

The English Pub

ACTELA's Newsletter

Arkansas Council of Teachers of English and Language Arts



Differences
Giving children an awareness of learning differences or disabilities and impairments is part of how we help them grow into compassionate adults. Here's a video about children learning from an adult with a hearing impairment: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hrgqs4MmK3U> What learning challenges do you accommodate in your classrooms, and how do you teach your students to navigate differences like these?

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Letter from the President

Hello ACTELA,

I've sat at my desk on multiple occasions to gather my thoughts for this letter. Invariably, I was called away to extinguish all manner of metaphorical fires. At the height of my frustration, it occurred to me that this must be the pervading mindset of so many teachers this year—always pulled away from one task to another and feeling as though there is never enough time to complete a project fully. But rather than burrow into my frustrations, I have taken a step back and refocused on the potential future of ACTELA.

It's no secret that COVID altered the way we approached life for a while, and living in isolation for so long made it difficult to get back to "the way things used to be." Or at least, that has been the case with me. Stepping into the role of ACTELA President during such a time has been... clunky at times while I work to find my footing. However, I do feel as though things are beginning to take shape.

We have a great group of officers working to reinvigorate our organization. We have begun to look at opportunities to provide conferences and

training for English and Language Arts teachers and to revive the newsletter and the anthology series. In current times, I believe that these supports are vital to our world of literary education.

There have been greater demands and expectations for change over the last couple of years regarding ELA instruction, as well as changes and evaluations for our universities' educator preparation programs. I think there will always be debates between philosophies, curriculum, and instruction, and those debates can interfere with our work and wear us down. However, I know that I am surrounded by great educators in ACTELA who are passionate about literacy. It is my hope that our passion can be a source of support for all educators.

In the meantime, practice self-care: meditate, go on walks, exercise, or totally immerse yourselves in a great book. Surround yourself with your circle of positive people. Take a deep breath and exhale negative thoughts. ACTELA may not have all the answers, but we are working diligently to find ways to help.

Dawn Bessee, ACTELA President



We're connecting!

Visit our website: www.actela.weebly.com and LIKE our newsletter!

Email our editor: walter@uamont.edu

Friend us on Facebook:
 Arkansas Council of Teachers of English Language Arts

And Join ACTELA! [Become a member.](#)





Editorial Note

by Dr Kay J. Walter

University of Arkansas at Monticello

How grueling the task has seemed to endure years of silence! Computer struggles, COVID concerns, *ennui*, and many other obstacles have intervened in well-meaning attempts to keep our news current, but in the end the victory is ours. It's not that we haven't been productive. In this issue you'll find evidence of our work. Feel free to explore the hyperlinks to conference webpages and online recordings of presentations. But let's not spend all our time looking back and shaking our heads about the consequences of COVID. Let's look forward too.

We have lots of new ideas to share, from at home and afar. Grover Welch offers insight on ATLAS and explores new efforts in assessment. Our bilingual piece offers a glimpse at the Japanese language in print. Our Global Perspective takes us to explore schooling in South Africa.

There are reflections on instruction and teaching suggestions. Dr Ron Sitton shares his best hints for successful interviews. Dr Kathleen Shahan considers her years (and love) of education. Others of us tell about recent conference presentations. All of us wish your ideas and experiences were represented among these pages as well.

Make no mistake. This issue is a whopper, the biggest we've ever published. We have a lot of excitement to share about what we've accomplished, and there's more to come. Does any of us ever accomplish all we feel we should? Still, without your news, the picture remains incomplete. Perhaps you can imagine yourself contributing something for next month. Try it! Before I visited New York City, it was hard to imagine myself posing for a photo at the John Lennon memorial in Central Park, but now it is easy for me. Once you get involved, imagining your contribution to ACTELA's work will be easy too.

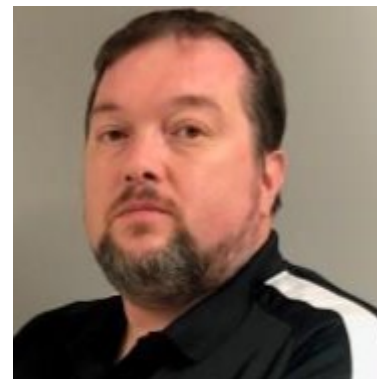
Next month's issue will focus on differences. If you happen to agree with our ideas or not to find yourself completely represented here, if you have a unique or a common perspective on any ELA topic, if you don't see your name in this newsletter, **write to us**.

We welcome your input, your feedback, your questions, your concerns, your comments, and your pictures. Particularly, we welcome your voice. If you're not a member of ACTELA yet, come join us. Our time of isolation and distancing is over. We are eager to join together in a call for excellence in ELA instruction and for preeminence in all literacy efforts. I can't imagine our song being complete without you.



The State Provides an ATLAS to Plan for Future Success

by Grover Welch, Newport Special Schools—High School



I remember first sitting in a security briefing while deployed with the 1/63 Armor to Macedonia. It ended with a discussion on noise discipline, and we spent an hour wrapping zippers, tools, and clips in tape to avoid an instance where we became a detriment or, worse, a casualty. I am often reminded of this occasion when I plan district testing at my school. The stakes always seem so high, and my biggest concern is always making sure that my plan doesn't flounder because of the little things that come with the endeavor. This year, I find myself engrossed in the intricacies of a new testing system that has yet to prove itself and in the position of training teachers to complete new procedures radically different from past assessments. Just as any system requires checking, education requires us to reexamine our approach to pedagogy and curricula continually. The new [Assessment of Teaching and Learning Achievement in Schools](#) (ATLAS) test system will be the mark to measure how well I and other teachers are at moving students forward.

In a significant stride toward refining educational assessment practices, the Arkansas [Division of Elementary and Secondary Education](#) (DESE) has rolled out a new test system to foster a more reliable evaluation framework for Arkansas's educational standards. ATLAS marks a departure from conventional assessment methodologies, signifying the state's commitment to continually enhancing its educational landscape.

The rationale behind this transformative shift stems from a concerted effort



Not all students have the same test-taking skills.

to address the limitations of previous testing paradigms. Recognizing an imperative to align assessments more closely with evolving educational goals, ATLAS offers a comprehensive evaluation mechanism reflecting students' mastery of state-mandated curricular outcomes. ATLAS underscores a strategic move towards ensuring equitable educational outcomes for all learners.

Central to the implementation of ATLAS is the partnership with Cambium Assessment, a leading assessment solutions provider renowned for its expertise in designing robust testing infrastructures. Leveraging Cambium's proficiency in

assessment design and administration, Arkansas aims to instill greater confidence in its testing protocols while upholding the integrity of educational standards; by collaborating with Cambium, DESE endeavors to harness cutting-edge assessment technologies to optimize the efficacy and reliability of the ATLAS test system.

The imperative to assess educational systems annually underscores a fundamental commitment to fostering continuous improvement, particularly for at-risk communities such as special education students and socioeconomically oppressed populations. By routinely evaluating educational outcomes, states can identify areas of improvement, tailor interventions to address specific needs, and mitigate disparities in access to quality education. This emphasis on annual assessment serves as a barometer of educational progress and underscores a proactive approach toward nurturing inclusive learning environments. Implementing ATLAS, Arkansas endeavors to provide educators, parents, and stakeholders with a more comprehensive understanding of students' academic proficiency, enhancing transparency and accountability within the education system.

Test validity is a cornerstone of Arkansas's assessment framework, underscoring the importance of ensuring that assessments accurately measure the intended educational outcomes. Validity, as articulated by the American Educational Research Association, refers to the extent to which a test measures what it claims to measure. In Arkansas's educational landscape, the validity of assessments holds profound implications for informing instructional practices, guiding policy decisions, and promoting accountability across the educational spectrum. By prioritizing test validity, Arkansas endeavors to uphold the integrity and credibility of its assessment practices, thereby fortifying public trust in the educational system.

On the more recent past assessments, Arkansas embraced the ACT Aspire's nationally referenced system, which offers a standardized benchmark for assessing student proficiency across multiple states. While the ACT Aspire provides valuable insights into students' academic preparedness nationally, the transition towards state-specific referencing empowers



Every classroom is unique.

Arkansas to tailor assessments to its unique educational context. Arkansas can glean more nuanced insights into students' progress by anchoring assessments within the state's educational framework.



We can now assess our students based on Arkansas practices.

One notable aspect of the new ELA standards is emphasizing a more inclusive approach to writing across all grade levels. Unlike previous standards that prescribed specific writing modes per grade, the new standards advocate for a diverse range of writing types at every grade level. This holistic approach to writing instruction allows students to

explore and engage with various forms of writing, fostering creativity, critical thinking, and communication skills essential for success in the 21st century.

As a teacher, I welcome the introduction of the ATLAS test system as a step toward enhancing educational assessment practices in Arkansas. Through collaborative efforts, a commitment to equity, and a focus on validity, Arkansas is poised to redefine educational assessment, ultimately empowering students to thrive and succeed in an ever-changing world. As a writer and educator, the emphasis on writing and literacy creates an opportunity to dig deep into the

nuances of pedagogy and curriculum development. Just as I learned in the past, a strong plan with proper preparation can win any day. So, I step out of my comfort zone as an educator and test administrator and look for those places where I need to address the obstacles to success. Guarding our students' chances to achieve is worthy of our best efforts.



“Arkansas is poised to redefine educational assessment”

ANNOUNCEMENTS, AWARDS, NEWS, AND NOTES

- ◆ At present, our visitor map records viewers from 38 nations outside the United States. Even during our silent years, we have had scores of people logging in to read our newsletter. We welcome you all! Summer and Fall after our last issue saw us add visitors from Bracknell, United Kingdom; Burleson, TX; Bakersfield, CA; Newport, KY; Leawood, KS; Yonkers, NY; Oakbrook, IL; Winnipeg, MB, Canada; Monticello, IL; and Mission, TX. During the past year, our map has added points of light which indicate readers in the following new spots: Carrollton and Athens, TX; Casa and Stuttgart, AR; and Missoula, MT; Spring Hill and Orlando, FL; Bastrop, LA; Bedminster, Bloomfield, Beach Haven, Sparta, and West Berlin, NJ; Millington, TN; Northbrook and Saint Joseph, IL; Royal Oak, MI; Cody, WY; Gulbarga, India; Mystic, CT; Salisbury and College Park, MD; Guadalupe, Mexico; Portugal; Blackduck, MN; Beverly, MA; and some indistinct locations in Europe. January 2024 saw new visitors from Cabot, AR and Chesapeake, VA. Thanks to everyone who is spreading the word! We invite you to share our newsletter with all the literacy enthusiasts you know and look forward to replying to your online comments.



- ◆ Your editor has been professionally productive over the past years while she was falling behind on newsletter responsibilities. She produced several articles for *Friends of Ruskin's Brantwood Newsletter* including these: "Fruitful Work in Arkansas," "About James Dearden: 1931-2021," and "Claiming the Prize with Ruskin." In addition, she published the *Extension Homemakers Council Yearbook for Drew County 2022-2023* and created

“Preserving Time,” a handout for the Educational Booth display of the 2022 Drew County Fair by Town and Country Quilters EHC. The booth won a purple Best of Show ribbon. Her “Birthday Tribute to Jim Spates” and “80th Birthday Tribute to Robert Hewison” are published online [here](#) and [here](#). Her review of Robert Hewison’s book, *Ruskin and his Contemporaries* is published in *Lifewriting Annual* [here](#).

- ◆ Your editor also presented professional papers in face-to-face meetings at several conferences including “The Moral Influence of Aunts” at the Faulkner & Ward Conference in Missouri, “Wilde Women” at the Victorian Institute’s Golden Jubilee in South Carolina, “Shakespeare Through Sonnets and Service Learning” at the UVA-Wise Medieval Renaissance Conference in Virginia, “What Reading Reveals” at the Arkansas Philological Association in Little Rock, “Responding to the Needs of World Literature Students: A Case Study” at this year’s virtual OE-AR+ Symposium, “[Relying on Ruskin: A Fulbright Scholar in Residence for UAM](#)” at the Ruskin Art Club in Los Angeles, and “Considering Veterans in the Composition Classroom: Assigning to Connect” at 8th Annual Southern Regional Composition Conference at Pulaski Tech.
- ◆ She collaborated with students and colleagues on other conference presentations. Her library friend, Elizabeth Parish, co-presented “Optimizing Connections: Personal and Pedagogical Benefits from Professor/Librarian Collaboration” at 2022 Arkansas Philological Association. The paper they co-authored was selected for publication in [Arkansas Libraries \(vol 80, nos 1-2\)](#), and it was chosen to receive the 2023 LaNell Compton Prize. “Aberations, Deviations, and Mutations in 19th

Basic membership in ACTELA begins at \$20. Student discounts and lifetime memberships are also available [here](#).



WHAT A BARGAIN!

Century British Literature” was a panel collaboration with undergraduate students for University of Arkansas Graduate Students in English 2022 Interdisciplinary Conference, and her students made presentations at the same conference in 2023. With instructors from Tennessee and Illinois, she made her debut presentation at Conference on College Composition and Communication in a virtual panel called Economy, Culture, Geography, Access, & Ethnicity: Eliminating Barriers to Embrace and Support Student Complexity. Her presentation title was “Assigning to Empower.”

- ◆ In addition to being productive in writing, Dr Walter hosted the 2022 Arkansas Philological Association Conference on-campus at University of Arkansas at Monticello as Program Chair. She was elected the Vice-President of that organization at the annual business meeting, and was promoted to President of the association at the 2023 meeting.
- ◆ ACTELA has approved a new slate of officers and board members to represent you. The following officers will serve for the next term: Dawn Bessee, President; Kay Walter, Vice-President; Sarah Winterberg, Treasurer; and Donna Wake, Secretary. At-large representatives include Braden Taylor, Joan Linnstaedter, Mindy Lynn, and Gina Bolick.
- ◆ Dr Kay Walter has taken part in numerous Ruskin Art Club virtual events over the past few years and is now a lifetime member of that organization.
- ◆ She is also a charter lifetime member and serves on the board of the Ruskin Society of North America.
- ◆ Have you wondered why *The English Pub* didn’t win an NCTE Newsletter of Excellence Award in 2021, 2022, or 2023? We didn’t apply! We plan to make a brave attempt to win one this year, but we’ll need your help. [Write our editor](#) and share your news and ideas. What have you been reading, writing, teaching, thinking, and telling lately?
- ◆ Dr Sarah Winterberg made an in-person presentation with virtual assistance by Dr Ann-Gee Lee, “Waiting to Exhale: Critical Empathetic Writing Pedagogy and the Mindfulness Connection” at the 2022 Arkansas Philological Association Conference, and they presented together again at the same organization’s 2023 meeting.
- ◆ Braden Taylor, former Editorial Assistant for *The English Pub*, chaired the 2023 Graduate Students in English Conference at U of A in Fayetteville in



Braden Taylor made a presentation of part of his Master's thesis at the 2022 Medieval/Renaissance UVA Conference at Wise.

April 2023. The conference theme was **LABOR AND WORK: WHAT IT WAS, WHAT IT IS, AND WHAT IT MIGHT BE**. Braden graduated with his Master of Arts degree in English in May 2023 and has accepted his first professional position as Student Life Coordinator for U of A Pulaski Technical College.

- ◆ Ashley King, another former Editorial Assistant, is midway through her second year of graduate study in the MA program at Arkansas State University in Jonesboro this spring. All our best wishes!

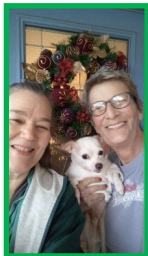
- ◆ A third former Editorial Assistant, Ana Rodriguez, presented "Creating Horror,

Producing Knowledge: Toni Morrison's *Beloved*" at the 2022 Arkansas Philological Association Conference. She too graduated from U of A last May and currently works as a Research Writer for UAMS.

- ◆ Dr Kay Walter successfully solicited an AEHC Mini-Grant to help fund the Keynote Address at the 2022 APA Conference by Dr Gabriel Meyer of California. Dr Meyer is Executive Director of the Ruskin Art Club, and he spoke on Inspiring Community Development and Ruskin's Law of Help.
- ◆ ACTELA partnered with UAFS to host a Charles Portis Symposium last fall and with UAM, UAFS, and Arkansas State University to host talks in Fort Smith and Jonesboro by Sarah Woods, the UAM 2023 Fulbright Scholar-in-Residence. Sarah is a world-famous dramatist and Systems Thinker who writes for the BBC.
- ◆ Your newsletter editor has received editorial acknowledgements in two new books, *Prisoners After War* by Jason A. Higgins, and *Medicine and Society in Late Eighteenth-Century Berkshire: The Commonplace Book of William Savory of Brightwalton and Newbury* edited by Dr Stuart Eagles.

You can see the cover of the Higgins book here and the Eagles book on page 14.

- ◆ Your newsletter editor has been selected as a new member of the Budget and Finance Committee of the Arkansas Library Association.
- ◆ Pictures of Dr Walter with the LaNell Compton Award at the 2023 Arkansas Library Association meeting illustrate pages 10 and 12 of *Arkansas Libraries Fall-Winter 2023 issue*.
- ◆ We are sad to announce the passing on New Year's Day of

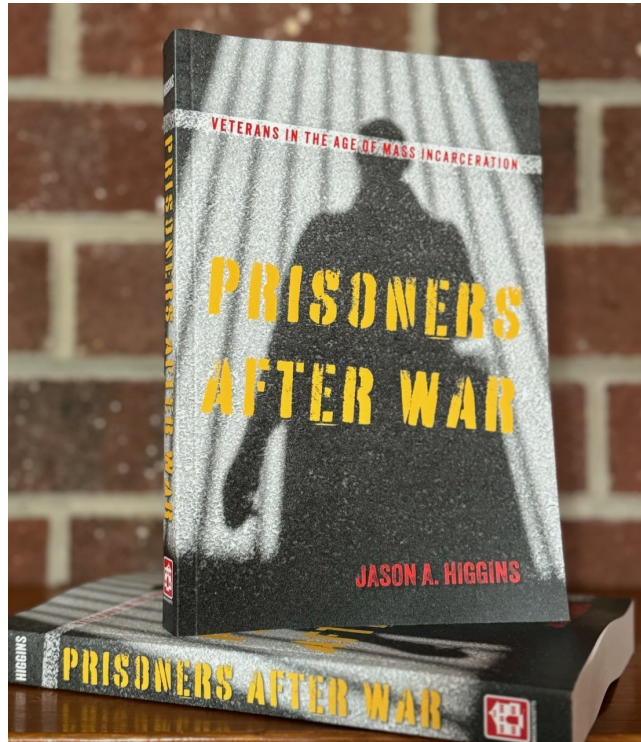


Carol Kiphart, fervent reader of our newsletter, prize-winning writer, and once a student of our editor at Blinn College in Brenham, TX. Rest in peace, Scholar.

Dr Kay Walter (Left) and Carol Kiphart (Right) with Kevin.



In our time of foreign political unrest, it may help to remember that global freedom was won by men and women we honor as our heroes



Jason Higgins, currently Digital Scholarship Coordinator for Virginia Tech Publishing and Assistant Professor of History, was a member of ACTELA as an undergraduate in Arkansas.

Where are your pictures?
If you have photos of interest to literacy enthusiasts, send them to decorate upcoming issues of our newsletter. Contact your newsletter editor for suggestions or submissions **here**.

NCTE NEWS

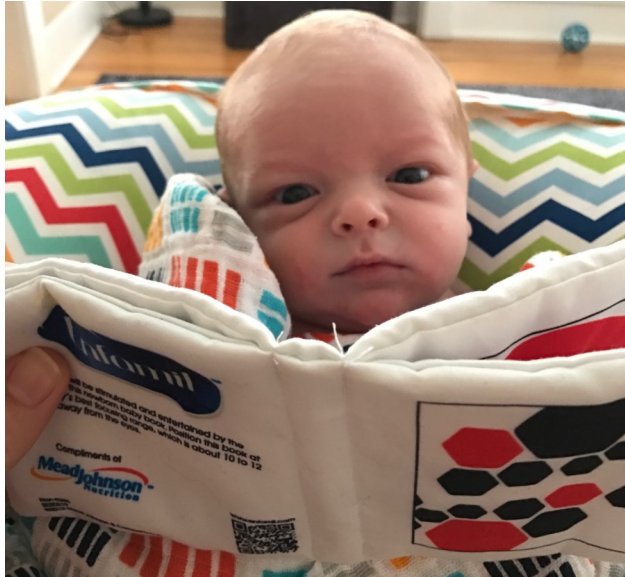
Boston is hosting the [2024 NCTE Convention](#), and proposals are in! It has been too long since we all gathered together to share ideas and make new friends. We look forward to seeing you there. Let us know if you will be presenting so we can cheer you on.



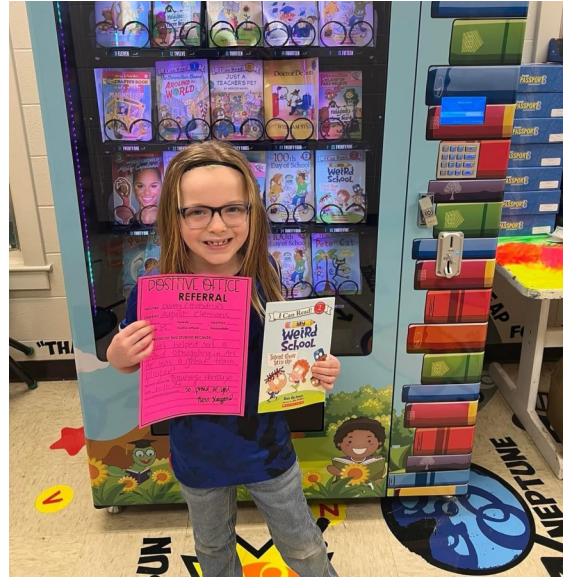
Heart, Hope, Humanity
November 21 to 24
Boston, MA

Contact [us](#) to collaborate on plans to attend.

Readers and Writers



August Clemons has been an avid reader from infancy. His baby sister is also an early reader. You can see a picture of her reading habits on page 13.



August's love of reading is not limited to infancy. He is growing into a young scholar. We'll keep watching to see his tastes in literature develop as he grows.

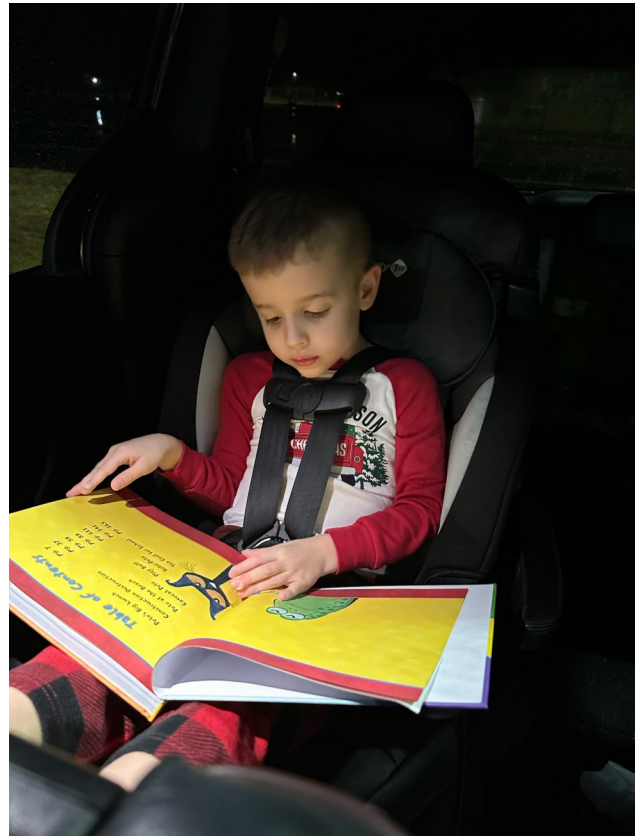


POINT OF PRIDE

Adam Clemons, August's father, was a student of your newsletter editor as an undergraduate at UAM. Isn't it awesome when our learners grow up to produce new readers and writers! You can see his daughter, along with other children, reading on page 13.



Evan Arce likes to dress as his favorite book character, Pete the Cat.



Eli Arce couldn't wait until he got home to begin reading the book he received Christmas Eve.



With twin readers, Grandmother Claudia Horton gets double the requests for stories.



Cate Clemons is learning to love books from her big brother, August. See page 12.



Boardmember Joan Linnstaedter has a colleague whose daughter and niece, Alivia in blue and Eryn in white, like to read together.



Medicine and Society in
Late Eighteenth-Century
Berkshire: The Commonplace
Book of William Savory of
Brightwalton and Newbury
Edited by Stuart Eagles

Our newsletter editor receives editorial acknowledgement in this book.



The spring semester offers several conference opportunities that are easily within driving distance. Among the ones you can attend with students are the interdisciplinary **LSUS Student Scholars Forum** in Shreveport, Louisiana for graduate and undergraduates and the **GSE Conference** at UA Fayetteville.

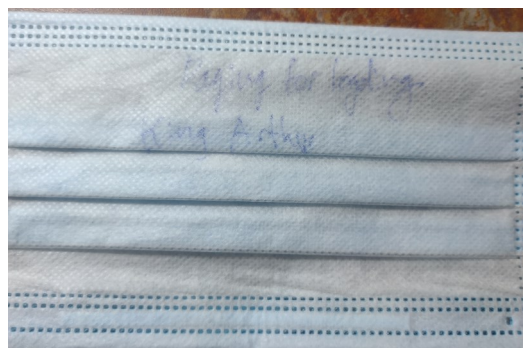
Notably talented dual credit students can use these opportunities as introductions to the fun and excitement of professional conferencing. If you know of other opportunities or for more information, contact your newsletter editor [here](#).



What does a first draft of your writing look like? I will write on anything when I have a hot idea. Here is a first draft of a collaborative paper a colleague and I are writing on Medieval B & Bs scripted on the inside of a medical mask we discarded. It says

Paying for Lodging / King Arthur

What's the strangest thing you've ever written notes on for a professional paper?



Arkansas Anthology

The webpage for *Arkansas Anthology* links to a dated issue. It's time to awaken from our collective slumber and champion our students' creativity again. The 2020 *Arkansas Anthology* (as well as archived past issues) is available to inspire your writers, and Aaron Hall is eager to answer questions and receive your submissions at ARAnthology@gmail.com.



AEJ 2024

The webpage for *Arkansas English Journal* may be a little out of date, but the publication is alive and well. Dr Sarah Winterberg is the current editor. She welcomes submissions [here](#). The pandemic arrested the production, but only temporarily. Now that we have emerged we look forward to the next issue of our peer-reviewed journal this year. *AEJ* is yet another sign that ACTELA is reanimating. Don't miss your chance to be part of the excitement. Submit your scholarship results! Similar to this newsletter, this publication is ours, and we want to celebrate and promote your ELA professionalism in Arkansas.



Read any
good books
lately?



With the pandemic behind us, Dickson Street Books in Fayetteville is finally open for browsing again. Do you have a favorite bookstore? Send us a photo!

How to Conduct a Successful Interview

By Dr Ron Sitton, Arkansas State University

Dr Ron Sitton teaches Journalism at A-State. He is a crackerjack at writing instruction, and I have known him to create published authors out of functionally illiterate students in a matter of weeks. Here, Ron gives us his best tips on conducting a successful interview. Share his ideas with your students and watch their skills at composing interview responses improve!

I make three assumptions about people conducting an interview. First, I expect they've conducted background research. Not doing so will stop many an interview short as the source will not take you seriously. Second, I expect they properly set up the interview through official channels (a call or an email will usually do). If necessary, schedule with an assistant but it's best to schedule with the primary source.

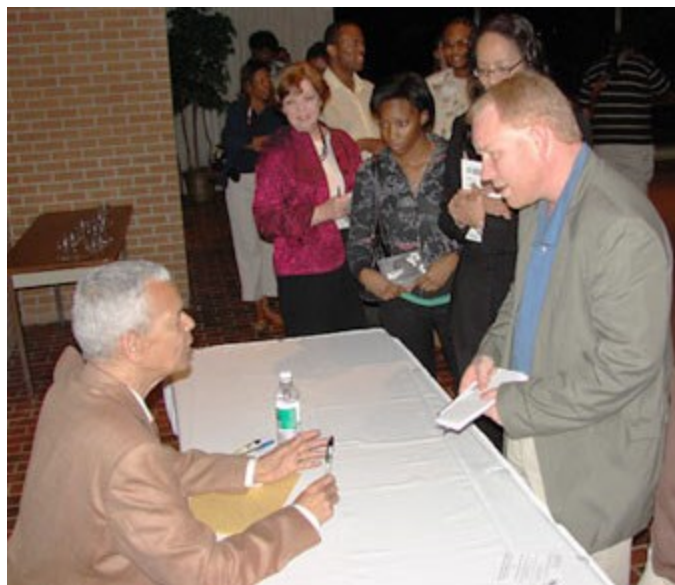
Finally, I expect the interviewer will conduct the interview *in person* as there's no way to truly verify who's at the other end of the phone or an email. No opportunity exists to observe facial expressions, body language or general surroundings. This typically leads to a dry report. Additionally, a source doesn't have to reply to email or answer the phone, but it's difficult to dismiss someone standing in front of you.

Granted, teleconference interviews during the pandemic have allowed us to see the other person, but a disconnect remains. You can often see this during roundtable discussions where one discussant is joining remotely; their responses may seem out of sync or technical glitches must be overcome. In short, it's always best to be in the same room with the interviewee.

Given those three preconditions, here are my Top 10 interviewing tips that I discuss with students considering the news reporting occupation.

Arrive early; SMILE; prepare to listen.

Being punctual shows you're ready; being early shows your eager; being late shows you do not value the source's time. Smiling increases the odds of a return smile, which can relax the source. But don't be too eager, i.e.,



be prepared to listen more than you speak. The interview is not about YOU or the questions you've prepared from your research. The interview is ALWAYS about the source. Listen and you'll learn something.

Write notes to back up recordings, and vice versa.

A student once interviewed members of a championship high school football team for an anniversary article, but lost the notes and the recordings. He had to interview everyone again. Batteries die, files get corrupted ... take written notes. Tell the source you're using the recorder to ensure you don't butcher their words.

Observe surroundings, body language and dress.

Details humanize subjects and items of mutual interest provide a potential icebreaker. If someone says they're a family-oriented individual, do they have indications of this in their immediate surroundings? Crossed arms indicate the source doesn't really want to speak. Discussing something the source obviously cares about should provide them the opportunity to relax and get into the right frame of mind to be questioned.

Verify spelling and pronunciation of name, titles.

This simple rule shows the subject you care about the details. If you cannot get this right, no one will expect you to have the correct material later. Assuming you know how something is spelled/said can ruin an otherwise great article/recording.

Use open-ended questions phrased to encourage opinions, feelings.

If you only ask yes/no questions, be prepared for yes/no answers. That won't fill time or column inches. Instead ask questions that require a longer response. Follow up with "How?" or "Why?" when appropriate. That said, use tact. For example, don't ask someone "How are you feeling?" after they've experienced a tragedy; they feel horrible and the audience doesn't need to hear it to know it.

Background research provides fodder for open-ended questions; clarify inconsistencies.

No one wants to answer questions you could have easily found with any research. Asking for clarifications indicates you're vitally interested in the subject. In addition to impressing the subject, your resulting publication will enlighten your audience.

List likely questions into similar groups.

Grouping allows a source to maintain a line of thought. Having a list of questions keeps you from running out during the interview. The exception to this rule can be found in the last rule.

Don't suggest answers; give the source time to answer. Use silence to your advantage.

Sources need time to gather thoughts. Suggesting answers may encourage a source to provide the answer they believe you want rather than the answer that you need. Don't blow the chance for a great quote. Silence encourages talking to fill the space; let the source do the talking.

Ask for examples to elicit anecdotes.

Anecdotes provide the spice to any interview as you can tell the story in their exact words. While some may come from your primary questions, others will occur during the aforementioned follow-up questions. It's better to have multiple anecdotes from which to choose than be stuck with dry copy. Your audience will thank you.

Save contentious questions for the end of the interview.

If the interview ends due to hurt feelings, at least you have the interview up to that point. Whether a good or bad interview, thank them for their time. If requested, I will provide a transcript of the interview but I never allow a source to see the story before it's published.

Will these 10 tips guarantee a great interview every time? No. Sometimes a source just does not want to be interviewed. Under such circumstances, I will often play to their pride by suggesting they were recommended as the ultimate source on the topic under question. Or I might explain that I wanted to give the other side of a story, which will be impossible if they're unwilling to be interviewed. Conducting the interview somewhere they feel comfortable helps more than nearly anything.

A note of caution: It's unethical at best to pay for an interview. Nor should you allow the source to purchase your meal or other items as it could be seen as a conflict of interest. I always tell the source I cannot take notes if I'm busy filling my face. I'll take a cup of coffee, but I'll purchase their coffee the next time I see them.

Interviewing is like any skill: the more you do it, the better you will do it. Best of luck!

Questions and comments for Dr Sitton
can be directed to your editor [here](#).

A True Story of Loving to Teach Social Studies

by Kathleen Shahan, EdD, NBCT Early & Middle Childhood Literacy
University of Arkansas at Monticello

NOW

Today, I had the opportunity and joy of reflecting on my teaching experiences in elementary school social studies thanks to a thoughtful question one of my students asked in class. I paraphrase it here: What did I do in my own teaching experience that was powerful, appropriate integration of other content in social studies? I know that reflecting helps me to process and remember my own teaching and learning experiences and additionally reminds me of what I want to pass on to my older students as we think about what powerful, goal-oriented, content-integrated social studies instruction looks like. So here is my “then” perspective that may be useful to share with first time or new teachers in the “now”. I was surprised at how much of what we did then could still be relevant in our current educational climate and even within COVID19 teaching and learning limitations. Here’s my true story.

MY SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT THEN

Beginning in 1992, basically until I left the classroom to work as a literacy specialist, I had the most challenging job I have ever known. I was a first grade teacher. I taught in a traditionally high performing and testing urban school with a good mix of socioeconomic status, race & ethnicity, class reading and developmental levels, and expectations from all stakeholders. It was truly a high pressure job teaching first grade in this school. My own children were among the students, and they too felt the pressure to perform academically. On one hand I had the highly score- and test-conscious wealthy parents with mom at home to help who always desired more to do. On the other hand I had equally caring parents who worked three jobs and struggled to meet their family’s basic needs helping their sometimes crying child study a spelling list with 20 multisyllabic words pulled entirely out of context (not appropriate then or now). There were all types of parenting situations in between those, and I took time to know my stakeholders. Any of this ring a bell?

MY YOUNGER STUDENTS THEN

I had students with challenges of serious behavior problems that interfered with learning, physical disabilities and challenges, and children experiencing reading difficulties, some of which were yet to be diagnosed formal disabilities. Still there were more who lacked experience with both oral and written language at home and needed intensive classroom intervention with concepts of print and developing a sense of story. I mustn’t leave out our students who just as importantly were operating on individual levels as a fourth or fifth grade reader in decoding and comprehension and needed

challenging, yet developmentally appropriate reading enrichment opportunities. A quadrant of the class would have been considered to be technically on-grade level without known circumstances to prevent them from learning or failing to progress without appropriate instruction and practice. Some of these students' situations may be familiar to you in your classrooms now.

MY YEARS AS A NEW TEACHER SITUATION THEN

I was a first year teacher lucky enough to have two master teachers in my grade level willing to guide me through every aspect of teaching reading and the classroom management they so, so skillfully exhibited every day! They basically "took me to raise" as the saying goes. If they had not, I would have floundered under that kind of pressure. I could remember nothing that I learned from my prestigious professors except the award winning children's literature lists and bibliographies. It was with my colleagues that I learned all the nuances of teaching reading to all my children. I hope this reflects the support all new teachers are getting in their schools as well. If it isn't, keep asking for it.

IN REGARD TO SOCIAL STUDIES TEACHING THEN

(An UNTESTED subject then and now). The standards-based movement was beginning in 1992-1993. I was expected to teach the social studies standards but integrate them *strongly with literacy* (the TESTED subject). It is probably much the same now if it's taught at all. I say this based on how hard it is for a substantial number of higher education students to recall the facts and minutia included in today's Social Studies Praxis Exam. Who remembers that anyway? I had desirable integration of other content areas in my social studies instruction and some probably less desirable. One thing I remember well was the use of Readers' Theater and whole group chanting or choral reading of powerful and significant poetry. How could it possibly go wrong? It did take a lot of thinking and planning to make it work with all the levels in my class; but most assuredly I am certain almost all students loved the content and the process.

MY MATERIALS AND STRATEGIES THEN

I literally gathered a three inch binder of levels and topics available at the time in Readers' Theater skits. This was before the massive flood of internet educational resources and materials. The same went for the choral reading of poetry. There were scripts and poems with topics from around the world and for the most part intentionally chosen to support our content and culturally reflect our world's different perspectives. I used a gradual release of responsibility approach, unless I was just having so much fun saying it with them that we continued to say it together to the end. We used sound effects with bells, whistles, doors closing for whatever was in the poem or script. The key for us was to keep instruction novel, surprising, and engaging for a first grader's attention span; you can sometimes still see this

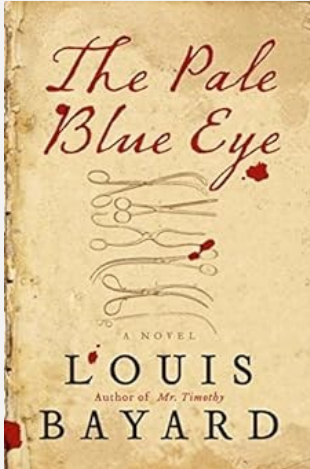
in my teaching approach now. I differentiated by making role assignments, changing up the amount of in class practice time as needed, and with select peers helping and working together. Scripts were sent home to all students with the understanding in the back of my mind that some families did not have enough time to spend on this, so families would need their materials for an extended period. I included my (subtle or so I thought) support during class practice and presentation for specific students such as those with reading difficulties, shyness, or lack of confidence, and also for those having attention challenges. I knew if a student really wanted a role, and even when it was slightly above his/her independent level, I would allow it with a caution that it could take a lot of practice before it could have the intonation and fluency required for theater or presentation. Strong internal desire will motivate some students and help them step up to a challenge in reading. Much like the Harry Potter books that were challenging to read but doable with minimal support if the reader's motivation level was very high. I provided my box of Lysoled Goodwill and class donated household items as props to add razzle dazzle and make the performance more realistic and fun. To make the work more relevant after the novelty wore off, we invited other classes, parents, and administrators to attend our performances. The outside audience members bumped up students' responsibility and accountability levels as well.

FINAL THOUGHTS FOR NOW

I want you to reflect on the fact that we are in an educational world where you may have to carve out and insert fun and interest in social studies or any subject area with integration of other content and the transfer of tested skills. This may be accomplished through the use of appropriate humor and the novelty aspect of changing content, process, and product along with a growing knowledge base of what works and what doesn't work for you. Just today in another conversation with my colleague Mrs. Wanda Jackson about our first years of teaching I was reminded that the idea of continuing self-improvement was true then and is true today. "When you learn more, you do more." You won't find yourself feeling like you have to apologize to your first classes of students if you promise to keep doing more to improve your own teaching and learning as each year passes. Reflection as I have experienced twice today, is the KEY to processing the "then" and in understanding the "now" and as we are preparing for the "future" in our wonderful teaching profession.



From the Library



The Pale Blue Eye: A Novel <https://www.louisbayard.com/pale-blue-eye>

Author: Louis Bayard

Publisher: HarperCollins Publishers (first edition)

Date: 3 May 2006

432 pp. \$17.99. ISBN 9780060733971

Currently available in hardcover, paperback, audiobook, and Kindle.

The Pale Blue Eye is a historical mystery written by Louis Bayard as his fourth book. Set in New York at the West Point Academy in 1830, this novel creatively evokes a sense of foreboding in the reader. The story is told through written narratives by the main character, Augustus Landor, as he tries to solve the murder and mutilation of a cadet. He is brought out of retirement from being a New York City Police Detective, by the administration of West Point, to provide his experience in solving difficult mysteries. The fate of West Point Academy rests on whether Mr. Landor can solve the crime quietly before anyone else finds out what has occurred on campus. These political machinations make the plot more sinister as the characters struggle with keeping the other cadets safe while searching for a masochistic killer who may be among them. His assistant on this investigation is none other than Edgar Allan Poe, who provides a fascinating and poetic turn to each event.

This Agatha Christies-que novel was a fun read for this historical fiction fan. The use of scenery and setting immediately pulls the reader into an ominous environment where nothing is as it seems and anything can happen at any time. Edgar Allan Poe's appearing as a character initially seemed an unnecessary gimmick to this reader, but his plotline worked well for the story. This novel was adapted into a movie produced by Netflix in 2022. Louis Bayard is a talented writer who excels at creating moods to carry his audience through the story to a shocking conclusion. He weaves the atmosphere, politics, and sanity of the characters into a compelling theme that will stay with readers long after they finish the book. Thus, *The Pale Blue Eye* is an excellent addition to any library collection.



This review is provided by Elizabeth Parish, formerly an ACTELA member and currently Director of library Services at Louisiana Christian University in Pineville, LA.



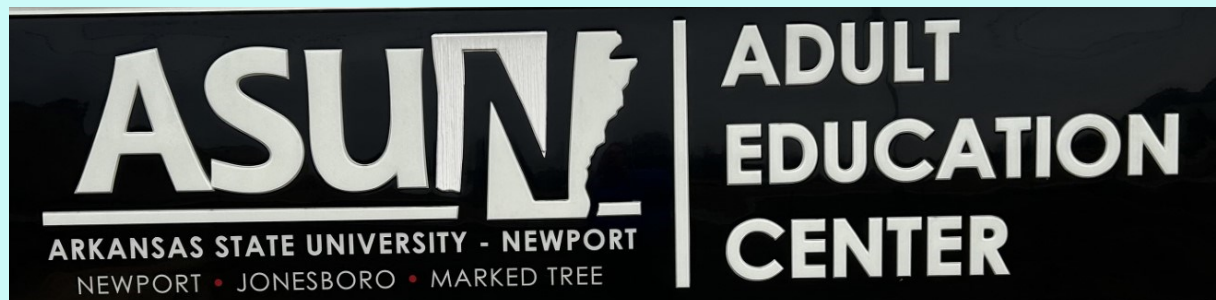
Community Involvement in Literacy

Lessons Learned as an Adult Basic Education Instructor
by Gregory Slayton, Arkansas State University –
Newport



I transitioned to a full-time twelve-month forty-hour per week Assistant Professor of Adult Education on January 2, 2023. I had become disillusioned with the stagnant trajectory of my career as an Assistant Professor of Mathematics at the General Education side of my institution. Since the Fall semester of 2021, I had been serving as a tutor three evenings each week for the Adult Education program. I liked the students. I enjoyed awakening their joy of learning. In reflecting on completing my first year in the program, I have learned more about education than I did in the previous twenty-six years of my career. I attribute this to the students I have met here. Most of my efforts are with students classified as ABE L1's and L2's, and this is my first experience with a class at this ability level. Let me share a few lessons I have learned from them.

We all suffered through a predictable getting-to-know-each-other phase before they accepted I was here for them. A couple weeks later, some shared that they were scared because I was a Math Professor over at the college. They think



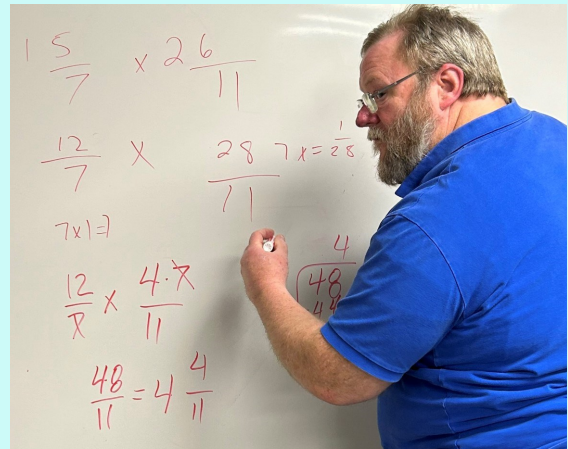
that means I am smart, and they were worried that they were not. I often share my story of being the oldest son of a mother who was denied a secondary education by her family. Her goal was to see each of her three sons graduate high school. She beamed brilliantly on the evening my bachelor's degree was conferred. She could only dream of attending the ceremony for my master's degree because I was six states away. Whenever I tell this story, I can see my students relaxing in class and focusing on their studies. I help them understand the concept of self-directed education and my willingness to explain my own circumstances answers their questions in a manner that makes them feel valued. Occasionally, one would comment that they will never understand math because it is so hard and does not make sense. I stop my lesson and ask them to repeat their sentence after me. After a slight pause, I finish the sentence with the word "YET!" This only happened a couple of times before they started believing that math competence was an inevitable part of their future. They are precious and valuable people that our society has othered into a dark existence. All of them have challenges to learning. Some have lost hope because they think that a few weeks or months in the program would be miraculous and end in completing their GED. The days stretched into multiple months, and when they stopped progressing, they needed my faith in their success to live in their hearts. I am confident in their return with a renewed spirit and vigor for learning.

This past week, a day shy of her three-year anniversary in the program, a middle-aged lady successfully passed the math test to complete her GED certificate. The squeal of happiness upon hearing her score made the struggles of the last six months evaporate. For a few students, it is not easy for them to change their mindset or accept the policies of the program. They still are worthy of my best efforts and know that for a short while somebody cared about their mental development and believed in their academic ability. When the time is right and they have overcome their barriers they will return. I will welcome them with open arms and get to the work of putting them back on the path to a brighter future.

I now know my previous life experiences have prepared me to act as the calm in life's storms for people looking for shelter from ignorance and inability. My reinforcement in the value of their goals is enough to rebuild their strength for the challenges they face and along the way they will be lifted by recognizing they are worth my best effort. I will never forget my first student to complete the program and

“YET!”

walk across the stage. He entered the program in the Fall semester with high scores but very low self-esteem. He completed his test just in time to be on the graduation list and have his name read over the internet. His parents beamed with pride at their son's accomplishment. And yet it took his third attempt to successfully pass the GED Math test. He had been down on himself entering the testing center that evening, and I was concerned for him. Not passing this attempt would mean a wait of two months before another attempt and missing graduation. I returned to my classroom to work with my other students. He and the test examiner came back with very long faces reporting a less than passing score. I delivered my spiel about not getting depressed, being diligent, and studying harder for the next time. He could contain himself no longer: a Cheshire-cat grin spread across his face as he reported that his math score was the highest of his GED tests.



Gregory Slayton teaches his adult learners to decode the mysteries of math problems so that they can communicate their understanding.

In the Adult Education program, there are great days, good days, and days I would rather forget. I would not change any of them for a day elsewhere because here I get to interact with people just looking for a chance at rerouting their life onto a brighter path and future. They have learned many lessons about failure in life, and they have not yet achieved a secondary education. I get to teach them about resilience and watch them achieve success.

Gregory Slayton is currently serving as the Vice-President for Two-Years Colleges of the Arkansas Council of Teachers of Mathematics. He is actively working with other officers in their organization and in ACTELA to help organize a joint conference for 2025.

Conference Results: OE-AR+

by Dr Kay Walter, University of Arkansas at Monticello and friends



I may be the world's most eager collaborator. When I heard about the [2023 OE-AR+ Conference](#) at NWACC, I was excited. I'd been looking for a reason to visit northwest Arkansas, and I'm always pleased for a chance to gather with scholars who love to read and write and teach English and Language Arts. English teachers, librarians, independent scholars, all alike feel like family to me. I started talking to friends about proposing a panel presentation around the ideas of heroes in which we could each play a part. I just about had them all talked into the idea before we ran out of time, but I emailed the conference directors describing our idea and begged for an extension. We were given more time, and very soon we had something concrete to share with them. It wasn't long before the conference where I'd hoped to meet up with friends and relish in presentations of new ideas went virtual.

I don't know about you, but virtual conferences are not my cup of tea. I tend to put in less effort and find less inspiration. I understand why online classes are so difficult for my students when I think of how hard it is for me to embrace fully the experience of an online professional conference. Virtual life takes much more effort to achieve the same results. Research tells us that face-to-face human encounters are processed differently in chemical terms in our brains. My fellow presenters and I wrestled with the idea and changed our collective mind three times before we decided to attend this event.

I've asked both of my colleagues to write briefly about this experience, and they approached that task in very different ways. Joan Linnstaedter tells us about the content of her presentation. Braden Taylor describes the process of preparing for the delivery of his talk.

Joan Linnstaedter, Black River Technical College:

Creating Opportunities for Heroes:

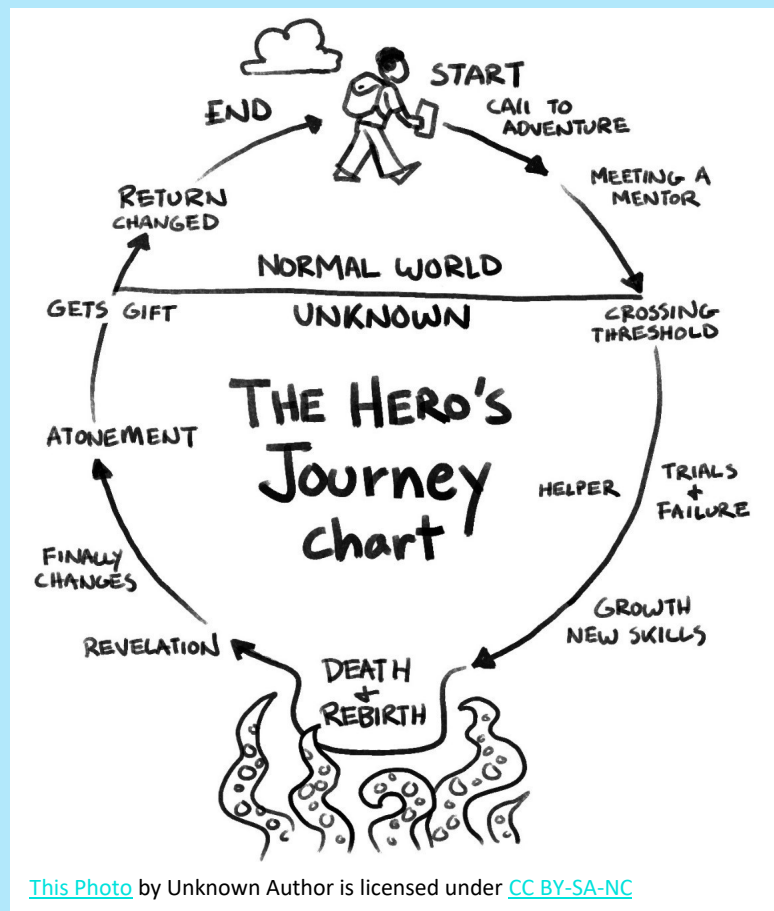
Revision Policies that Work

A Call to Adventure

As a graduate student teaching writing classes, I was afraid of failing my students by not presenting all the



information they needed (the way they needed it) to make the grade. Planning lectures and practice didn't feel safe enough; I wanted to champion learning and provide opportunities for heroes to develop. A revision policy met a mix of needs for me and for my students. It helped me learn to be a teacher, gave students an activity to move past potential griping, and mitigated the fear of failure for all involved. As I have grown as an educator, I believe the magic of education moves past the mundane of evaluating the first try into participating in the trials and tribulations of trying, failing, trying again, and developing the tenacity and resilience of a hero.



Some manner of revision opportunity is a call to student writers to actively participate in the education adventure and become their own hero.

Mentoring

Mentoring our young heroes in training can come in many forms. One simple method is to share that students who want feedback should bring the paper in for office hours a few days or a week early. Encouraging writing center visits with a few bonus points and strategies can be useful.

Revision opportunity on the first paper can help young heroes choose to discover how to meet the rubric expectations. Feedback on the first attempt could be used for a higher grade or a partial return of points. Students are more motivated for a new grade, but many will not use a revision for a B or a C. They have met their goals. Not all are ready to be heroes.

One of the last assignments in the class could be a revision on one paper. Students often beg for bonus points. Bonus points don't really help much and can be annoying to grade. I struggle with the thought, "If you haven't done the assigned work well, why should I be punished with more grading?" A revision opportunity on a major assignment for a new grade can let students learn, quiet the grumbles, and make more of a difference to the grade than 10 bonus points.

Trials and Failure

A Global Revision Policy for several papers can also work well for students and for the teacher. This is my favorite version of the revision policy in terms of helping students learn and managing my grading. Currently, I have three submission dates (early, on-time, complete) for each one of four papers and one project. (I also have two in-class assignments with no revision opportunity to see if students are getting the necessary writing concepts.) These are not “forced” revisions—it is a choice! Being a hero is a choice.

The “early” date is for two major groups of students: fearful students who have been stuck in a C range for writing and grade junkies who panic over grades. For many of the fearful students, factors such as poverty, food scarcity, divorce, illness, and trauma kept them from being mentally present to learn what other educators shared. These potential heroes feel behind and sometimes ashamed of their lack of success. I normalize the policy by sharing that I would turn my papers in early in graduate school to learn in the process and protect my grades. By sharing my own journey, students begin to develop a vision of potential success.

For A-junkies, relieving their stress with an extra try prevents the complaining and whining that can make teaching less enjoyable. I find it also keeps my grading consistent. I don’t think about giving an extra point because I know someone will gripe. Providing the revision opportunity means their grade is in their hands. The hero must find power and consistency from within.

As an educator facing other educators who don’t want more work, I have faced trials and tribulations. Over the years I have had teachers say a revision policy is “too much work,” that “if the students don’t do it right the first time, they won’t a second time,” and various other negative comments. But it need not be a pain and can be an advantage in grading time.

For my classes, revision is a choice. I never force students. If a student wants to use the revision policy, they do. If not, no problem. This means I don’t find myself drowning in grading 25 papers three times. The reality for me is mostly positive. For 25 students, I usually have about five students who turn the paper in early. I comment on the papers focusing on what students have done well, what needs work, and human connections we can share. The rubric is reflected in the comments and the learning management system sends a notice that feedback has been provided.

For the on-time date, I probably see 17. A couple are usually revisions—which are easier to grade because I have seen them before. I grade 5 a day and might get another revision or late paper to add to the list. My goal is to get graded papers back in 3-5 business days. We have already moved to the next assignment in class. Students submit in the same window on the LMS. I have the early, on-time, and complete days listed in parentheses beside the assignment submission.

For the final submission date, I can have two weeks to complete the grading and it shows as late or red in our LMS. I might get 3-4 new papers and five revisions. My final due date tend to be on Friday and students know from day one that an extension can be requested for the weekend until Sunday at

midnight. After that, the paper is complete. My goal is to communicate that procrastination leads to weekend work. Treating college as a 9-5 job five days a week can make weekends more enjoyable. Heroes need guidance.

Death and Rebirth

As students have changed over the years, I do sometimes have brazen souls who ask in front of the class, “I know I turned my paper in late, but I want my revision for this paper.” I smile and remind them that we have moved on, but I look forward to them using the revision policy on another project. This late bloom is encouraged to get up and get busy a bit earlier for the next paper.

My dream for each student to choose to be a hero dies each semester. My added time is spent on the young heroes actively choosing. I still reach out to the fallen, encourage, and pray for their return. The dream is reborn the next semester. Failure is not the end for the hero.

Growth and New Skills for Students:

Generally, the students who use the revision policy earn higher grades in my class as well as in other classes with no revision policy. Students who have graduated with four-year degrees sometimes thank me for working with them. A few who have gone on for Master’s degrees share that writing is now a strong skill. Most of these students would have succeeded without me, but the learning opportunity and work mean they reach out and thank me for my hard work and care. That helps me as an educator, too.

Revelations:

By papers three and four, fewer students use the revision opportunity. In asking students and looking at the grades, I don’t think the students who have used the revision policy still need it at the end. They have learned how to write a successful paper and know it is working before they turn it in. The heroes are stronger!

The question of grade inflation arises. If the student learns to achieve a particular grade, is it inflated or a symbol of learning? I think about two pieces of advice I received in my first year of teaching. One was that I could be generous with grades during the semester or at the end, but doing both leads to grade inflation. The second piece of advice was that grades are symbols of achievement and tools of encouragement. The revision policy allows me to give the opportunity for learning and indicate improvement to those who want it.

The Gift!

The revision policy doesn’t create stress for me. It relieves stress. At the end of each week and each semester, I know that student grades belong to them and the choices they make. My grading feels more manageable because of the natural numbers submitted for each date. The revision policy provides a safe place to learn from mistakes and teach at the point of need. Education takes time and the revision policy helps me spend that time where it will matter most—with the students who are ready to learn and willing to work. Revision

champions student learning and hard work allowing students in my class to become their own heroes.

Braden Taylor, University of Arkansas

Pulaski Technical College:

I graduated from University of Arkansas in the Spring of 2023 with my master's degree in English. My time as a graduate student was filled with in-depth scholarly research followed by presenting these ideas at conferences around the country. All the work and travel seemed to make time fly by in my graduate program. When I did finally graduate I was at a loss for what to do. I was desperate to begin a new career that would give me new opportunities. My inner need to read and research was always in the back of my mind, but I feared my time as a researcher had passed. Most work places do not call for a traditionally trained research scholar to help run their small working environment; but I needed that connection to others who want to think and develop new ideas. I was eager to attend the OE-AR+ Conference with Dr Kay Water and Joan Linnstaedter so that I might keep up with my desire to be active in scholarly research and presentation, becoming my own hero by discussing the use of free resources to make heroes the audience for my students' writing.



Leading up to my OE-AR+ conference presentation, I met with Dr Kay Walter and Joan Linnstaedter a number of times to look at our panel and the topic we chose. I soaked up all of this time together as networking opportunities. Getting another chance at thinking about connecting new ideas with new topics was by far the best part of my unemployment. This conference allowed me think about my research interests and explore them outside of the classroom. Without my professors asking me questions, it was my own responsibility to look at the ideas I developed and begin forming them into reasonable thoughts that would connect to a larger picture.

My research interests and the paper I presented online at the virtual OE-AR+ 2023 Conference with my colleagues look at how people connect with one another using objects they can touch and develop understanding of. My topic explored how the act of writing is able to connect us with others when they are able to hold the paper in their hands. They are no longer just seeing words on a screen or talking to you over the phone. The two parties are connected by something physical and now have a greater ability to interact and understand one another. The assignment I gave my students was to write letters to war veterans for an Honor Flight Mail Call. I asked them to demonstrate gratitude and attempt to make a human connection.

I felt rather out of place when we were beginning the conference because my presentation was over how things we can touch and feel, like Honor Flight letters, bring us close and the theme of the conference was looking at how online and free resources can make teaching in a classroom more engaging and impactful. It was not until I listened to feedback and questions about my topic



that I understood not all “Open Educational Resources” have to be digital. The resources that allow teachers to engage better with their students just need to be something they can do in the classroom that all students can access and interact with. Writing letters of gratitude is something that all students can do. When these letters are shared with an audience of heroes, the topic of the classroom goes with them. This sharing is very similar to attendance at a

conference with other professionals in a field. When the sessions are held and ideas shared, those ideas travel and impact others bringing folk together and building community.

Dr Kay Walter, University of Arkansas at Monticello

Our panel, “Finding, Reaching, and Teaching Heroes” was a reflection of heroes in undergraduate gen-ed classrooms. We shared ideas of the hero as content, author, and audience of freshman and sophomore English studies. My presentation was a case study of a world literature class I taught during the spring semester of 2023. My dean wanted to cancel the class for low enrollment, but I talked him into letting me teach it to my four students *gratis*. Because I was not getting paid for the course, I decided to teach it without a textbook. My students and I found online and otherwise free copies of the stories, poems, and plays we needed to read. That put the onus of providing biographical sketches of the authors and bibliographic descriptions of the texts on me. The exercise kept me on my toes and encouraged me to search for and discover sources of free copies of traditional stories of literary heroes for my students. The class was a means of exploring Open Educational Resource availability and an impetus to utilize all I found. We read differently, but we read deeply and intensely.

Presenting our panel together gave us a chance to share with library friends and to champion our own professional scholarship in a new format as we learned to navigate Whova, and Joan and I competed for the top spot on the conference Leaderboard. We all need encouragement and support to keep up the responsibilities we have for sharing ideas with others. I hope you will find inspiration to become your own hero in our responses to this conference and will send us news of your own conference attendance, presentations, and results.



A Bilingual Message

Covid-19 and Japanese Language Education

by Yukiko Bivens, University of Arkansas at Monticello

About four years ago, the attitude of the students toward the way of learning changed. In the past, face-to-face classes were used to learn new grammar and communicative adaptation methods, and homework assignments were given to prepare students for new learning content and to master the application of what they learned in class through review. This type of repetitive learning has become outdated, and the only study time allocated for students to learn Japanese has moved towards mastery during class. Therefore, in order to adapt to the students' learning environment, and to help them acquire the ability to speak fluently, I have been actively studying and introducing tools that are used in online and hybrid classes into my style of teaching to reach maximum efficiency. Thanks to these experiences, when the class structure changed rapidly due to Covid-19, the transition went very well because the students were used to an environment that utilized online tools such as Blackboard and Zoom.

The most difficult thing for me when Covid-19 started was to explain to the students in a clear way what I wanted them to do. My English has a strong accent, so the students are constantly reading my lips. When wearing the mask, basic communication methods such as reading lips and facial expressions were taken away. In order to provide clear instructions for interactive communication, I used Zoom's subtitle function, the whiteboard, and other online tools. The educational change that Covid-19 brought forth has given me the opportunity to understand the advantages and disadvantages of online education tools, and to further improve my understanding of the benefits of technology and how it can be used to provide lectures that are meaningful to students.

To see a Japanese language version of this article, turn to page 34.

四年程前から、学生達の授業に取り組む姿勢が変わって来ました。従来では、対面授業で新たな文法やコミュニケーションカテゴリーアダプテーションの方法を学び、宿題は新しい学習内容の予習とクラスで学んだ内容の応用を復習を通してマスターしていくという目的で出していました。このタイプの反復学習は古くなり、学生の日本語学習に振りあてた勉強時間はクラスのみとなり、クラスの中だけでマスターする方向に移動しました。そこで、学生の学ぶ環境や生活環境に適応し学生が使える日本語を効率よく習得させるために、オンラインクラスやハイブリット型授業体型で使われる機能を積極的に勉強しクラスに導入してきました。そのお陰で、コロナの影響で、急速に授業体型が変わった際には、学生がブラックボードとズームなどのオンラインツールを活用した環境に慣れていたため、移行が非常に上手くいきました。

コロナが始まって一番苦労したのは、学生達に何をしてもらいたいのかわかりやすく説明する事です。私の英語には強いアクセントがあるので、生徒達は常に私の唇を読んでいます。マスク着用の際には唇を読むことや表情を読んだりする基本的なコミュニケーション方法が困難になりました。そこで、私は双方向的なコミュニケーションが取れるような指示を明確に出すために、ズームにある字幕機能を使ったりホワイトボードを使ったりとオンラインで使えるツールを積極的に学びクラスに取り入れて来ました。コロナで強制的に始まった教育現場の改革では、オンライン教育のメリットとデメリットを理解した上でテクノロジーの恩恵を更に享受しどのように工夫すれば学生にとって意味のある授業を提供できるかという事をさらに追求していく良い機会を与えてくれました。

If you'd like to contact the author of this article, you may send a message through the newsletter editor or email Sensei Yukiko directly at bivens@uamont.edu.

Global Perspective

Spending My Sabbatical in South Africa

Byung-In Seo, Ph.D., Chicago State University, Chicago, IL

At Chicago State University, professors are allowed to apply and be granted a sabbatical after seven years of being an associate professor. In 2017, I applied for a sabbatical. Sabbaticals are technically a rest from the academic rigors of university responsibilities. It's time for professors to pursue other academic pursuits, like writing a book or conducting research. I spent my sabbatical in South Africa.

In 2017, South Africa's population was 58.4 million people. Of them, there were 21.85 million were school-aged children (ages 5 years old to 19 years old) (Alexander, 2018). The majority of the population are Black South Africans (45.65 million), comprising of 80.8% of the population. Over 40% of the general population lives at or below the poverty line. Guateng Province is the smallest province in the country, but it is one of the wealthiest. In this province, only 4.6% live in poverty, but the poverty is considered to be the most intense (Alexander, 2021). Pretoria is one of the capitals of South Africa, and it is in Guateng Province. It is here where I spent my sabbatical.

From May-December 2018, I was a visiting research professor (VRP) at the University of South Africa (UNISA) in Pretoria. Their Institute of Science and Technology Education (ISTE) brought me in to conduct workshops, give seminars, and work on a math education research project. How, then, does a language/literacy education researcher end up working with STEM education professors? Essentially, I was brought in to be a STEM communications specialist.

Prior to becoming a university professor, I taught English and math to students in grades 6-12. I taught all levels of ELA and remedial-level algebra and geometry. In Illinois, while my pri-



my licensure is in ELA, I have secondary endorsements in math, science, and reading. Unlike many of my colleagues, I worked in the parochial system, for the De Lasalle Christian Brothers. As the president of the school used to tell me, “We can’t pay you, but we’ll give you the freedom to teach.” As a result, I used ELA examples and concepts when teaching math, and I used math terminology and examples when teaching English. Over the year, I have used linguistic and writing theories to understand how adolescents write mathematically. I’ve learned that the students will completely change the tone, diction, syntax, lexicon, and format of their mathematical communication when their audience changed; their use of mathematical language adapted according to their audience. In 2016, I presented this information at an international conference, and there, I met Dr. Nosisi Feza, a professor at ISTE. She heard my presentation and was intrigued with my perspectives on teaching and learning math.

In South Africa, there’s still a reliance on rote memorization. Students are taught the mathematical procedures but not the mathematical concepts. According to Dr. Feza, many math teachers in impoverished areas don’t have the proper background knowledge to teach math past pre-algebra. As with the other countries, the most talented teachers work in wealthier areas while the more inexperienced ones work in impoverished areas. With the high need of STEM teachers, Dr. Feza explained that many impoverished schools will hire anyone with a teaching license, just to have a teacher in the classroom. That teacher may or may not be able to teach that particular subject. In addition, classes are large. In many cases, classrooms that should seat 30 students will often have 65-70 students in that classroom (See Figure 1)



Figure 1: Typical grade 10 classroom at Pretoria High School, Mabopane Township

In the U.S., both NCTE and NCTM have content area/disciplinary communication standards, and math teachers have been willing to teach communication skills to their students. On

the Illinois mathematics licensure exam, students must be able to identify the mathematical problem before solving it. Gone are the days when math exams only consist of equations. As a teacher who taught both ELA and math, math teachers are willing to pay attention to my suggestions (because I used to be one of them).

Studying math as a language is very different than the way math is currently taught in South Africa. Instead of memorizing facts and figures, South African math teachers learned how to communicate their mathematical ideas. My premise is that an equation is a mathematical sentence, and a series of equations makes a “paragraph.” I taught them how to “translate” the mathematical symbols into conventional sentences. (see Figure 2)



Figure 2: Dr. Seo giving a mathematical communication session

These teachers were also taught reading and writing activities that they could use in their classrooms. One of the writing activities I taught them is RAFT (Role, Audience, Format, Topic). For example, when teaching the Cartesian graph, this RAFT could be used: “Have X write a letter to Y on why they should go on a date.” Traditionally, these township and rural teachers taught from the textbook. Teaching them different ways to look at mathematical communication took time. However, when I visited their classrooms three months later, I saw that one of the teacher/participants used it in her own classroom (see Figure 3).



Figure 3: Township students engaging in a RAFT exercise

One of my host professors, David Mogari, told me on the first day, “I don’t care what people say about us, but you need to remember, you’re still in Africa.” “Sabbatical” means an academic rest. While there, I truly did rest. Everything moves slower; it just takes longer for anything to occur. I expected to get a bus pass and use public transportation, as I would in Chicago. No, that didn’t occur. As a foreigner, I was a mugging waiting to happen, and there was no way my hosts were going to put me in harm’s way. Therefore, for the first few weeks, I was “stuck.” I couldn’t get Uber to work, and finding a trustworthy driver took time. My being “stuck” forced me to relax and truly rest. Prior to going there, I was moving pretty fast, doing too much for too many people. Once in South Africa, life as I knew it stopped. Being on the other side of the world prevented my colleagues asking me to do “just one more thing.” Instead, I read historical fiction (which is the best way to learn about a country) and napped. In the beginning, it felt odd to be doing “nothing,” but eventually I enjoyed the languid movements of their life.

All work and no play make a very dull professor. A typical South African vacation is flying into Johannesburg, getting on a van to Kruger National Park, return to Johannesburg and getting on a plane to Cape Town, return to Johannesburg again and seeing the sites there before heading home. I went on several safaris at Kruger National Park and saw the Big 5: rhinoceros, elephant, lion, leopard, and buffalo. In Johannesburg, I visited Nelson Mandela’s home in Soweto. Finally in Cape Town, I visited the furthest southeastern point of the African continent. Because I was there during their spring, I was able to see the jacaranda trees in full bloom. (see Figure 4)



Figure 4: Jacaranda trees in bloom

Most importantly, I made many life-long friends, friends who I continue to keep in touch via WhatsApp, email, and Zoom. The next time I can apply for sabbatical is in 2023, for 2025-2026 academic year. Dr. Feza is starting the visa paperwork now to have me return. As previously stated, South Africa is still in Africa, and in Africa, everything takes time.

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