

ACTELA Newsletter

Arkansas Council of Teachers of English and Language Arts

A recent initiative of ACTELA is the development of a peer-reviewed professional journal that would encourage publication of action research and theoretical scholarship about ELA instruction. Publication of the first issue is anticipated for September 2015. Stay tuned for updates!

Letter from the President—Dixie Keyes

Get rid of the new standards? Return to old Arkansas ELA or Math frameworks? Common Core or bust?

Maybe just bust? Life as a teacher, with standards, seems to involve half the community who believes the Common Core standards are evil, while teachers who've developed more student-centered learning events over the past few years are grateful



IRA Standards for the English Language Arts remain steadfast (reaffirmed by NCTE in

2012). Find them under "Resources" on www.ncte.org, and give them a new look. Along with the "Guiding Visions," these standards, along with the professional minds and intellects of the brilliant, certified, degreed educators

for the standard changes brought on by Common Core. Nevertheless, states are now blocking the PARCC testing, and Common Core may be on the block next. So, what do ELA teachers do? Here's a timely reminder—the NCTE/

of ELA across the country, are meaningful guideposts when we consider our curriculum choices, but they could mean a lot more right now in these times of bureaucracy and change. Let us know what you think!

Inside this issue:

Member Blogs	2
ACC Announcements	3
Anthology News	4
Board News	4
Global Perspective	5
Washington Report	7
Contacts	10

Let's Connect!

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walter@uamont.edu

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<http://www.actela.org/home>

Or Comment on our ACTELA CIT:

<http://www.literacyinlearningexchange.org/group/actela-cit>



Blog Quotes

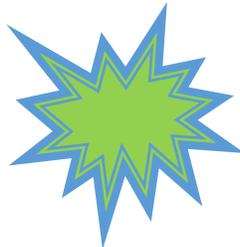
Some ACTELA board members are gifted bloggers.

Here are poignant ideas from recent posts:



Of all the things that I wish I had learned in high school, I wish I had learned the value of struggling, the power in fighting through, and the fact that a B didn't mean that I was incapable of moving forward.

Casey Bazyk Thoughts from Nerdland



I get it. I chose an underpaid and underappreciated profession. But I also didn't choose it because I thought I was going to be overpaid or even appreciated a normal amount. I chose it because I love kids, and I'm passionate about creating more curious, creative humans.

Jessica Herring Wisdom from the Middle

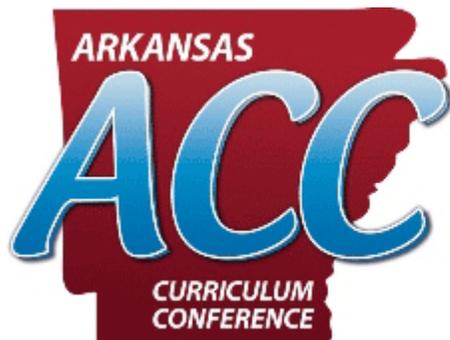


Are there other members whose blogs you read to gain insight on teaching English and Language Arts? Send us links and descriptions. We'll review them for inclusion in future issues of our newsletter.



Teach. Learn. Grow. Share.

Arkansas Curriculum Conference 2015



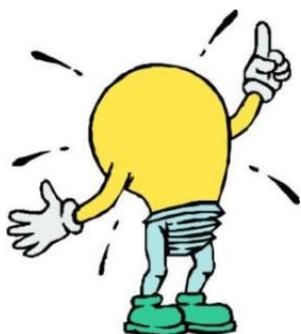
Arkansas CURRICULUM CONFERENCE

This year's conference will be held Thursday and Friday, November 5—6 at the Little Rock Statehouse Convention Center and Marriott Hotel. Highlights from ACTELA sessions include the following:

- ◆ A Two-hour Writing Marathon which will culminate in a Read-around
- ◆ Managing the Digital Classroom: Avoiding Technology-Related Trouble
- ◆ Annotated Bibliography: The Tool Most Predictive of Research Success
- ◆ Teacher Advocacy Through Blogging: Three ELA Perspectives
- ◆ Making the Most of Workshop Teaching: Strategies to Maximize Instruction

ACTELA's visiting author for 2015 will be **Zetta Elliott**. Visit her webpage to explore her adventures in self-publishing, read descriptions of her workshops for school visits, and find information about the Birthday Party Pledge.

<http://www.zettaelliott.com>



Hurry! It's Still Not **TOO Late.**

If you have ideas you'd like to share with other teachers, you can propose a session for ACC. This year's Online Proposal Deadline is April 30th. For information, contact your ACTELA scheduling representative:

Sunny Styles-Foster at sunnyf@uca.edu.

We Want Your Input!

There are about 10,000 ELA teachers in Arkansas, and we want to network and share ideas with all of them. Join our discussions about membership and other ELA topics in the ACTELA CIT here:

<http://www.literacyinlearningexchange.org/group/actela-cit>



For an opportunity to meet our visiting author, Zetta Elliott, be sure to buy a luncheon ticket when you register for ACC 2015.

Recent News from ACTELA:

ACTELA sends hearty congratulations to board member Dr. Ryan Kelly on the birth of his daughter, Clara Joy, on March 26th.

Congratulations to board member Janie Mason for leading a book discussion at the Little Rock Main Library as part of the Say It Loud! Girl Empowerment Series on March 24th.

Loud shout outs to board member Grover Welch on his recent trip to Washington! Read about his experiences in the interview on page seven of this issue.

Arkansas Anthology 2015 received a record number of submissions this year. Good work, Writers! Start now encouraging your students to submit to next year's *Arkansas Anthology*, and stay tuned for announcements of this year's winners. Editors' Choice Awards will be presented at the ACTELA Luncheon at ACC. Don't forget to order your tickets when you register for the conference!

<http://www.actela.org/home/anthology>

Global Perspective

By Jason Higgins

In early March, the University of Oklahoma's chapter of Sigma Alpha Epsilon caught national attention with a viral video, which included members of the fraternity singing a racist song, glorifying America's dark history of lynching African Americans. I had intended to teach a lesson on equality in my classroom the following Monday. International Women's Rights Day was celebrated the day before the scandal, and I planned to show my composition students an interview with Malala Yousafzai, recently the youngest recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize and advocate of female education, who had been shot in the face in Pakistan by the Taliban.

After viewing the Malala interview, one student poignantly remarked that Malala gives "a face to the ideal of equality." The student recognized that abstract ideals of education often become dissociated from actual, living human beings. Her struggles remind young American composition students of the consequences of oppression and inequality.

As educators, we realize our successes in one class rarely can be duplicated in another class. Due to technological difficulties, I could not show the Malala video to my other class that day. The students asked if we could discuss the OU controversy. One student protested, "the problem is they were caught." I was appalled by his comment. I recognized the deep-seated culture of racism in America bleeding through his presumably sincere observation. Oklahoma State University is overwhelmingly white. Approximately 200 incoming freshmen students identify as African American in a campus of over 25,000. The majority of students have been isolated in their middle-class communities and sheltered in their worlds of white privilege. I redirected his comment and tried to make it a *teachable moment*. I asked my students, "Is the problem that they were caught, or is the problem that they were perpetuating a racist ideology of white supremacy and advocating the lynching of minorities? Is the problem that songs, jokes, and stereotypes dehumanize our fellow human? Do these fraternity members see the face of another human being, when they chant their hate speech?" In Jim Crow-America, lynchings were celebrated, community spectacles. Cultural norms. Fathers and mothers encouraged their sons and daughters to celebrate the suffering, the torturing, the inhumanity of man.

The class fell dead-silent. I have learned to appreciate these moments of silence. Silence complements dialectics and discourse. This silence was earth-shattering. It is my duty to foster the silence, the moments of introspection, and mold it into passion and conviction.

My job responsibilities as an English Graduate Teaching Assistant extend far beyond teaching my students grammar and the effectiveness of topic sentences or evaluating their performance. English Composition falls under the umbrella of the Arts and Humanities cluster. My students learn and practice Humanity. I nurture free-thought. In my Socratic learning environment of emergent intellectualism,



students engage in social issues, critically. We do not shy away from “controversial issues.” We confront inequality and injustices head-on. It is my duty and privilege to lead them in the struggle against intolerance.

Education is reciprocal. We can learn from each other. Malala’s words are universal ideals, applicable to both Western and Middle-Eastern civilizations:

[The children] are suffering from the cultural norms and traditions. There is not only one issue we are facing. There are many others as well. Education is the best way. . . . Going to school is not only learning about different subjects—it teaches you communication. It teaches you how to live a life. It teaches you about history. It teaches you about how science works. . . . [Y]ou learn about equality. . . . It teaches students how to live with others, how to accept each of their languages, each of their traditions, each of their religions. It also teaches us justice. It also teaches us respect.

Education teaches empathy. It teaches humanity. In a globally, interconnected modern world, we can achieve dialogue more efficiently than ever. I teach my students the value of effective communication in my composition classroom. I teach communication’s potential for achieving peace. Through dialogue and education, we experience humanity. We, as English and Language Arts instructors, give students a voice for the human experience.



**Remember to celebrate April as
National Poetry Month!**

Mr. Welch Goes to Washington

Interview by Dr. Kay J. Walter

A grant partnership between the National Writing Project and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation recently funded a visit to Washington, D. C. for board member Grover Welch. He attended the Spring Meeting of the National Writing Project to represent the Arkansas Delta Writing Project site. Grover took some time on Easter Sunday afternoon to answer questions about his adventure.

Question: **While you were in Washington, you spent time with Arkansas politicians. Whom did you meet?**

Answer: I met with Tom Cotton and Tom Cotton's educational czar, and then I met with John Boozman and his educational committee person that works on his staff.

Q: **What signs did you see that indicate they are devoted to educational innovation and reform?**

A: Both were very positive as far as their conversation. John Boozman was extremely positive, and he was very versed on the ESEA (No Child Left Behind) bill. . . . It had stalled in the house when it was connected to the Homeland Security bill. So much of the Homeland Security funding was involved with it, and that's why it got voted down last time. This reauthorization bill that has been proposed now has stripped all those pork projects from it and released it. He was very versed on whether or not he was ready to vote for it. He was, and he was very excited about getting it reauthorized. It's been three years since it's been authorized.

Q: **What about Senator Cotton?**

A: Cotton was very positive. Cotton said he was dedicated to education in Arkansas. He wanted to make sure that teachers were funded and that the educational priorities were right. He had a lot of questions for me on Common Core. I'm a Common Core advocate, so we talked at length about my experiences with PARCC and my experiences with Common Core. I speak highly of it because I do like it.

Q: **We ELA teachers see education as a building block of our economic future. How do they see it?**

A: I think both representatives from Arkansas see that—I think especially I saw more language from Boozman than I did from Cotton because Cotton, of course, is a very foreign-affairs oriented congressman, so I got a lot of general



statements. His education committee chairperson, she was very versed in the fact that we have to have education as that foundational block. I talked with Boozman at length about how education is a building block and how the infrastructure of our financial future has to be believing in that.

Q: You spoke with them about ACTELA. How did you introduce them to it? How did they respond?

A: Well, both were very interested in it. Both were very interested in what educators think, especially Representative Boozman. Mr. Cotton's educational czar was very interested in what educators were thinking. As a reference, I showed them both the ACTELA website and talked to them about ACTELA and what we're doing in the state. I told them both that if they wanted an organization they could look at that would help them communicate with educators and help them understand what educators were thinking, they should consider following our website. Both of them wrote it down, and both of them bookmarked it, and I also showed them the Facebook page.



Senator John Boozman and Grover Welch

Q: If you were grading them on grammar and mastery of language skills, how do they measure up to our expectations?

A: I think John Boozman is excellent. He worked as a teacher for a long time so he is top notch. I think Tom Cotton, you know, he's a Harvard grad, so I'm not going to disparage a Harvard grad. I think they are both excellent representatives for Arkansas.

Q: What about Washington, D. C. inspires a strong feeling of patriotism in you?

A: I love D. C. It's my favorite city except Chicago. I took a lot of pride in walking into the Statutory Rotunda and seeing Rosa Parks's statue there among all those great founding fathers of our country. They just recently moved it there three months ago after her passing. It's now the representative statue from Arkansas, and I'm very proud of that. I think it's a testament to the fact that we are moving forward. To have that statement so preeminent in that statutory hall really impressed me.

Q: What else did you see/experience that assures you this was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity?

A: Well, it was the dialogue. I was able to meet with teachers from all over the country. There were twenty-seven states represented. I was able to meet with educators and teachers that could discuss literature, that could discuss what's going on in school systems. For five days I was surrounded by such great voices of the field: some teachers with twenty years' experience, some with twelve, some like me that are just starting out in the teaching field. We were able to sit around tables like at dinner and even during the meetings and have these conversations about what it means to see educational prosperity, what it means to see an equal playing field, what it means to see leaps forward in education in our schools, what it means to have equity. These were all conversations I was able to be a part of, I was able to participate in. . . . Plus I found out about the Department of Education Teacher Fellowship Program. That's an excellent program that I'm really excited about. Every year the Department of Educa-

tion brings a teacher from every state to work with Arne Duncan on educational policy and educational initiatives. The teacher that is helping write the ASCIP, the internet protocol plan for the Department of Education, I was actually able to tell him, “Look, we need to find a way to get internet in students’ houses not just into the schools. We’ve got to come up with some kind of voucher program that will put internet in a kid’s house so that when he takes a device home he can get on the internet to do his research and do his work.” I was able to say that to somebody who actually has the ear of Arne Duncan, who is actually able to help, to maybe add that into the plan.

Q: Travel is a form of education that provides live opportunities to practice theoretical learning. What were you glad you knew that you found a practical application for during this experience?

A: I write a lot and I reflect a lot. Whenever I go on a trip like this, I’m able to meet so many diverse people [with] voices I can bring back into the classroom and share with my class. I can say, “you’re not any different from students in Colorado” or “you’re not any different from students in Massachusetts.” I have friends I made from the Cedar Ridge Writing Project in Michigan who are able to jump on Skype with my class and talk about what they’re doing in their classrooms. It’s the bridge-building. You know we talk a lot in education about collaboration. Collaboration doesn’t just have to stay within our school. It can go across states, across nations, and it’s really a great opportunity.

Q: What surprised you most?

A: What surprised me most was, I guess, the amount of inclusion I got. I’m an idea guy. I throw a lot of ideas out there sometimes. Sometimes I feel like I maybe overstep, but I found a leadership team that really just wanted me involved, wanted me at the table, wanted to hear what I had to say, and I think that meant the world to me.

Q: What new understanding/enlightenment did you bring back to Arkansas that you will share with your ELA students here?

A: I think that most of what I brought back was that whole national center of the country and being able to come back and talk to my kids about seeing Rosa Parks’s statue and what that means and what a big step that is in the right direction. I was able to talk to the kids about being on the mall, standing where people stood and listened to Dr. King, at the Jefferson Memorial—I was able to bring those experiences back to my kids.

Q: So you saw signs that we have made progress and maybe we’re on the right track in a lot of ways?

A: Oh yeah, I think we’re definitely on the right track. I think that right now our biggest problem is so much partisanship going on with congressional leadership in so many areas. I think it scares us sometimes, but I think if we can get out of our own way on a state legislature level, I think nationally the goals seem to be aligned with what I hear other teachers talking about.



Grover Welch with the Rosa Parks statue

Do You Want Some More?

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



The goal of the ACTELA Board is to work hard to make ACTELA relevant and effective for English and Language Arts teachers in our state. If you have ideas, concerns, or comments, share them. We want to listen and learn together how to help us all be most effective.

We Represent You!



Every area of the state is represented at ACTELA Board meetings. Your regional representatives are your connection. Contact them for information or with any questions about English or Language Arts concerns.

Email Contacts for Questions/Comments

Membership

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Anthology Submissions

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