

The English Pub: ACTELA Newsletter

Arkansas Council of Teachers of English and Language Arts



Letter from the President

ACTELA Board members were recently asked to consider the following writing prompt:

A teacher's work is never done. We use our summers to inspire ourselves to greater achievements each year. What uplifting summer experience will support your approach to teaching this year?

Let us know how you got inspiration for new approaches this year.

Dear ACTELA Members,

Welcome back! I hope that everyone enjoyed a break over the summer and the first weeks back to school have been filled with engagement, camaraderie, and plans for an eventful school year. I, like many of you, attended some wonderful professional development this summer including the AP Summer Institute at UALR and an enlightening and inspiring affiliate meeting in St. Louis with NCTE leaders and other members from our region. How wonderful to see what NCTE and the other affiliates from around the country are doing for teachers in their respective states! It



gave your ACTELA representatives lots of ideas for Arkansas teachers, so be looking for new initiatives in upcoming emails and newsletters.

The summer has also been busy with preparations for our Arkansas Curriculum Conference in Little Rock this November. ACC 2016 is going to be a spectacular conference, so I hope you all are planning on attending!

Please stop by the ACTELA table in the Rotunda to visit with us during the conference. We want to meet you and know what further support we can provide for your teaching.

Cindy Green, ACTELA President

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Arkansas Council of Teachers of English Language Arts



Our Summer Endeavors



- ⇒ **This summer we implemented a reading camp for struggling readers as part of the field requirement for our MAT program. It has been so exciting to see our teacher candidates plan for and work with students who need them. My favorite part of the experience is leading the debrief after each tutoring session. This experience has really reinvigorated me and my course. I can't wait for the fall camp to begin.** *Jeff Wittingham*
- ⇒ Attending my required professional development for English Language Arts (ELA) in early June was inspiring because it is there that I got a few technology tips that I will make an attempt to utilize in my class in the upcoming year. This year, I have every intention of using "Plickers" in my class as a way of assessing student learning of grammar concepts or reading vocabulary. I am still studying the process, but my cards are ready! I also had the wonderful opportunity to teach in the BearsWrite Summer Camp at UCA. This camp is exciting for the students because they get to be creative authors, and I get inspired by the creative ways they are able to think and express themselves through the lessons we have given them! My heart always leaps with joy when it's time for "Pens to Pixels"!!! Finally, I spent a good portion of my summer with the "Choosing To Excel" group developed by Mrs. Thelma Moton. Since Sharon G. Flake is one of my favorite authors, I wanted to expose the group of young girls I was privileged to meet with her work. We read *Unstoppable Octobia May* which was a great book to fit in with the organization's theme: "Be Different." What a joy it is to be able to implement a great book with developing great character. I was a little physically drained but definitely inspired to return to the classroom with a different view of the academic world. *Janie Mason*
- ⇒ **Aside from traveling to Europe (Greece, Turkey, Malta, and Italy) and the Southern Caribbean (Puerto Rico, St. Thomas, Barbados, St. Lucia, St. Kitts, and St. Maarten), I continued my involvement with the Arkansas Department of Education's APPEL (Arkansas Professional Pathway to Educator Licensure) program as a presenter on two occasions (once in Hot Springs and once in Conway) to non-traditional teachers advancing through that program. I am honored to be able to play a role in the preparation of educators for the field.** *Corey Oliver*



- ⇒ I attended AP Summer Institute at UALR for AP English Literature and, as always, it was an inspiring and educational week. I met new teachers and gained a lot of wonderful material for my classes. The week spent with other AP teachers is a breath of life for the summer months and keeps me focused through the year ahead. *Cindy Green*
- ⇒ This past summer, I was able to attend training in Fayetteville, AR. The training was concerning the new science standards in Arkansas. For the past couple of years, I felt like I wasn't smart or good enough to teach

science. New Generation Science training showed me differently. Training is for three years. I am very excited to be incorporating these new standards in my kindergarten classroom this year. Go science! *Brycial Williams*

⇒ Being part of ACTELA inspires *Sherri Thorne*:

I have been swamped all summer with various assignments. It is an honor to be a part of this thriving organization, and I am so proud of the great work that members are accomplishing for English/Language Arts.

⇒ This year's NCTE Affiliate Leadership Meeting in St Louis, Missouri was a time for affiliate leaders from across the country to come think and brainstorm together about initiatives, advocacy, and sustainability. ACTELA President Cindy Green, ex-officio Dixie Keyes, and treasurer Janine Chitty all traveled to St Louis for this 2-day meeting. NCTE's executive director, Vice-President, and Affiliate Senior Advisor were also there to update the group about exciting shifts in NCTE that will open up new ways they can support affiliates. One of those is the new blog many of you may have seen. They openly invited affiliate members to submit blog pieces, talking about ELA teaching and advocacy for teachers.

The three of us came home with ideas like recruiting our ACTELA members to be ACTELA ambassadors so our membership is increased. We also found out that Ta-Nehisi Coates will be one of the Major Session Speakers at NCTE 2016 in Atlanta!

Dixie Keyes



New Generation Science teachers with Brycial Williams

Preservice Roundtable at ACC

Young scholars from UAM, UAFS, and ASU will be presenting their research at ACC. Come see the results of their cutting-edge scholarship in English language arts and literature studies! Our guidance helps mentor our preservice members into the start of their careers as teachers and advocates of literacy.



They are the future of our profession, and we can help them make a successful transition from life at the university to the realities of public school classrooms.

Visit the Preservice Roundtable session to meet them and support their efforts to become tomorrow's excellent teachers of English and Language Arts.

Defining Proficiency

by

Dawn Beese, Crowley's Ridge Educational Cooperative

By and large, I feel I have one of the most rewarding jobs because I have the privilege of working with excellent teachers in many school districts across northeast Arkansas. When most teachers are winding down to recuperate from the hectic school year, I am getting geared-up for the flurry of teachers passing through our doors for their professional development hours. It is intense and sometimes chaotic, but I thrive on the opportunity to create new professional development sessions and share information with my peers.

One challenge, though, has always been for me to step out of my comfort zone of the “stand and deliver” methodology of professional development presentations. It is easy enough to read through the literature and collect the latest information regarding effective literary practices; it is another thing entirely to adjust the presentation of that information so teachers feel they can take it back to their classrooms and implement strategies with confidence. It has previously been an intimidating thought to adjust my sessions “in the mo-



English and Social Studies teachers agree on indicators of proficiency in writing components.

ment.” What about my PowerPoint? What about the activities? Those handouts? And what about my answer key to all that I would ask the teachers to discuss?! I’m up for an adventure as much as the next person, but the fear of failing in front of my colleagues had me petrified. By the end of every summer I found myself exhausted and wilted. So what changed?

I began to build relationships.

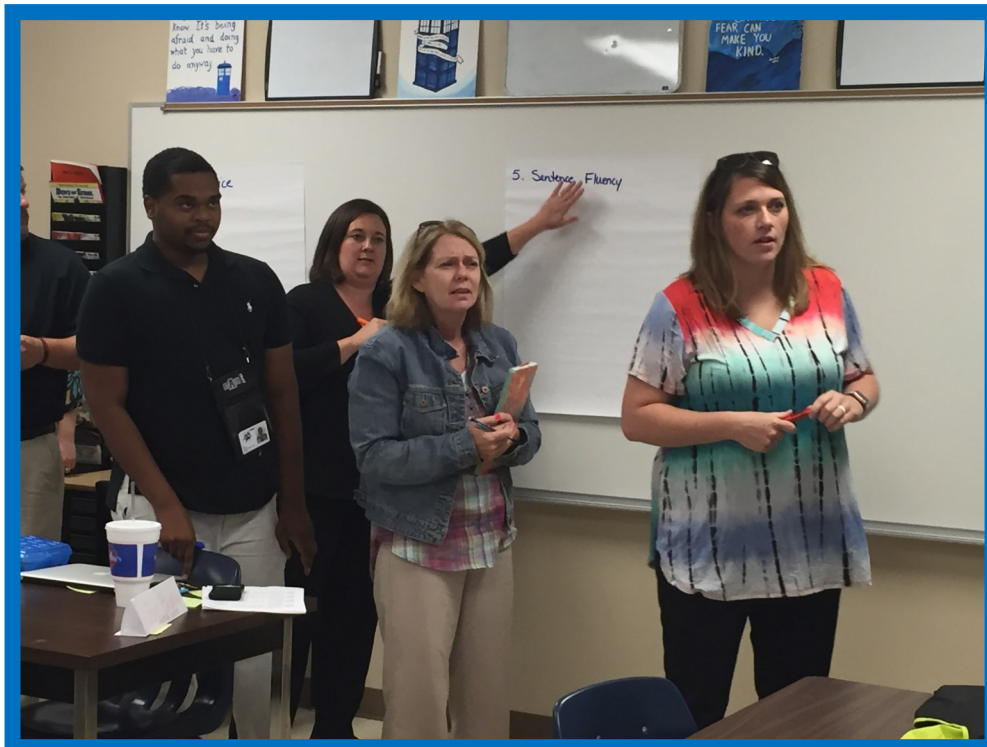
I began really to listen to what teachers were saying--their concerns, their ideas, their questions. Over the past school year, I became the student. I took notes; I asked questions, and I made all manner of graphic organizers (complete with various ink colors, highlighted areas, and the occasional flower doodles). By the time May came to a close, and with the help and cooperation of a willing school district, I had a plan. I wanted to do more than simply share information with my teachers. I wanted to attend to their unique needs. I wanted to make a difference.

Student writing has been a concern of many, and it was determined in my partnering school district that many teachers felt less than adequate when it came to assigning, explaining, and grading writing pieces. There was no consistency among and across grades or disciplines. So rather than sending these teachers to a general professional development session for writing, I took my training to them.

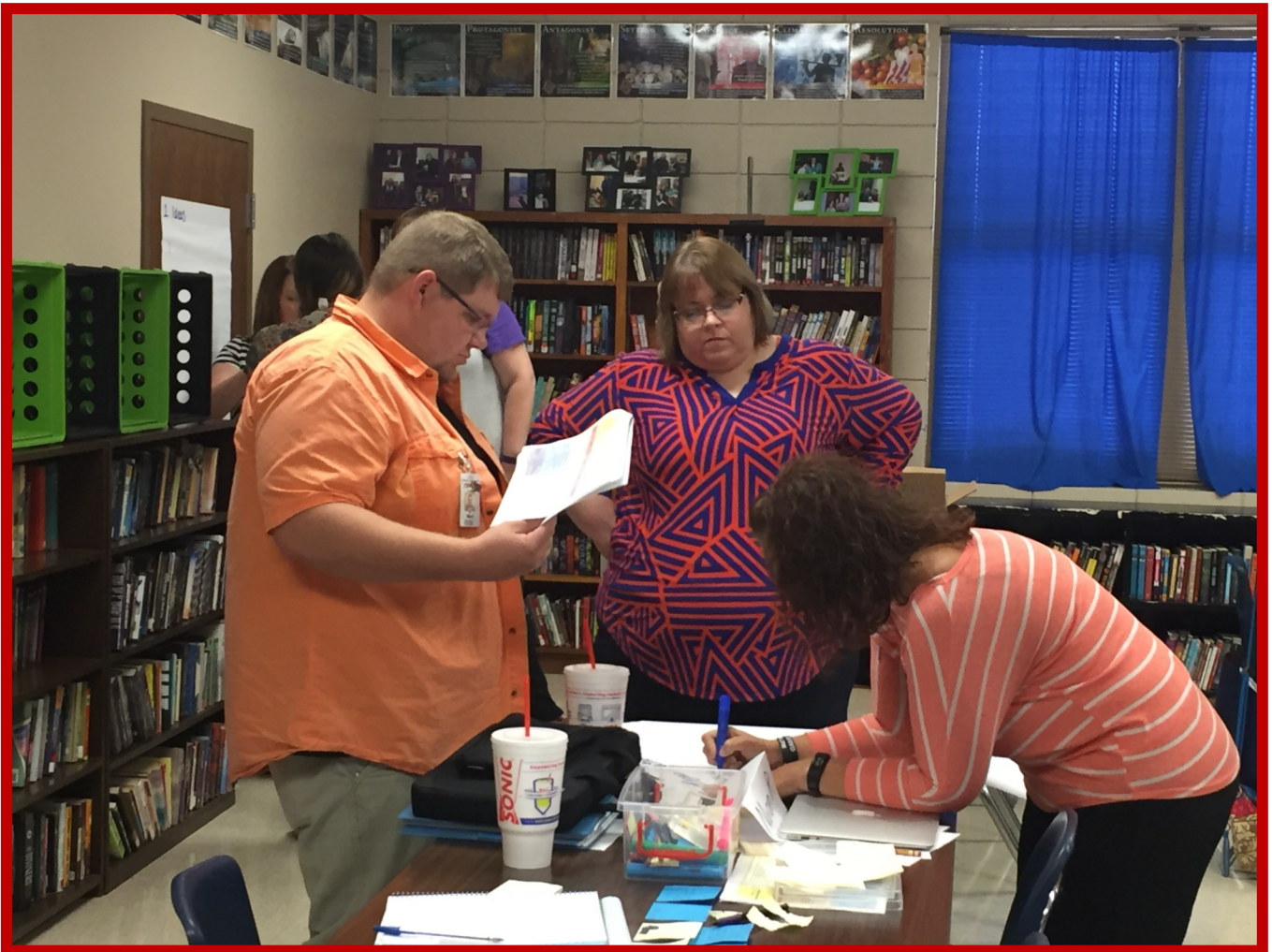
The information I shared with these teachers isn’t really what’s important here. What’s important is that I walked in with a skeletal plan allowing for processing time and input from the teachers. We discussed the characteristics of effective writing. (I do not use the phrase “good writing” because personal preferences influence objectivity about what is “good”). We analyzed mentor texts from various disciplines to find effective characteristics, and we compared the ways those qualities of effective writing appeared in different content areas. This led to conversations about how the teachers could use shared language to support the students in writing composition. The wonderful thing was that the teachers were leading the conversations. I would facilitate and redirect as necessary,

but for the most part I simply gave them manageable chunks of information to work with, and work they did!

In addition to sharing information and mentor texts, I asked the teachers to sit in the metaphorical students’ seat and practice some writing pieces themselves. After examining mentor texts and generating topics for writing (thank you, Kelly Gallagher, for your “1 topic = 18 topics” tool), the teachers drafted their own pieces of



Teachers brainstorm criteria of proficiency for writing.



Teachers compose a sample draft to score using the criteria they have determined upon.

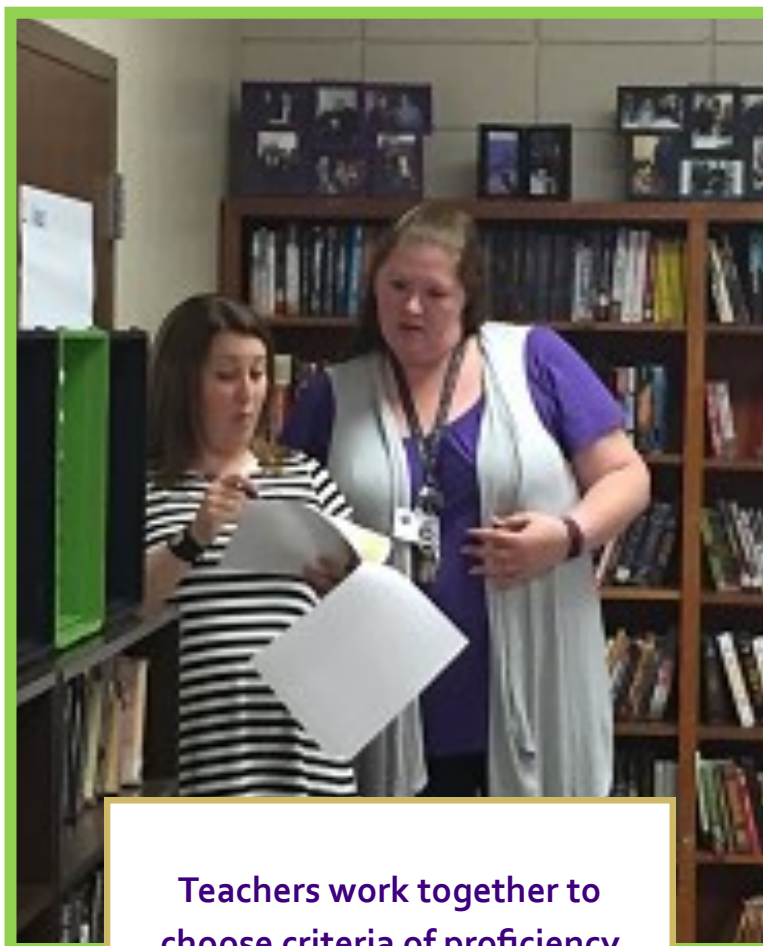
writing. They shared their drafts with different colleagues, and I made sure that they had multiple ways to give and receive feedback. While they were initially tentative to reveal themselves as vulnerable novice authors, by the end of the training they were laughing, crying, critiquing, and improving. The atmosphere was incredibly positive. It was easy to use the teachers' writing experiences as a natural segue into planning for writing instruction.

The teachers' experiences gave them concrete examples when we examined scoring guides for writing. The charts of characteristics of effective writing they had made were visual reminders of the language they could all use in their discussions with students. A review of the standards validated the modes of writing their students needed to be creating as well as the specific content that students should address in their writing. By the end of the training, the teachers were ready to plan a writing curriculum for the year.

It was invigorating to witness their eagerness and willingness to tackle this issue of improving student writing. It was as if they recognized that I was honoring their professional knowledge, their content knowledge, and knowledge of their stu-

dents. And I did want them to see that there is value in each discipline. (I have no desire to try and transform every teacher into an English teacher.) They didn't need me to come in with all the answers for them. They already knew their students' needs. They just needed a little scaffolding and direction and a lot of time to work through the process.

In response to the question, "what uplifting summer experience will support my approach to teaching," I must say that I am most energized by this professional development experience. We aren't finished with our quest. We have made plans to come together throughout the year and check in with one another's progress, trials, and successes. There are specific "next steps" in place that give everyone a vital role in attaining this goal of improved student writing, and most importantly, the teachers want this to happen. It's their plan, and I am honored to be made a part of it.



Teachers work together to choose criteria of proficiency from a scoring rubric.

ADWP Summer Institute 2016

by

Grover Welch, Gosnell Junior High School

When summer comes and students go home, teachers often find themselves facing hours of summer workshops and seminars. This past summer I faced the same, often overly-daunting, schedule of summer professional development options. Luckily, I was able to attend one of the most rewarding summer professional development programs going. The Arkansas Delta Writing Program's Summer Institute is a three week oppor-



Arkansas Delta Writing Project 2016 happened in Blytheville.

tunity to work with teachers in a collaborative environment, where each voice is accepted and amplified into a symphony of teaching ideas and pedagogy.

The ADWP operates the Summer Institute in conjunction with the National Writing Program and facilitates a strictly writing instruction immersion that can transform any ELA classroom. The institute is usually small enough for all attendees to bond, let go of reservations they may have, and invest in truly rejuvenating exposure to writing processes and techniques. Strongly emphasized at this summer's institute was the idea of perspectives of writing, the fundamental idea that all writers can achieve quality writing through authentic assignments and authentic products.

Authenticity, and its effect on the student writer, develops out of a teacher's willingness to invest time in the process of writing. This allows the student to experiment with style, content, and development in fluid, natural steps that are comfortable to them and lend the best chances of the student learning. We began this process in the summer institute at Blytheville High School with real, relatable texts that featured authenticity as a model for students. The teachers who attended the institute developed practical approaches that were organic to their



2016 Fellows at the Arkansas Delta Writing Project Institute

members expressed joy at having attended a workshop that helped teachers create rather than dissect pedagogy. The core concept of the summer institute is that teachers lead the learning.

The teachers at this summer institute inspired me to develop more writing opportunities in my own courses. This has already begun in the first weeks of the new year, as I have had my students writing almost daily. My students and I are using sound strategies to dissect readings for writing instruction. My ultimate goal is the development of students who are able to explore ideas and thoughts in multiple modes of writing. The fellows are also embarking on similar journeys. We share ideas and the practices with one another in an online Learning Exchange and group emails.



Erica Sockwell, a sixth-grade teacher from Jonesboro, AR

teaching methods. Instead of prescriptive models of writing, the fellows were allowed to develop models that encouraged choice and variation among those attempting the assignments.

The group bonded over new and exciting approaches and developed a shared belief that writing, literacy, is the key to student growth. Many

I have developed a love for this type of learning, the fluid mechanics of real teacher development, which reinvigorates as much as it motivates. It inspired me to have been a part of so many great teachers huddled around a small pile of emoticons, trying to develop a writing prompt that uses these small yellow faces. It is awe inspiring to find so much inspiration in one place; thankfully, the learning continues. One of the first questions asked by administrators during my orientation this fall was, “Did you attend any workshops you would like to share?” My hand immediately shot up as I could hardly contain the excitement. I wish every teacher could experience the love and growth offered by the Arkansas Delta Writing Program’s Summer Institute!



Erica Sockwell and Jae Glass bond over lunch at the ADWP Summer Institute.

Inspired by a Love of Books

by

Dr. Kay J. Walter, University of Arkansas at Monticello

In May I took a group of students abroad for a summer travel seminar focusing on British Authors. We spent two weeks touring the birthplaces, homes, inspirations, and gravesites of famous writers, and at the end of that journey I sent my students back to Arkansas. I stayed on in Europe for the remainder of my summer vacation.

I spent some of the time on the continent, but dashing about from one Ruskin-related meeting to another took up most of my summer. I reserved two weeks for my own research interest. These two weeks I indulged my love of libraries in the Rare Books and Manuscripts Reading Room of the Weston Library, Bodelian Libraries, Oxford. <https://www.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/weston/using/rooms>.

Obtaining a Reader's Card was my first exquisite adventure. I had a letter of support from my dean, and that helped, but in the end I had to talk my way into permission to examine the rare books and manuscripts owned by the Bodelian Libraries. I smiled for my photo and vowed the obligatory oath with great relish:

I hereby undertake not to remove from the Library, nor to mark, deface, or injure in any way, any volume, document or other object belonging to it or in its custody; not to bring into the Library, or kindle therein, any fire or flame, and not to smoke in the Library; and I promise to obey all rules of the Library.

With the declaration of these words, I joined the untold numbers of scholars before me who were honored with the ability to read in the Bodelian.

Each morning thereafter, I rode the bus into Oxford City Centre to walk around the University Church of St Mary the Virgin <http://www.university-church.ox.ac.uk/> and down cobbled paths. My way was always crowded with international visitors posing for selfies and young gowned scholars—the best and brightest of the English-speaking world—engaged in excited discussions on the exams they were sitting. I passed the Radcliffe Camera where scholars have been teaching and studying and learning longer than my nation has existed, and made my way to the readers' entrance on Parks Road.

I always paused before entering that door, often to shake off the raindrops which had collected on my waterproof jacket and



The Radcliffe Camera, Oxford

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Radcliffe_Camera

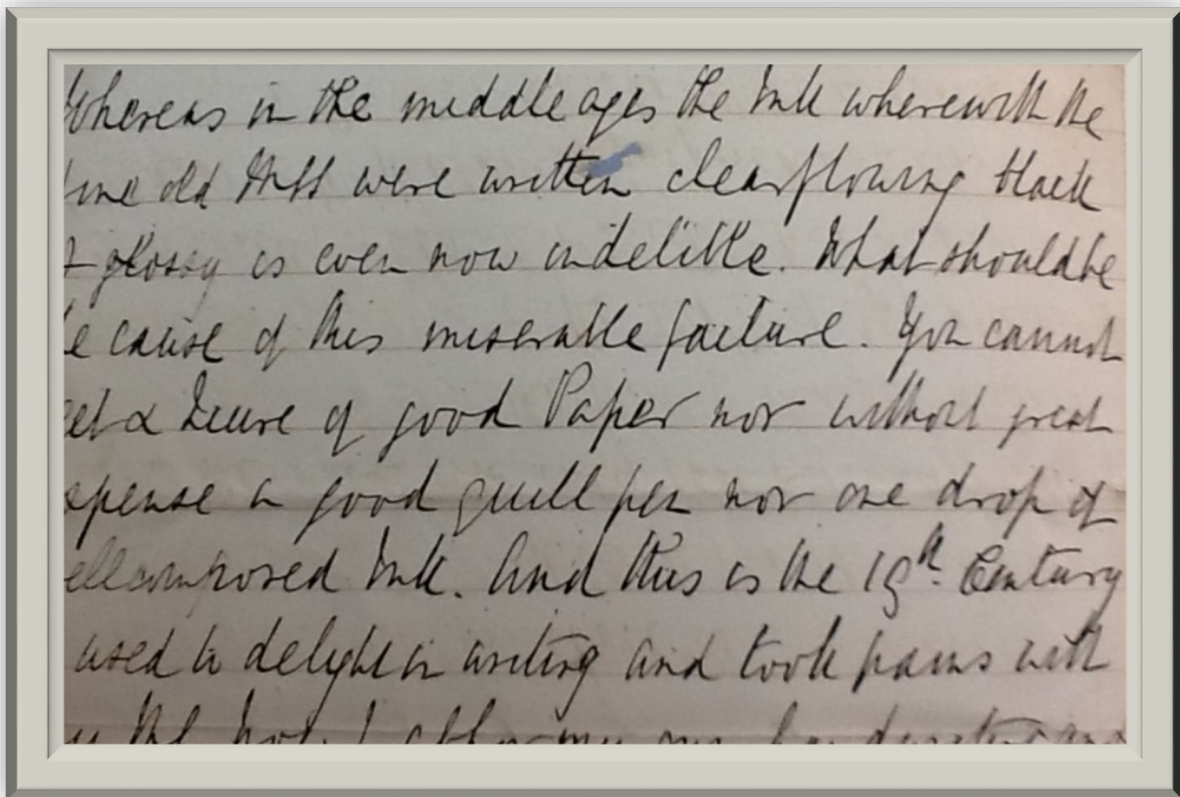
thank God for my respite from the heat back home, but also to savor the certainty that somehow life was offering a teacher from rural Arkansas such blissful opportunity. The locker room was my first stop.

In this room, I stored my jacket, my backpack, my computer case, and my other belongings. All I took with me into the reading room had to fit in a clear plastic carrier bag provided by the library. The security guard at the desk learned to know me by face, and my Reader's Card was scanned to gain entrance to the private library rooms.

Upstairs, another secure door and guard examined my bag every time I entered and exited the reading room. These guards too learned to know me at sight as they examined my card and signed me in and out each day and noted the times of my comings and goings. The library workers at the desk who helped me locate, order, collect, and use the materials available were friendly and helpful—even the one I met on her (and my) first day in the room.

The tea room just around the corner from the entrance offered an affordable lunch, clear wifi signal, and the opportunity to use a pen to record my thoughts and observations—though I grew fond of writing in pencil. The smooth flow of graphite onto the pages of my notebook tuned out to be a more fluid expression of my thoughts than the notes I took on my laptop and led to the epiphanies I will explore in conference presentations and publications this year.

I learned the ladies room was upstairs and down the hall from the Rare Books room where I spent my days reading. Gents, your facilities are downstairs near the entrance. I made a habit of avoiding the elevator when possible as charging up the stair-

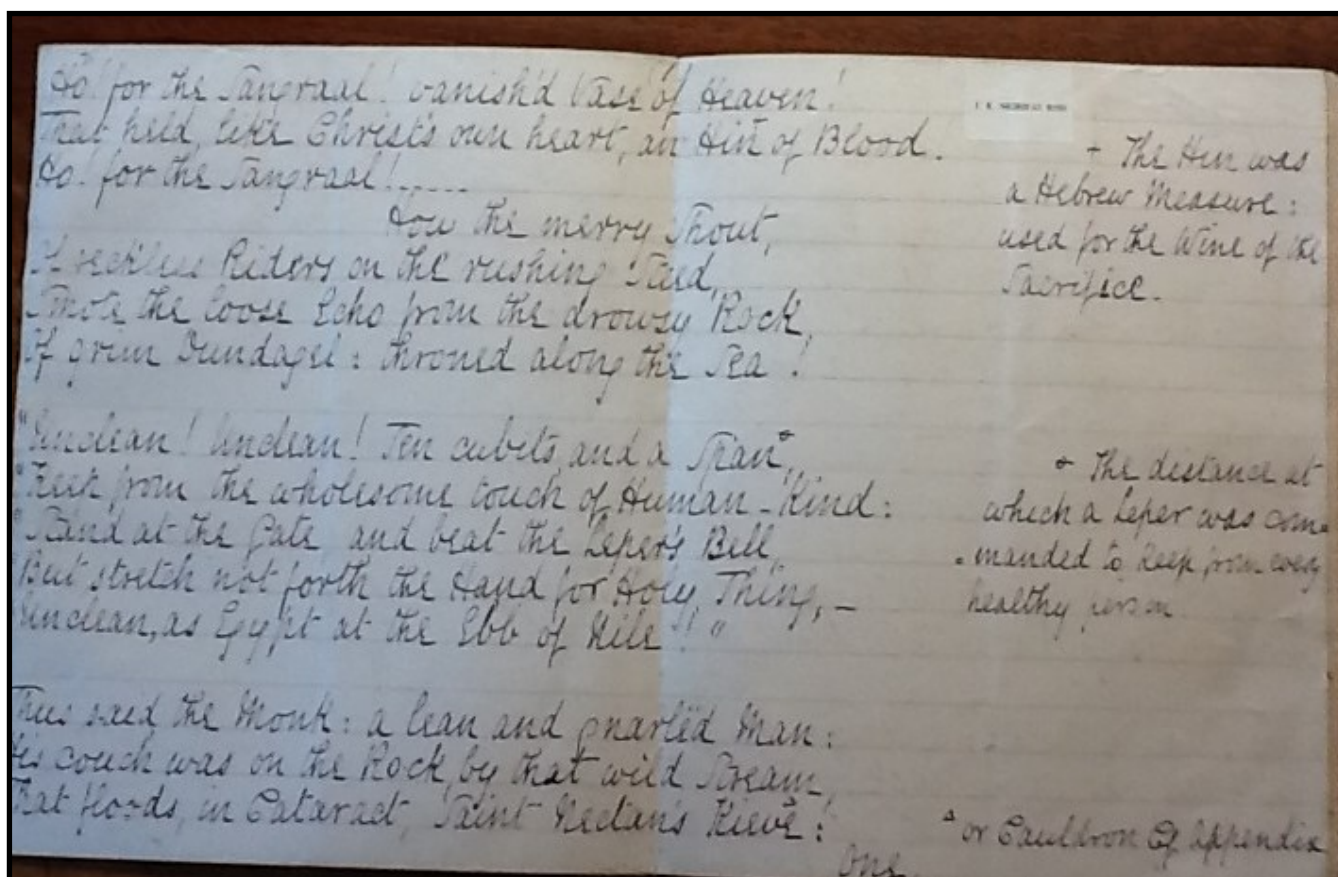


**Manuscript clip of a letter
penned by Robert Stephen Hawker
from the holdings of the Weston Library, Oxford**

case is a healthier option and burned off some of the adrenaline-charged excitement of the experience allowing me to concentrate on my research.

I spent the many hours each day indulging my inner-bookworm. I was able to explore handwritten Sermon Notes and Thought Books of a too-little-known Victorian poet and priest from rural northern Cornwall. Robert Stephen Hawker is the subject of my doctoral dissertation, but I have not indulged my fondness for him in many years. I had some catching up to do! Interest in Hawker has been growing. The Kernowyon A Gan massed Cornish Choir Concert delivered a rousing rendition of Hawker's most famous ballad this summer to a packed Royal Albert Hall <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FSLbyarViO8>, and there is now a Hawker Society [http://www.robertstephenhawker.co.uk/!](http://www.robertstephenhawker.co.uk/)

What I wanted most, of course, was to hold in my hands such reliques of Hawker's writing as still exist—not virtually but physically. Digital copies of rarities are wonderful substitutes for experiences we can only dream of—such as turning the leaves of the Book of Kells—but my more realistic dreams of holding Hawker's original manuscript of *Quest of the Sangraal* came true. I could see for myself and understand in concrete ways his insistence on high quality paper stock and ink. I handled the paper and learned the tactile pleasure of the stock he enjoyed most. I inhaled the scent of ages. I could tell from the strokes of his letters and the formation of his words how he was feeling and when dark days or illness visited him and when bright moments of excitement or victory arrived. Such revelations are confusing, obscured, or disguised in



**Opening lines of Hawker's *Quest of the Sangraal* manuscript
from the Weston Library holdings, Oxford**

computer-generated typescript.

I also managed to attend the coffee hosted by librarians for the rare book and manuscript researchers. I met visiting scholars from many parts of the world, including a reader from Maine who was married to a native Arkansan and a reader from New Mexico who had once interviewed for a position at my university in my own department! I eagerly took the opportunity this occasion offered to explore the rooftop view of the city.

The experience convinced me I must be doing something right if fate or God or karma could be this kind to me. Of course, I got addicted; one visit certainly wasn't enough. I already have plans to go again next summer, and (being a teacher first and foremost) I intend to take my students with me. The experience was too rich not to share.

If you're up for an adventure you'll never forget, I recommend a library. My now-expired Reader's Card to the Bodelian Libraries is among my proudest possessions, and I can't wait for a chance to renew it. My students next summer will be developing research interests of their own and applying for Reader's Cards at the Bodelian so



Dr. Kay J. Walter, University of Arkansas at Monticello, atop the Library building with Radcliffe Camera visible in the background

that we can enjoy the experience of handling rare books and manuscripts together. Everyone thrilled by this idea should join us! Contact me for more information as plans develop and stay tuned for updates about next year's travel seminar to the United Kingdom as details emerge:

walter@uamont.edu



Updates

on Publications and Conferences

The first issue of *Arkansas English Journal*, our new peer-reviewed publication is available now, and papers have been chosen for inclusion in our second issue. The website will soon display the results of hard work by our editor, Janine Chitty, and her editorial board. Help spread the word about this link to our best practices, the results of our current research, and our professional musings.

<http://arkansas-english-journal.weebly.com/>

Several of our board members will be making presentations at NCTE in Atlanta this year, and our affiliate representatives will be receiving awards on our behalf. Now is the time to start making plans to attend 17-20 November. Join the growing family of English and Language Arts teachers from around the country who stand together to support literacy education.

<http://www.ncte.org/annual>

AEJ

NCTE

ACC 2016



The 2016 Arkansas Curriculum Conference

The Little Rock Marriott and Statehouse Convention Center

More than 200 Teacher-led professional sessions-- interactive and engaging!

Multiple Social Events—Come Network and Meet Other Educators!

Exhibit Hall, Door Prizes, & Organization Luncheons

NOVEMBER 3-4

TRANSFORMING STUDENT-FOCUSED EDUCATION

This conference is special....

The unique intention of this conference is to bring together educators from the different content areas to explore new teaching ideas and deepen content knowledge, but to also interact and network with teachers from other areas. This opens the space to talk about integration, collaboration, service learning, and inquiry-driven projects. The leaders of ACSS, ACTELA, ACTM, ASTA, and their executive boards know how important this is! Join us!

The registration link is on **Facebook**. Just search for "Arkansas Curriculum Conference."



Conference Partners

[ACSS, ACTELA, ACTM, ASTA, Arkansas Department of Education, Arkansas State Teachers Association, and the STEM Centers for Math and Science Education](#)

Featured Author

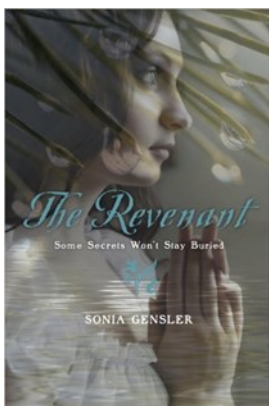


Author photo credit: Eden Wilson Photography

SONIA GENSLER is the author of two young adult novels, *The Revenant* (Knopf, 2011) and *The Dark Between* (Knopf, 2013), and a new novel for middle grade readers, *Ghostlight* (Knopf, Fall 2015). Things that go bump in the night are just the beginning in *Ghostlight*, when a summer film project in a frightening old house becomes a real-life ghost story.

As a child growing up in rural Tennessee, Sonia dreamed of teleporting to medieval Europe to experience firsthand the bygone days of chivalry and romance. When international time travel proved impractical, she compensated by devouring books and making up soap operas with her friends. Countless recess periods were devoted to swapping stories, most of which featured epic romances with favorite celebrities. This tradition continued through high school.

As an adult, Sonia experimented with an assortment of professions suitable for a dreamy bookworm—museum interpreter, historic home director, bookseller, perpetual graduate student—before finally deciding to share her passion for stories through teaching. She taught literature and writing to young adults for ten years, and she still thinks fondly of her days in the classroom now that she writes full time. Sonia currently lives in Oklahoma with her husband, and together they spend the summers in England. For more information, visit soniagensler.com



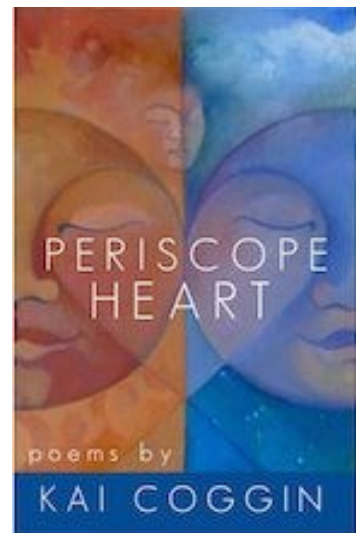
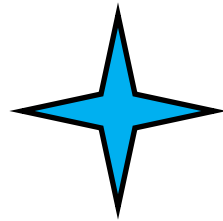
Sonia Gensler will speak at the ACTELA Luncheon on What Writing Has Taught Me about Young Readers. Reserve your tickets for the Luncheon when you register for ACC 2016:

http://arkansascurriculumconference.pbworks.com/w/page/79024613/Arkansas_Curriculum_Conference

Featured Poet

The Arkansas poet, **Kai Coggin**, will also be joining us at ACC this year. Visit her website for information about her and her work:

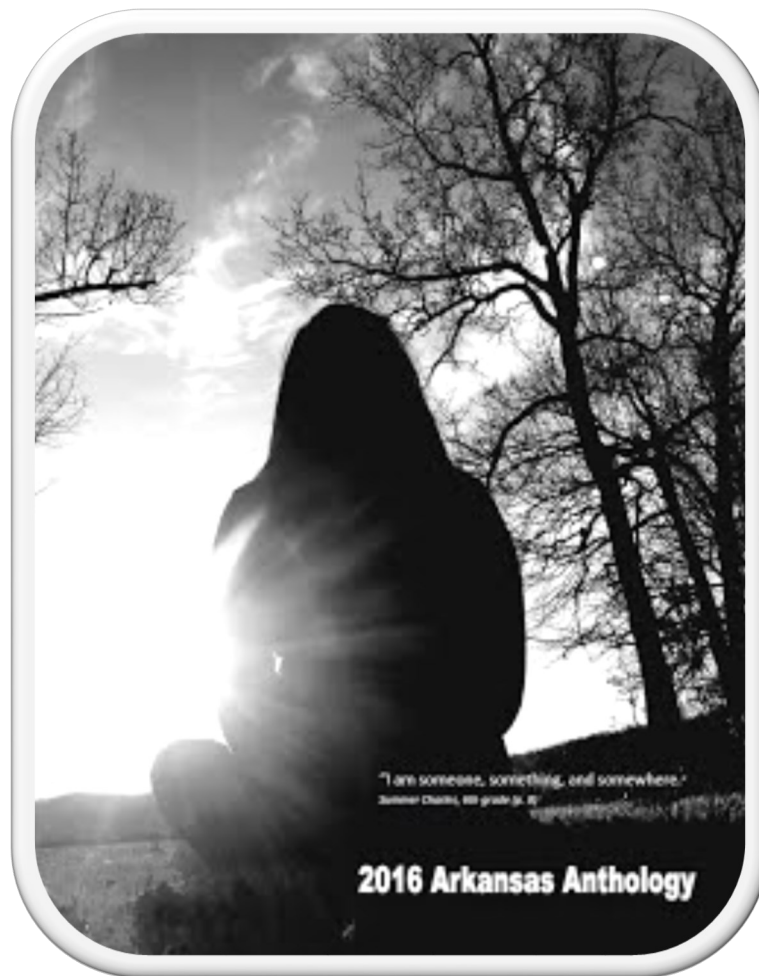
[HTTP://WWW.KAICOGGIN.COM/](http://www.kaicoggin.com/)



In her session at ACC, **Kai Coggin** will tell us the powerful and moving story of how she used poetry to bring a famous literary figure (Sandra Cisneros) to her classroom and the impact the experience had on her students.

Arkansas Anthology

2016



This year's issue of *Arkansas Anthology* is available online. The Call for Submissions for *2017 Arkansas Anthology* is now open here: <http://www.actela.org/home/anthology>

Encouraging and honoring the
writing of Arkansas students and
teachers

Honors and Awards

- ◇ ACTELA has been notified that we will receive an Affiliate of Excellence Award at NCTE 2016. Our peer-reviewed journal, our newsletter, and our motivated members all contributed to this achievement, so thanks for doing your part!
- ◇ We have secured funding for a second Teach for the Dream grant. Last year's Teacher for the Dream, Brycial Williams, made application for a Donald H. Graves Writing Award. Our fingers are crossed for you, Brycial!
- ◇ ACTELA has been awarded one of two NCTE Affiliate Multicultural Programming Awards to be presented this year.
- ◇ Dr. Dixie Keyes, our past president, has been promoted to Full Professor. Congratulations, Scholar!
- ◇ Several of our board members are applying for promotion this academic year: Dr. Janine Chitty, Dr. Jeff Wittingham, and Dr. Kay Walter are among them. Our best wishes are with you all as you prepare your portfolios for review. If you, too, are applying for promotion, let us know so we can lend our encouragement to your efforts.
- ◇ Tyler McBride is working on National Board certification and working with the Northwest Arkansas Writing Project as part of a grant from the National Writing Project called the New Pathways to Leadership Design Challenge. The grant paid for travel to an NWP meeting in Washington, D.C. this March, and it will pay for the NWP Annual Meeting this coming November in Atlanta. The grant is seeking ways to connect more early career teachers with the Writing Project to use leadership and involvement in the Writing Project to keep early career teachers from leaving the profession. Tyler will





be presenting the results of his work at the NWP Annual Meeting and is hoping to apply for an extension of the grant to be able to craft something that could be replicable to NWP sites across the nation.

◇ Melinda Francis is National Board Certified. She is also working on an Educational Specialist degree in Curriculum and Building Administration.

◇ Britney Andrews anticipates graduating from UCA with a masters in Advanced Studies in Teacher Leadership!

◇ Jessica Herring became a Google Certified Educator over the summer. She also received the ISTE Technology in Action award for a project called Coding in the Literature Classroom, and she is an Apple Distinguished Educator.

Service Learning at Brantwood

When students from the University of Arkansas at Monticello visited the home of John Ruskin during their English Travel Seminar: British Authors, they were not just ordinary tourists. The students got a hands-on experience working in the experimental gardens and grounds of the estate. Ruskin, the Victorian polymath, was an avid environmentalist, geologist, artist, and social critic in addition to being a famous and influential writer. His love of his Lake District home in Coniston is well-documented in his autobiography, *Praeterita*, and the upkeep of his estate requires the devoted efforts of combined crews of workers. The visiting Arkansans tidied the historic foreshore where Donald Campbell was clocked breaking the world speed record, took tea in the private chambers where they met staff members, built organic plant supports for budding flowers in the Professor's Garden, and then enjoyed a personal welcome by the director, Howard Hull, before touring the house. Months later, the students still describe this day as the most meaningful experience of their course.

Want to hear more? Some of the students will be joining the Service Learning in English session at ACC to discuss their experience. Visit the session to meet them.



Service Learners from UAM with their teacher and the Gardeners at Brantwood

Global Perspective

During my travels in Great Britain this summer, I met an artist and literacy activist who told me the story of his time advocating for the immigrant populations in London. His experiences reveal creative efforts to empower English as Another Language learners through using literacy to enhance their quality of life and employability. The success of his programs and the inspiration of his approaches make his view worthy of our reflection. Dr. Kay Walter

The Power of Language Study with Immigrant Populations

by

Paul Jackson

I was kindly asked to contribute a small piece to the ACTELA on my experiences working on projects and policies aimed at improving the educational attainment and life chances of deprived and marginalised individuals and communities in England.

I should first of all point out that I am not an English teacher--or even a teacher. My skills developed more from a lifetime of providing counselling, advice, and guidance to people living in inner cities.

This narrative will mostly describe the conditions and issues we faced working in east London for the most part in an Employment and Training capacity for adults.

The United Kingdom, while relatively small in area geographically, has a population of some 65.5 million people and for a number of historical reasons has a very diverse population both ethnically, culturally, and in terms of first language. For instance, in London in the inner city boroughs of central London, at least 50% of children in school have a first language other than English and there are probably more than 200 dialects and languages spoken by children in their homes. This does not necessarily mean that these children are not fluent in English, although clearly many recent arrivals may not be. Quite often the parents and grandparents of these children may, and often do, have a need to acquire better English language fluency, both for their own employment prospects but also to become better able to cope with the complexities of modern life.

My experiences working for over ten years



in London's East End were as what was then called an "Inner City Officer". I was then employed by our Employment Service which had responsibility for finding work for unemployed people. The Employment Service had the statutory responsibility for making sure that people claiming unemployment benefit were fit and able to work; were looking for work; and were available for work. Most of this was conducted through a network of Job Centres where people who were unemployed were required to report regularly to be assessed and matched to jobs. The Government of the time recognised that in the inner city many people had employment issues that were complex because of the nature of poverty, deprivation, poor housing, and lack of education and language skills. My job then was to work out in the community, making contact with individuals, community organisations, charities, and other educational and training initiatives to try and reach out to isolated people and those who were somehow falling through the net.

During the period I worked as an Inner City Officer there were a number of targeted initiatives aimed at improving particularly deprived areas. I was for a long while attached to a "City Challenge" project that was set up to look at encouraging employment and enterprise, improving housing, and creating training and education opportunities. One of the most effective ideas here was the setting up of a "GATE" project which was a drop-in centre for anyone who wanted to come in under no obligation for as long or as short as they liked. At the GATE project were a number of highly skilled

advisers who could help with job search, applications, and so on. We also had a dedicated room where people could attain computer skills or simply just be supported to use the computers to do job search, fix up their resumes, or even do their homework.

A key principle in the ethos of the GATE project was



Paul Jackson at work on the GATE Project to Empower Immigrants through Language Study

Mission Statement of GATE

AS A CLIENT OF GATE YOU CAN EXPECT:

GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT TO HELP YOU

- to make realistic decisions about your next steps
- to explore comprehensive information about available opportunities
- to understand and assess the available opportunities
- to assess your own potential
- to choose wisely from all the options open to you
- to make and implement an agreed plan of action

GUIDANCE WHICH IS

- impartial and centred on your interests - educational, personal, social and vocational
- unbiased towards particular education, training or employment
- available to you whatever your ethnic background, religious beliefs, abilities or gender
- impartial and centred on your interests - educational, personal, social and vocational

GUIDANCE AND ASSISTANCE FROM STAFF

- who treat you with respect and ensure confidentiality
- who are well trained and qualified
- who are aware of developments in education, training and employment and can advise you appropriately
- who are part of local networks of experts and will collaborate to ensure you receive the best possible help
- who will argue your case where relevant, to policy makers and other bodies
- who will feed back information about need and demand direct to planners and providers of opportunities

GUIDANCE PROVIDED WHICH

- offers you the chance to comment on the quality of the service you have received
- welcomes your suggestions for improvement
- provides access to a complaints procedure



the freedom for people to come and go as they wished. This was essential in providing an environment of trust and eventually building up each individual's self respect and desire to progress. The project acted as a portal through which we could then refer people to other targeted help—including a range of English classes which were pitched at different levels from the basic to much more complex and demanding professional and business literacy classes. It was recognised that a one-size-fits-all English language provision was often counterproductive.

This area of London had a high percentage of people of Bangladeshi heritage and many Somali people as well as many other small ethnic groups and white British. The ethnic make-up of the staff of the project reflected many of the community groups and there was also a deliberate gender mix across all responsibilities. A bonus of the project is that people from these different communities would mix together out of necessity, and it helped in many small ways and large to de-mystify differences and make connections and foster positive relationships.

The majority of Bangladeshi people in Britain come from the Sylhet region which is a mostly rural and quite traditional area. One of the issues we wanted to address was that many of these Sylheti Bangladeshi women were isolated in their homes; their husbands were often at work and they often would be housebound, unless they could be accompanied by other male relatives, in the Islamic tradition. Many of these women had no opportunities to learn English. There were two innovative projects that were started while I was there. One was a “healthy cooking” initiative (type 2 diabetes is a disproportionate problem in this community); the other was a sewing skills initiative. Both of these used Bangladeshi female advisors and teachers who worked hard to identify and make contact with these isolated women through holding outreach sessions in mosques, doctors surgeries, various markets, and so on. Once the women signed up for the classes they of course were exposed to opportunities to learn English while they worked in an environment was a supportive, non-threatening space.

We also had some success reaching out to disaffected youth many of whom had left school early and were members of various street gangs. This was a more difficult proposition, but youth workers would make attempts to engage with these (mostly) young men and gradually we would find these gang members turning up at the project. Often these visits would initially be quite disruptive but our approach was always to be scrupulously polite and positive, and gradually this began to pay dividends as we saw some of these young men returning for more specific advice or bringing in relatives that they thought we could help—even if initially it was just to



Underground Train 1974 by Paul Jackson

sort out letters from the doctor or the landlord.

My experience in this field helped me appreciate the complexity of people's lives. Sometimes to gain any progress with education and life you have to unlock or address a range of other connected issues. These may be housing, language, dependency on drugs or alcohol, health, mental health or disability, nutrition, transport, and mobility. Sometimes it is sheer and abject poverty. There are also many issues such as lack of role models, no history of reading or books in a family, and so on. Simply running a class or service without trying to understand the fundamental obstacles that many people face before they even come through the door is rarely sufficient. It does require a great deal of imagination, commitment and flexibility, and a recognition that

sometimes the very first victories may seem tiny, like arriving on time for three sessions in a row, but they are all significant and should be recognised.

Looking back on this time I am proud that we were collectively able to provide some life-changing interventions to help people on the road to realising their full potential. Projects such as these are often set up with no promise of long term funding. Expertise, trust, local knowledge of communities and how they work is often lost as soon as this type of project is wound up. This can be a significant loss as even a short hiatus means that many of the people with the skills and experience--and contacts--have moved on elsewhere and the whole process needs to be built up again from scratch.



City of Tiny Lights by Paul Jackson

More views of Paul Jackson's artwork are available on flickr here:

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/92943860@N00/>

What's New?

Our next issue of the newsletter will feature innovations in methodology, strategy, or approach we are implementing in our classrooms this year. Share your experiments with us by sending descriptions of your innovations and their results to our newsletter editor, Dr. Kay Walter.



Bright Ideas Wanted

Have ideas you'd like to discuss in our newsletter?
Send them to our newsletter editor at walter@uamont.edu

Email Contacts for Questions/Comments

Membership	jeffw@uca.edu
Anthology Submissions	ARAnthology@gmail.com
Teacher Initiatives	oliverc@conwayschools.net
Newsletter	walter@uamont.edu