie Bartlett**

The 2007 Association of Academic Language and Learning (AALL) conference at La Trobe University was significant in a number of respects: the highest number of registrations for an AALL conference (220); a significant increase in theorising about what we do and why; and the first five presentations of research undertaken under the auspices of an AALL Grant. Delegate feedback rightly focused on the consistently high quality of presentations and papers. The conference was also notable for the way in which the Association has become part of the mainstream discourse of delegates – what it is achieving, why and how. This growing consciousness and confidence augurs well for the Association's future. Also auguring well was the number of inter-and cross-institutional collaborations to present research and papers – clearly networking over time at professional conferences such as this is paying dividends.

Wanting more time to network is perennial, and this is strongly reflected in delegate feedback. It is always a struggle for conference convenors to balance opportunities to present with opportunities to network but the La Trobe committee demonstrated a way forward by specifying the networking opportunity – project work and applying for grants were particularly well received. This could be taken up in future conferences. Needless to say, given the amount of demonstrated collaboration, ALL networking is alive and well, augmented by the AALL website, AALL Discussion Forum and Unlearn.

Melbourne weather couldn't have been kinder to delegates, and importantly, the La Trobe University Conference team couldn't have been more attentive to delegates' needs. Delegates themselves showed an enormous generosity of spirit and contribution. The vibe was friendly, encouraging, and constructively critical, underpinned with lots of energy and interest. In this respect, audience response is what makes a very good conference even better.

On behalf of all delegates, thank you to ALL at La Trobe who contributed so much time and energy.

Annie

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### AALL Conference evaluations & reflections

**Kate Chanock (Conference Convenor)**

To the many people (91!) who filled out pink evaluation forms, many thanks. We have candid and constructive comments to brood on and to pass on to future conference hosts. There was nothing like consensus, as many people held quite opposite views (it was great to dance and mingle at the conference dinner vs. it was noisy and tiring not to be able to sit down; there should have been more in the conference pack, especially paper vs. there shouldn't have been a conference pack, it's bad for the environment), but where several people made the same

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point, I'll summarise those below:

## **OK (i.e. not good) to Poor**

### **The venue:**

should have been air-conditioned (actually, there are days when we feel that way about our uni's offices and teaching rooms, but only the computers are kept in cool conditions – we're sorry, but it was beyond our control – but future convenors may wish to note it, juggle it against the environmental considerations, etc. In fact, somebody suggested that the conference be moved to the end-of-Sept break just for the next time, as Brisbane is not at its best in late November.) should have been in the city, close to accommodation and other good things (but people did appreciate the buses). We did try – couldn't get a uni venue and couldn't afford another kind without changing the cost structure. The pack: pretty ordinary (but to the person who wished it could have been re-used to carry shopping in, I assure you, it can! It's made of recycled paper, and if it's the uni provenance that worries you, we just have to hope bystanders won't point and snigger.)

### **The dinner:**

Poor quality of food, and it shouldn't have been finger food, or if it was going to be, we should have told people so that they ate enough of it instead of thinking a meal was coming later. Very good points, these; we wish we had. Several people said they would have preferred a sit-down dinner; others liked to mingle; someone suggested a buffet so that you could mingle but also eat what you wanted when you wanted. This seems an excellent solution.

### **The paper refereeing process:**

Why did so few papers get through to the journal, and how are you supposed to deal with contradictory comments from referees? I think this is important and needs extended discussion, so I'll write a separate piece about it for this forum.

## **Good to Very Good (and most people gave these ratings to most things)**

### **The feeling:**

Friendly, encouraging, lots of energy and interest, and in contrast to previous years, a sense of mature confidence as a profession.

### **The program:**

Good to hear so much theory, and to hear it in dialogue with practice (but there were some who would like to have more theory next time, and/or a separation of papers into theory or practice).

Consistent high quality of papers/presentations

Special Interest Groups (and some people wanted more time devoted to networking SIGS such as the one where people could mention projects of interest, identify other people interested in those, and start to talk about applying for grants together).

### **The timekeeping:**

Presentations were kept to time, and turnover was smooth; however, some people suggested a bit longer between each presentation for movement between rooms.

### **The lunches and teas:**

This was everyone's favourite thing in the conference, it seemed, and big claps for Mary & Steve, the caterers!

### Things to improve for next time

More time and space for social interaction

More variety of presentation modes

#### Timing of papers:

Thinking on this was mixed. Several people thought 20 minutes was not long enough, and time-slots should be 40 or 45. Others thought that 20 minutes should be sufficient, and presenters should include less background to their paper, get to the point faster. For some people, there was a sense of rushing through things, not enough time to absorb and discuss, a crowded program in which you had to focus too briefly on one thing after another. (I think it would have been good to assure people, AHEAD of the conference, that presenters' power points or handouts would be posted on the website afterwards, and this might have helped people to relax, knowing they could revisit the presentations.) Someone also said roundtables should have been all together in same time slots, which I agree with completely. I intended to do that but we just had too many roundtable offers for the rooms that had movable seating. One person suggested having fewer papers, and I pass this on but I don't agree with it; apart from proposals unrelated to the conference theme or the interests of AALL people (we had only one of these, and we declined it), how would you decide whom to reject? I hope the conference will continue to be a real opportunity for AALL people to join in the conversations of the field, even if it means adding parallel sessions.

Merry ALL things to AALL, wishing you hugs and puddings and rain,

Kate

**Source URL:** <http://www.aall.org.au/conferences/2008/how-do-we-communicate>

#### Links:

[1] <http://journal.aall.org.au/index.php/jall/issue/view/2>