

# A history of volunteers 1985 - 2006

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The YL SIG was founded 21 years ago as the Young Learner Group (YLG). Alongside Teacher Development, Computers and Business English, it was one of the first Special Interest Groups to come into existence. The acronym YLG prevailed until the newsletter of October 1989.

The idea of having Special Interest Groups in IATEFL was put forward by Opal Dunn in 1983/1984 to Peter Strevens, the first elected chair, after Dr WR Lee, the founder of IATEFL. In 1984, at the Annual IATEFL Conference, Andrew Wright collected a list of 32 signatures of colleagues interested in the idea of a Young Learner Group (YLG). Together Opal and Andrew launched the YLG at the 1985 IATEFL Annual Conference. Opal Dunn was the first chair with support from Edie Garvie, Leonora Fröhlich-Ward and Andrew Wright. At the 1986 Annual IATEFL Conference in Brighton, the YL Group officially recruited members and held their first meeting.

I'm not exactly sure who the first official coordinator / secretary was, whether it was Opal Dunn or Andrew Wright, neither can confirm! But by the May 1987 YL Group newsletter, Gordon Slaven writes, "Andrew Wright, co-founder and secretary of the group for the past two years, resigned his position ...". One thing I am sure, we have both Opal and Andrew to thank for planting the YL SIG sapling all those years ago. Both remain active members to this day, as does Leonora Fröhlich-Ward, one of our first newsletter editors.

The YLG committee began with three members. At the 1990 Annual IATEFL Conference in Dublin, a caretaker committee of six members was created. However, five years later the YL SIG was being run by just two committee members, who battled alone for about twelve months – I'd like to take this opportunity to thank Melanie Williams and Wendy Superfine for their energy and enthusiasm that year! At this moment in time, we boast a committee of ten!

After scanning early newsletters, I have discovered that the YLG was keen to set up national and regional correspondents, whose role it was to describe what was happening in their particular countries or areas, and be a link between IATEFL YLG and local YL practitioners. In May 1988, it was reported that the YLG, in collaboration with the British Council, had produced the first YL bibliography.

John Clark, co-author of Stepping Stones, beavered away for the SIG as newsletter editor, for several years as from 1988 and his co-author, Julie Ashworth, designed the YL SIG logo, which was used from 1988 till 1996. Many household names have volunteered their help in past YL SIG committees. I've already mentioned Andrew Wright, Opal Dunn, Leonora Fröhlich-Ward and Edie Garvie. Later Jayne Moon, then Annie Hughes, led the SIG, with appearances by Jackie Holderness and Shelagh Rixon. Wendy Superfine, Melanie Williams and Carol Read are also names we associate with YL literature and respected professionals in our field.

Our longest standing committee member is Chris Etchells, who joined in 1998 as Web Manager, tackled being SIG Coordinator for a couple of years and continues as Web Manager today - what a star he is! Long standing committee members include Wendy Superfine, who joined in 1994 and left in 2001, taking on the roles of coordinator, newsletter editor and events coordinator, and Carol Read, who joined in 1998 and is stepping down in 2006. Carol has worked as Newsletter Editor since 2000 helping to make **CATS** the respected publication it is today.

Each and every volunteer, be they 'famous' or not, has worked to ensure that the YL SIG provides for its members: regular publications sharing up to date information about working with young learners, the possibility of meeting fellow professionals at conferences worldwide, and a forum for sharing ideas. It really is thanks to all the volunteers involved and their hard work that the YL SIG is what it is today. I would like to toast those volunteers I have discovered were part of the YL SIG history. THANK YOU for bringing us here, for enabling the YL SIG to come of age, and may future volunteers take us even further!

*Andrew Wright, Opal Dunn, Leonora Fröhlich-Ward, Edie Garvie, Rosalyn Hurst, Gordon Slaven, Jackie Holderness, Ann Alexander, Jaynee Moon, John Clark, Julie Ashworth, Sarah Thorpe, Sue Bale, Annie Hughes, Shelagh Rixon, Lois Arthur, Mel Williams, Wendy Superfine, Caroline Laidlaw, Marina Stros, Helen Dunford, Lynette Murphy O'Dwyer, Denise Clenton, Sarah Burwood, Chris Etchells, Eleanor Watts, Helen Paul, Carol Read, Janet Olearski, Andy Jackson, Debbie Candy (née Smith), Sandie Mourão, Gordon Lewis, Beatriz Lupiano, Wendy Arnold, Kay Bentley, Rosemary Mitchell-Schuitevoerder, Jason Renshaw, Hans Mol, Niki Joseph, Karen Widl.*

A detailed description of who was involved, when and how, can be seen on the YL SIG website.

I have tried to acknowledge all those involved in bringing the YL SIG to where it is today, and would like to thank Andy Jackson, Andrew Wright, Opal Dunn, Leonora Fröhlich-Ward and Jaynee Moon for their input in my search. Each memory has added an extra piece to the puzzle and being sent old newsletters has helped enormously.

I know that anyone who joins a SIG committee gets as much out of it as they put in. I am very proud to have my name included in the list of volunteers. It has been a truly wonderful experience belonging to the YL SIG and its committee, and I have learned much, professionally and personally.

**Sandie Mourão** lives and works in Portugal and has been YL SIG Coordinator since 2003. In April 2006, she will take up a new role in IATEFL as Joint SIG Coordinator.

