



LITERACY
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DSICG Newsletter

Fall 2019



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Ricardo Gomez Angel



Doctoral Student Innovative Community Group



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Welcome to the Literacy Research Association's Doctoral Student Innovative Community Group!

We are a group organized by doctoral students to support doctoral students.

The mission of the Literacy Research Association's Doctoral Student Innovative Community Group is to facilitate doctoral students' development as exceptional researchers, scholars, and teacher educators in the field of literacy. This task includes purposeful efforts to (a) encourage doctoral students' participation in the LRA, including annual meetings and publications, (b) meet the unique needs of doctoral students, (c) support doctoral students' professional growth, and (d) create a collaborative community of scholars.



Mission Statement

Photo Credit: Richard Felix

From the Editors

We are excited to offer this issue of the DSICG newsletter as we prepare to come together for LRA's 2019 Annual Conference. Following the conference's call for scholars to illuminate the future through our literacy research, themes presented in this issue of the newsletter explore community, mentorship, and the voices each of us bring to our work.

Among key contributions in this issue are discussions of language and literacy advocacy and mentorship in enacting graduate student voices. Community comes into focus through pieces about the dissertation process and transitions from graduate student to academic or even professional lives outside the academy itself. Finally, an interview with Dr. Betsy Baker, President-Elect of LRA, draws connections among these discussions and the mission of LRA.

Our hope is that this issue offers readers opportunities to reflect on their own voices and the communities to which they belong. Further, we extend a warm invitation of community to readers to become involved in DSICG activities, including opportunities to write for and/or join our editing team, as a way to engage in ongoing dialogue. We hope this newsletter and the DSICG continues to grow as a space where we can support one another and truly illuminate the future through our community of literacy research.

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The Literacy of Mentorship:

Engaging Graduate Student Voices in Academic Discourse

by **Julia D. Morris, Old Dominion University**

Recently abroad to attend an international conference, I found myself the sole graduate student in a discussion that circumnavigated if we are, indeed, living in a post-truth world. The group comprised 12 international scholars of critical pedagogy... and me. And it is this self-deprecating characterization of my role in that conversation that brought me to ruminate about how I enact--or, in this case, failed to enact--my literacy and my truth into a conversation that was entirely celebratory of the eccentricities of the individual; yes, even this individual. Rather than absorbing the volley of exchange amongst characters from all walks and whereabouts, I was transported back to the fourth grade during an angsty popcorn reading experience, panicking over my turn to speak when the conversation circled around to me. As with popcorn reading, I waited to be selected to speak, rehearsing the carefully measured words I would say in my head, paying no attention to the discussion around me; but, I was never called upon and thus uttered not one word--despite my furious mental rehearsing--during the entire 45 minute dialogue.

I would not characterize myself as shy. I believe my students would testify to this effect, claiming that my classroom antics are usually too lively for their 8am liking. However, my students do not know me in a graduate student role, and it was the graduate student version of myself that traveled over 4,000 miles to sit utterly passively and silently by in a conversation in which I was paying to participate. On the return journey, I made pleasant small talk with men and women from Spain, Portugal, Ireland, the Democratic

Republic of the Congo, and a colorful gentleman from Florida, who refused to wear shoes through the airport, much to TSA's dismay and objection. I spoke at length about my travels from a place of authenticity, my thoughts on the conference I had just attended, and spoke my truth on the existence of a world that is imbued with best-seller narratives, rather than substance and benevolence. Why, I thought to myself, was I so comfortable sharing my speculations with these strangers, rather than my conference colleagues?

I submit that my struggle during this conference conversation--which, for the written record, I am highly invested in--was that I am hyperaware of myself as a graduate student, rather than seeing myself as an emerging scholar who is in the phase of "graduate student." Thus, the lens with which I view myself, and the literacy discourse I feel comfortable enacting, are stuck in the developmental consumer role of *learner* (stagnant noun) rather than the creative and manufacturing act of *learning* (action verb). As a learner, I am comfortable parking myself in front of intelligent pedagogy and curriculum, and absorbing: the *lather, rinse, and repeat* of academia. However, the role of graduate work is to morph a *learner* into an architect of *learning* that is both enlightened and revolutionary in their pursuit of insight. The natural next question is: how does graduate work enable a *learner* to be literate in *learning*? From my vantage, we, as graduate students, need help being invited into conversations so we might do a better job of inviting others, in turn. Of all the skills we develop as graduate students, formative opportunities for developing our literacies as scholars is imperative and only achievable through dedicated mentorship.

A cursory search for graduate student mentorship in scholarly literature reveals that the goal of mentoring advanced study students is to do such things as *facilitate success*, *lower attrition*, *facilitate the building of skills*, and to *professionalize*. While these criteria are fair and valid, they are simultaneously vague and amorphous. A unique perspective accounts that graduate students should be mentored into a deftness which *requires graduate students to mentor other students*. It is fascinating to consider that mentorship is meant to facilitate not only product accomplishments (e.g. conference presentations, travel, publications, and the like), but a sustainable skill that requires a literacy and dexterity unique unto itself: we are mentored so we can mentor.

The graduate student voice is a unique perspective and presents a particular literacy in a professional, academic conversation. It is my rose-colored opinion that we might be a new and unique vantage, as we come to topics and problems for the first time. Realistically, I also believe that we are a good pulse-check for where and what holes exist in conversations, as we can come to these topics and problems without any background and are actively working to build a knowledge base. However, graduate work is less about what you have learned and more about how you have learned to learn. Academia, especially in the field of education, privileges the role of the teacher as a causatum of learning. However, the role of teaching, and learning is not only reciprocal, but interchangeable: learning is the most powerful teacher.

Reflecting on my international conference experience through this lens, I contend that I was hoping to speak as a learner in an organic conversation that was actively inviting learning: an incompatible and misplaced hope, I now realize. I was looking for a place to insert my static commentary, much like submitting an answer to a question, or reading my designated paragraph when popcorned. Instead, I should have inserted my voice into the conversation and been prepared to be melded. Learning how to learn in these settings is a difficult task, especially amongst the brilliant people with whom we work and are mentored. I have reflected upon my role as a mentee and a graduate student in order to discern why we do not privilege our own voices as graduate students. I conclude it is because we fail to recognize that sharing our voices is not about accuracy so much as it is about the ability to be literate in the process of mentorship, both as a mentees and future mentors.

In retroactive contribution to the conversation in which I failed to speak up: I do not believe we live in a post-truth era, chiefly because I cannot grasp that truth has ever been absolute. Instead, I think we live in the era of the disembodiment of truth as universal or comprehensive. As a nod to the future, may we graduate to an era of reciprocal and enriching education. I encourage that we each submit ourselves to the process of being critiqued, built upon, rebuilt, and mentored, so we do not raise--organically or academically--subsequent generations of learners, but people continually willing to engage in how to learn from each other.



I Have an Accent on the Page:

Put Your Red Pen Away

by **Claudia Potratz, University of Iowa**

We're all aware of the pressure that comes from pursuing a graduate degree. I'm sure I don't have to mention that here. It is, nevertheless, important to mention that non-native English speakers pursuing graduate degrees have to deal with the same pressure our English speaker colleagues suffer, but on top of that, we're pushed to constantly question our language, our choice of words, our syntax. Case in point: As I write this, I stop and think about every single verb, adjective, and noun I type. I make sure sentences have the right syntax, but at the same time, that I'm expressing myself and my thoughts in the most authentic way.

Much like every other person in academia, I benefit from an extra set of eyes on drafts. I need to make sure my content makes sense and my writing is cohesive. For the past few years, whenever I sought help with my academic writing, I accepted, almost submissively, language corrections from peers and professors alike. They must be right, I thought, they're the native speakers. All over the world, wherever there is immigration, local people are in positions of power through daily practices and invisible systems. This idea relates to what individuals consider is "normal," and normalization implies a form of power that expects people to adjust. This is particularly evident/true when it comes to language.

As a non-native English speaker completing a doctoral program in literacy, I have experienced some frustrating situations when getting help with my writing. I started to study English when I was 14 and I soon fell in love with it. Back then

my goal was to be able to read literature originally written in English without the need of translations, and I used songs, tv shows, and movies to learn everyday language and idioms not in books. As I started a doctoral program, I knew what I was getting into. But nothing prepared me for what I was about to experience when I asked for help with my writing.

I started noticing that I never got help with content. It was always about language.

Asking peers for help with an article/essay/what-have-you and finding them nit-picking grammar and word choice normally looked like this:

Me: "Can we please focus on content?"

Them: "Sure. You can say this more clearly, though."

Me: "Do I need to add another source for this?"

Them: "Are you aware this contraction here is informal language?"

In some cases, I've shown the same document to different people, and had them change things other people had already "corrected," reinforcing what I already knew: it's a matter of style, not accuracy.

Call it pride or stubbornness, but having other people correct a sentence that is clear and grammatically correct, not only drives me crazy, it shoots my imposter syndrome to the roof. As a writing tutor, I have observed fellow international students having similar experiences. I have also seen this happen to people who speak a non-dom-

inant dialect of English. It led me to wonder why people want to fix something that's not "wrong," just because it's not "how they'd say it."

I'm pretty sure you've been reading this and have stopped at points, silently correcting my grammar. I don't care. I write in my voice. I have an accent in English. I'm proud of it. As long as my message gets across, does it really matter, if I wrote "even if" instead of "even though?"

Why is it we feel the need to make others sound like us? What are we fighting for when we preach student's right to their own language, yet make unnecessary corrections in manuscripts? Don't get me wrong, I'm all pro clarity and understanding each other. But I'm tired of people trying to make me sound like them and fit me inside a box I don't belong. Native speakers unconsciously exert power over those who are non-native speakers through everyday discursive practices like this.

So, what do we do with this information? If you're in the position to help a fellow graduate student revise a text, it would be helpful to keep an open mind. Don't assume because we're not native speakers that our English is in need of "correcting." Keep in mind that many of us studied different varieties of English, each with their own correct system. I personally studied British English, so my choice of words or syntax is not always a reflection of my Spanish, but of a form of English that is not American. Unless you're an editor, help with what the author told you their concerns were. If you find the English so confusing that you can't give feedback, ask if it's ok to include language suggestions.

I'm not preaching for the end of academic English, nor am I promoting that we erase the line between oral and written language. However, as scholars, we get used to the ways linguistic and cultural practices impose normalization in international students' academic practices.

Instead, let's write and collaborate in our voices. Let's celebrate literacies as they are.



Photo Credit: Hannah Olinger

Building Your Community Before You Embark on Your Dissertation Journey

by **Tala Karkar Esperat, PhD, Texas Tech University**

Starting your dissertation is unlike anything you have experienced before. It marks the start of the last chapter in your doctoral journey. Lots of changes and adjustments happen during this time. It is the transition into being independent as an emerging scholar. You are responsible for finding a dissertation topic, planning your schedule, and arranging meetings with your committee members. You must hold yourself accountable for your time and create your own project deadlines.

From my experience, I learned that building your own supportive community is a key to success. As Glode (2000) suggested, “the absence of social integration can have a negative effect on the quality of the students’ experience, such absence is not a precipitator of attrition” (p. 222). Tinto (1993) referred to the community as social integration. White and Nonnamaker (2008) identified five embedded communities doctoral students can draw from to adopt values, skills, norms, and attitudes. These communities are your: discipline, institution, department, lab, and student supervisor/committee chair. The question is, how can you successfully build community?

Your community starts with choosing dissertation committee members who you hope can support you tirelessly. I suggest interviewing your potential committee members and taking time before you choose. Your committee chair can be your mentor. Research shows that the committee chair is considered the most important person (Barnes & Austin, 2009), playing an integral role in the dissertation process (Devos et al., 2017).

It is important to have an honest, productive relationship with your committee chair. My committee chair motivated and inspired me to keep working to finish my dissertation. She was positive, caring, and constructive. I recommend an average of three committee members who are knowledgeable about your topic, method, and research area. You will meet with them as a group about three times to discuss your topic, proposal defense, and dissertation defense. You want to keep it simple. You may meet with your committee members more than three times depending on the level of the support you may need. Do not be scared of changing your committee members if you need to. However, find the prospective member before you do so and always keep your committee chair informed.

Doctoral students both inside and outside your program can be part of your community, too. They can connect to your struggles, give advice, review your work, and remind you of deadlines. Students outside your field can provide different perspectives on your work. If you are in a cohort program, your experience may be different. You can have the support of peers in your cohort. Emotional support from fellow doctoral students can be helpful. However, in isolation, it has little impact on doctoral students’ decisions to quit (Devas et al., 2017). Terry and Ghosh (2015) suggested that psychosocial mentoring support designed to promote learning and success should include academic, workplace, and personal support. Family, significant others, and/or friends should be included. They can be your cheerleaders and provide spiritual, emotional, and academic support. They can help create a peaceful prod-

active environment. Nobody will help you create your inner peace at home except for the individuals in this circle. Communicating honestly and effectively about your needs, schedule, and expectations is crucial.

Creating your study space or work area is part of building your community. Your study space is connected to your level of productivity. How many times have you felt unproductive at your study space? Is the noise too loud or too quiet, the computer too slow, or the chair giving you a backache? Having your own space to work is necessary, especially when you are not feeling well, or you do not feel like going out in extreme weather.

Your calendar is also part of your community. You need to set goals and deadlines for yourself. It is okay if you cannot meet your deadlines exactly, but you can always work towards them. Keep your committee chair and members informed with your progress and share your needs. I heard so many times that students felt they were not making any progress because of their advisors and a lack of support. The committee chair should guide the student, but it is the responsibility of the students to reach out to share their progress and needs.

The process of crafting the dissertation is a complex one. It is full of emotional ups and downs. Do not be too hard on yourself. Be reasonable. Find your inner peace through prayers, exercise, and community. Remember, you compete against your own self. Everyone's dissertation is different. I speak from my experiences completing my dissertation in less than 10 months. I only did it through the community I built for myself.

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An Interview with Dr. Betsy Baker,

President-Elect of LRA

by **Stephanie F. Reid, Arizona State University**

Dr. Betsy Baker, President-Elect of LRA, is a Professor of Literacy Studies in the Department of Learning, Teaching, and Curriculum at the University of Missouri. She is also the creator, executive producer, and co-host of the podcast, *Voice of Literacy* (www.voiceofliteracy.org). She met with Stephanie Reid, Senior Co-Chair of the LRA-DSICG on September 26, 2019.

What drew you into your leadership role in LRA?

I was contacted and told that I'd been nominated to run for Vice President-Elect. I hesitated at first, but the primary reason I accepted the nomination was really my love of LRA. I've attended and presented at a whole range of conferences, but I always come back to LRA. I think LRA is a special and unique place, and it has become my academic home. It's given me so much that it became an opportunity for me to try to give back. Ultimately, I agreed because it was an honor to even be asked. I still am not quite sure how my name got on the list, but it's certainly a privilege. I just think LRA is the best. I've taken and I've taken and I've taken. It's an opportunity for me to give back.

What is so special about LRA?

For me, there are a couple things. One is the camaraderie. I look forward to seeing old friends, and I look forward to making new friends. I think the way LRA is structured, maybe it's part of my personality type, you can just hang out in the halls and get to know people. I feel like that's the cultural expectation. You should start talking to strangers. You should. Whoever's around you,

you should feel free to talk to them and pick their brains. I always leave LRA invigorated.

Thinking about your first experiences at LRA, what is your most memorable moment?

The first time I presented at LRA was in 1994, according to my vita, and LRA was in San Diego. It was being held at the Hotel Del Coronado, which is the iconic white hotel with the red roof you see in all the pictures. There are really two things that stood out to me and have continued to stand out to me about LRA. One was the camaraderie of the doctoral students. A big group of us piled into one cheap hotel room that we could walk to the Del from. And then you have the experience of standing around meeting people, and then realizing, oh, the person I'm talking to is Yetta Goodman. Oh, the person I'm talking to is Frank Serafini. I'm thinking, "I just read something that you just wrote." When I think about my first experiences at LRA, my most memorable experiences are of the doctoral students and our attempts to attend and become part of the profession. The second was the open-armed conversations with the scholars whose work I was reading. I thought, "Wow, real humans write these articles. Real humans write these chapters and these books. Maybe I can become one of them." Both those features just continue to resonate for me.

How has the field of literacy research changed since you were in graduate school? What changes are for the better/worse? What changes do you foresee looking ahead?

Well, in 1994, I actually did not attend LRA. It was the National Reading Conference (NRC). We did not publish the *Journal of Literacy Research*. We published the *Journal of Reading Behavior*,

with roots in behaviorism. The focus was on reading. We published the *National Reading Conference Yearbook*, which then became the *Literacy Research Association Yearbook*, which, more recently, became *Literacy Research: Theory, Method, Practice*. I think the shifts in those names are really significant. Obviously, the conversations had been happening before I showed up. Within a couple of years of me attending NRC, they decided they weren't national. They were international. They weren't reading. They were literacy. They weren't a conference. They were an association. NRC, the National Reading Conference, wasn't really who they were anymore. There were a whole range of names that were options. One possibility was to become the Reading and Writing Research Association, for example. I can't remember all the options, but at the business meeting, everyone had a ballot and voted, and the Literacy Research Association is the name that won. Those changes represent really theoretical, paradigmatic, methodological and substantive shifts in the field. I think there are pros and cons to all shifts. I perceive it to be representative of growth in our field. Sometimes there are people who are going to want to continue to focus on just reading from a behavioral perspective, for example. And others who think that maybe LRA is too broad of a scope. Maybe people can continue to delve into that. I hope they can. But I think change is good. I think our field is ever expanding, and I think it's important for our field to expand. But at the same time, I hope people can find their niches and push those niches forward.

How did this year's conference theme, *Literacy research: Illuminating the future, come to be* and what does it mean to you personally?

I enjoyed crafting the theme, and there is a good background to this answer. To me, the essence of

this theme is to call literacy researchers to embrace the diversity among us in terms of our paradigmatic, methodological, theoretical, as well as topical and substantive diversity. This theme says, "Hey, let's embrace the wonderful rich array of what is literacy research." I wanted attendees to celebrate what is called the polyphony, all the sounds of our rich and diverse field, and recognize that no one lens is really going to help us understand the complexities and nuances of this phenomenon we all cherish and love and call literacy. I want literacy researchers to embrace the full gamut of perspectives and approaches as we try to make sense of and advocate for literacy. I'm hopeful, as we come together in Tampa, to both present and discuss our research, that we can glean insights from the past to shed light on the present and therefore illuminate the future. I had to truncate that to "illuminate the future". I hoped that illuminating the future would beg the question, From where? The old stand on the shoulders of giants. To me, part of what draws me back to LRA is that the giants are hanging out in the hall, and I get to shake their hand and talk to them and, meanwhile, hopefully push the boundaries forward.

As a member of the leadership board, describe your favorite or most rewarding part of planning the conference.

One is the people. The second is broadening my own horizons. It takes a lot of people to plan a conference. First and foremost, I have to thank our co-chair and Vice President, Gwen McMillon. If you don't know her, you ought to get to know her. She certainly brightens every room she walks into. It's been delightful to get to know Gwen a little bit better. Then, LRA currently is separated into 14 different areas of research, of which the 14th is miscellaneous. There are 47 area chairs who oversee these 14 areas of literacy research. I had the privilege of getting to know these 47 area

chairs who work diligently to identify and talk with reviewers: What would make a good review? How do you get people to review? What are the criteria that we use to review proposals? I cannot speak more highly of the area chairs. They give of themselves selflessly and have worked diligently. For example, this summer, one representative from each area gave up a half a week and came to Columbia, Missouri, just to finalize program details. I almost debated, in terms of the conference theme, to purposely put sessions together according to paradigm or methodology and not according to substantive topical areas. We decided not to do that, but it was tempting. We also could not pull this off without LRA headquarters and the Executive Director, Caitlin Hyatt. Finally, planning the conference also meant that I read more widely. I read proposals across all 14 areas. My research resides at the intersection of literacy and technology. That is one area out of those 14. I also typically work with elementary children, so I'm not reading the adult literacy scholarship. I commonly do work from a sociocultural perspective. There are lots of other perspectives out there. I commonly use ethnographic research methods. There's lots of other research methods. I'm typically a post positivist. There are lots of other paradigms. It's a wonderful way for me to become more aware of the richness and the array of literacy research that LRA supports and advocates for.

Thinking specifically about early career scholars and graduate students, how would you recommend they incorporate this theme or mission as they prepare for a career in the field of literacy?

To me, the essence of research, whether you are an early career or late career scholar, is that you're pushing the boundaries. Trying to go beyond what we currently know is the essence of of a research question. Early career people will

have 20, 30, 40 more years to push those boundaries. If you were subjected to being one of my doctoral students, you would be subjected to my use of a myriad of weak metaphors that always fall apart quickly. One of those metaphors I would say is that new scholars are like a tree. In order to grow and branch into areas that you've not explored before, you've got to be well-rooted, and LRA has good roots, solid roots, diverse roots. It's not just rooted in here, but it's rooted here and here and here. I think it's important to value the roots - the perspectives, the paradigms - that you maybe don't agree with. I think some of the most valuable conversations I've had are conversations with people about why I disagree with them and vice versa. These conversations become a fascinating metaphysical pursuit that deepens all of us. To doctoral students, I would say that it's great to push more branches and to take the field in ways we've never gone, but it's also beneficial to embrace those who are going in directions you'll never go. Embrace those who will never believe what you believe. Find out why they believe differently because that grounds you and gives you balance. I think it's really valuable that you come to trust and know scholars that you don't agree with theoretically or methodologically. This will help you in your own scholarship, and you will help other scholars in their work.

How did your podcast come to exist?

Because I research literacy and technology, I teach new literacies courses. I was talking to some graduate students about how their K-12 students could be producing podcasts and the amount of reading and writing that it takes to create a podcast. And I thought, "I wonder how you make a podcast?" I approached at that time, IRA, which became ILA, which had a robust publishing house. I talked to the publishing director. I said, "What if I start a podcast that featured the

people who are publishing in *RRQ*?” Then I went to LRA and said the same thing to the editors of *JLR*. In 2008, I launched what was called the *Voice of Literacy*, which is my podcast. I’m real excited: We’re about to cross the 5 million mark for the number of requests to the podcast. Again, the goal there is simply to disseminate literacy research. We have great stuff going on in this community. How can we make sure the world knows about it? People are making literacy decisions all the time and may or may not even know that, “Hey! There are researchers over here. We might be able to help you make those decisions.”

What are your goals for this year as LRA President?

I think the real goal, I hope, of any president is to support the mission. The mission of LRA is four-fold. First, we are a community of scholars dedicated to promoting research. I think it’s easy for us to forget that because we have other professional organizations that may not be research organizations. But our niche, LRA’s niche, really is promoting research. I’ll be dedicated to figuring out how to promote research. The second piece of LRA’s mission is commitment to ethical research. Part of our mission is to be methodologically diverse. Our mission actually is to not be methodologically just this or just that. Then, the third thing I think we’ve been focusing on at LRA, and, of course, we can never focus on it enough, is to be socially responsible. The social responsibility of advocating for literacy research is paramount and a privilege, and part of LRA’s mission is to disseminate research. It’s not enough just to promote it, make sure that it’s methodologically diverse, socially responsible, and rigorous, but we then need to make sure the world knows about it. We do that through *JLR*. We do that through *LRTMP*. The mission statement actually says that those venues must purposely promote generative

theories that inform practice and inform sound policy. According to our mission statement, we can’t just go down a rabbit hole and do one of these things or the other. We’ve got to disseminate a broad breadth of literacy research. Finally, one-fourth of the mission statement is to mentor and support future generations of literacy scholars. Within a few years, it’ll be up to you all to continue to push the field forward. I’m thrilled to have this small window of time where I’ll be president and where, hopefully, I can foster and create energy and synergy around the mission of LRA.

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PhD Perspectives:

Is the Academy the Way to Go?

by **Kate Haq, PhD, State University at Buffalo**
& **Michael J. Young, University of Iowa**

Why should I get a PhD? What does it offer? For many of us engaged in the study of literacy at the doctoral level, the answers are simple: I want to be a professor. Or, I want to be a researcher. What happens if, after years of study, endless cups of coffee, and so many sleepless nights, professorship does not happen? What if we change our minds along the way? What options do we have and how are we supported by our mentors who are living the professor life? In this article, two perspectives are offered that explore these questions through real life experiences. As we drudge through the academic process, it is relevant to consider: Is the academy the way to go?

Kate Haq, PhD

I earned my PhD in Curriculum, Instruction, and the Science of Learning with a concentration in Literacy from The State University at Buffalo in June of 2018. I was lucky and privileged to resign from my career as a public school elementary teacher after 26 years to pursue my graduate studies full-time over four years. My cohort from SUNY Buffalo are talented, amazing people and I have watched as they have taken jobs at colleges and universities across the country. Academia is in good hands with the addition of these critical, thoughtful, humane scholars. As for me, after much thought and discussion with my loved ones, I happily took a year to write, reconnect with family, and find my way in post-PhD life.

As a now-retired New York State teacher, finances were not an issue during my gap year. I interviewed for academic, non-profit, and private

school positions both in Buffalo and Philadelphia, my husband's current location. I adjuncted in graduate literacy courses, volunteered at a high school writing center in West Philly, taught myself to knit, and took pottery classes. I also spent large chunks of time alone visiting libraries, parks, museums, and neighborhoods in both cities--things on my bucket list that I have been too busy to accomplish as a working mom over the past 28 years. These solo expeditions gave me time to think about the importance of living in the moment and pursuing the things that make me happy. This time, and my time at graduate school, were important because at each juncture I was able to focus on my interests, rather than the interests of others. My three sons are now beautiful adults, and I reclaimed my time as my own. This space allowed me to reflect on my career, my studies, and my life and led me to the roots of my beliefs about teaching and learning.

As the matriarch of my clan, I often remind the young people in my life that no matter where you are on your academic path, you only have one life to live and you should make every effort to live it on your own terms. I realized that I feel most like myself as a teacher and learner when I am engaged with children. Teaching teachers is important and critical work, and literacy research is both exciting and challenging. But I wanted to spend my days learning, laughing, and growing with young people, immersed in literacy learning at the grassroots level, so to speak. So, in August, I took a job at a small, Dewian independent school teaching middle school ELA and Social Studies back home in Buffalo. I have already connected with members of my cohort to bring research into

my classroom--something I regret missing out on in my prior years in public schools. I am empowered to create curriculum, take students out for recess each day, plan field trips, and develop relationships with students, families, and faculty. I am embracing the school's focus on the whole child and counting my lucky stars to be walking into my classroom each day.

Michael Young, PhD Candidate

I am months away from defending my dissertation at the University of Iowa in Language, Literacy, and Culture. I thought the same thing at this point last year. However, after spending a year collecting and analyzing dissertation data and navigating the job market, I decided to spend another year with my data, collecting and analyzing, and declined the tenure-track position I had been offered. I wanted to be a professor, but I was not yet ready. I started my doctorate work while I was still teaching in the classroom – fifth grade literacy and social studies. Since beginning my program, I have worked full-time as a teacher, then as an instructional coach, a curriculum leader in a school district, and now as a literacy consultant. On the verge of making the jump from teacher, school leader, and graduate student into academia, I was not ready. Why?

What if I was not meant to be a professor? In my work in K-12 schools, I have been quite successful. I could certainly stay. I could continue to do the work I have grown quite accustomed to doing. I could continue to collect a salary that outpaces many tenure-track faculty positions, enjoying my 190-day contract, working with colleagues I know and respect, and engaging in work I find to be both important and rewarding. Yet, my colleagues and mentors in the academy offer me something I do not get from my role outside of the halls of academia: They challenge

me to think in inventive ways and to consider larger contexts about the discourses of schooling, literacy, and learning in jurisdictions that extend beyond my former classroom spaces.

And so, I am at a crossroads, metaphorically speaking. I will soon make a decision about which direction to go. I will soon decide that I am either ready to do what I have been working toward for years--I will join the academy--or, I will continue my work in K-12 schools. Whichever path I take is mine to choose. Forcing myself into a position where I recognize that either option is viable and acceptable is what is essential. While the road is long, while the self-doubt may weigh a great deal, may we each find our place in a world where literacy and learning drive our decisions and where pressures we feel toward one path or another belong to us.

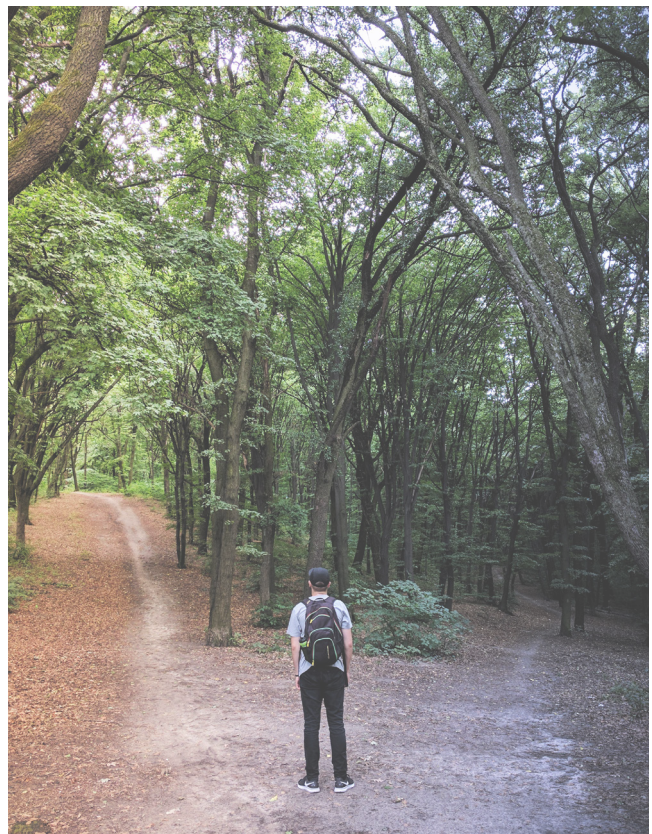


Photo Credit: Vladislav Babienko

Building Community Through Apprenticeship

by **Tairan Qiu, University of Georgia**

The Ninth Annual Proposal Mentoring Project (PMP) began in January 2019 when the LRA's Doctoral Student Innovative Community Group extended participation invitations to graduate students and university faculty in the LRA community. Following the excellent precedence of previous installments, this year's Project was another success. We cannot express our gratitude enough to all that participated in this Project.

The Proposal Mentoring Project and Pairing

The goal of PMP was: (1) to support doctoral students' navigation of the LRA proposal writing and submission process as they prepare to present their own research and, (2) to build relationships between students and faculty outside of their institution. This year, we respectively paired 34 doctoral students who were interested in submitting a proposal to LRA 2019 with 34 mentors who apprenticed them through their proposal revision and submission process. Through this mentoring process, students and professors built some strong professional relationships.

"[The most positive part about this project was...] building a relationship with my mentor. They were accessible and really relatable. They helped me feel less intimidated by the proposal writing process and equipped me with skills to do it again independently."

"[I enjoyed...] connecting with a student since my institution does not offer PhD programs."

Feedback from Participants

Faculty mentors and student mentees received an anonymous survey that inquired into their experiences participating in the PMP and their feedback. The feedback we received this year was overwhelmingly positive.

Both the mentors and mentees provided tremendous suggestions that will help us continue to develop this project into a more robust opportunity for all participants. Additionally, they provided personal commentary on their experiences as enactors of literacy in their communities. Mentors expressed that they loved being involved in the academic community and reading about "what up-and-coming scholars are working on and interested in." Some mentors were mentees in the PMP when they were graduate students, and decided to provide assistance to emerging scholars and give back to the community as assistant professors. The doctoral student mentees were grateful for the timely, warm, and supportive feedback that they received from their mentors. Most mentees elicited that it was extremely helpful to have an extra set of eyes on their proposal and that this was both a meaningful and productive apprenticeship process.

"My assigned mentor was incredibly helpful and responsive. She offered to read multiple revisions of my proposal, and offered helpful feedback, not just for that proposal but in general about proposal writing. Also - my submission was accepted, and I thank my mentor for her guidance with that!"

“I always love being involved and seeing what new scholars are up to. My most recent mentee shares many of my interests, and that always pushes me.”

Mentors

We want to express our deep gratitude to the following faculty mentors who volunteered their time, support, encouragement, and expertise to emerging scholars: Dr. Earl Aguilera (California State University, Fresno); Dr. Kate Anderson (Arizona State University); Dr. Becky Beucher (Illinois State University); Dr. Barbara Bradley (University of Kansas); Dr. Cynthia Brock (University of Wyoming); Dr. Kevin Burke (The University of Georgia); Dr. Kelly Chandler-Olcott (Syracuse University); Dr. Byeong-Young Cho (University of Pittsburgh); Dr. Cathy Compton-Lilly (University of South Carolina); Dr. Qizhen Deng (Boise State University); Dr. Katherine K. Frankel (Boston University); Dr. Julia Hagge (The Ohio State University); Dr. Juliet Halladay (University of Vermont); Dr. Dani Kachorsky (Texas A & M University, Corpus Christi); Dr. Ted Kesler (Queens College, CUNY); Dr. Jayne Lammers (University of Rochester); Dr. Josephine Marsh (Arizona State University); Dr. Raúl Alberto Mora (Universidad Pontificia Bolivariana); Dr. Lindsey Moses (Arizona State University); Dr. Joy Myers (James Madison University); Dr. Seth Parsons (George Mason University); Dr. Susan V. Piazza (Western Michigan University); Dr. Tracey Pyscher (Western Washington University); Dr. Jennifer Reichenberg (Medaille College); Dr. Jennifer Rowsell (Brock University); Dr. Joseph Rumenapp (Judson University); Dr. Katie Sciurba (San Diego State University); Dr. Frank Serafini (Arizona State University); Dr. Katarina Silvestri (State University of New York, Cortland); Dr. Elizabeth Stevens (Roberts Wesleyan College); Dr. Amy Vetter (University of North Carolina,

Greensboro); Dr. Corrine Wickens (Northern Illinois University); Dr. Thea Williamson (Salisbury University); and Dr. Bing Xiao (Austin Peay State University).

“The mentoring allowed me to write a proposal with a specific reader in mind and I liked that the deadline forced me to start early. My mentor was wonderful and gave me feedback that improved the clarity and tone of my proposal. Being able to ask her which section I should submit to was also very helpful.”

Anticipating the DSICG Proposal Mentoring Project for Next Year

In January 2020, shortly after the LRA 2019 annual meeting in Tampa, graduate students who are members of the DSICG can expect to receive an invitation email for the Tenth Annual Proposal Mentoring Project. Prior to that time, please reach out to the DSICG Leadership Team with any questions or concerns regarding the PMP. We value the success of members of our community and are thus committed to improving the program based on the feedback that we receive in order to cultivate meaningful and fruitful experiences for everyone. We appreciate your continuous support for the PMP and the DSICG. Cheers to another great year!



Photo Credit: Nik MacMillan

LRA-DSICG Calendar of Events

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 4

Annual Sara Bruce McCraw Doctoral Student Networking Session

7:15 AM – 8:15 AM

Tampa Marriott Water Street, Florida Salon IV

This event is for doctoral student members interested in meeting and networking with other doctoral student members. While a short amount of time will be dedicated to explaining the purpose of the Doctoral Student Innovative Committee Group (DSICG), the majority of our time will be spent getting to know one another. Breakfast sandwiches and coffee will be served.

Doctoral Student ICG Study Group Session #1 Session Focus: **Designing the Study: Thinking Theoretically, Methodologically, and Ethically**

12:00 PM – 1:00 PM

Tampa Marriott Water Street, Meeting Room 7

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 5

Newcomers' and Graduate Students' Breakfast

7:00 AM – 8:15 AM

Tampa Marriott Water Street, Florida Salon IV

Doctoral Student ICG Study Group Session #2 Session Focus: **Designing the Study: Writing the Study - I Have This Data, Now What?**

12:00 PM – 1:00 PM

Tampa Marriott Water Street, Meeting Room 7

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 6

Doctoral Student ICG Proposal Mentoring Project Breakfast

7:15 AM – 7:45 AM

Tampa Marriott Water Street, Florida Salon IV

Faculty and doctoral students involved in the 2019 Proposal Mentoring Project are invited to attend this breakfast. A continental breakfast and coffee will be served.

Doctoral Student ICG Business Meeting

7:45 AM – 8:15 AM

Tampa Marriott Water Street, Florida Salon IV

All doctoral students are invited to attend the business meeting. Everyone running for a leadership position must attend. **Voting for the leadership positions will take place at this time.**

Doctoral Student ICG Study Group Session #3 Session Focus: **Publishing the Study: A Talk with Journal Editors**

12:00 PM – 1:00 PM

Tampa Marriott Water Street, Meeting Room 7

Doctoral Student ICG Happy Hour

7:00 PM – 8:30 PM

Tampa Marriott Water Street, Waterside Grill and Patio

Hot appetizers will be served. Cash bar will provide beverages.

Self-nominations for LRA-DSICG Leadership positions due Thursday, December 5th.

Voting will take place at the business meeting on Friday, December 6th.

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 7

Academia 101: Navigating the Transition from Graduate Student to Professional

8:45 AM – 10:15 AM

Tampa Marriott Water Street, Meeting Room 9

The proposed alternative format session aligns with the mission of mentoring and compliments the 2019 LRA theme, *Literacy Research: Illuminating the Future*, as doctoral students are moving into the field of literacy research at a time when literacies researchers must attend to the multiple implications of literacy across everyday lives and times. As emerging scholars and teacher educators, doctoral students play a key role in the future directions of literacy research.

Presenting Scholars:

Dr. Grace D. Player, University of Connecticut

Dr. Justin A. Coles, Fordham University

Dr. Gholnecsar Muhammad, Georgia State University

LRA Conference Event Highlight: An Overview of the 2019 DSICG Study Groups

The 2019 LRA-DSICG Study Group series addresses the conference theme: “Illuminating the Future.” This is an opportunity for doctoral students to learn from distinguished members of the literacy community as well as collaborate and communicate as students and novice scholars.

During the three study group sessions, we will draw upon the shared experiences of faculty members with demonstrated expertise in the various stages of the research process to ensure that future scholars can contribute without fear of losing themselves in the process. The study group sessions will consist of panel discussions, with

opening remarks by each of the panelists, followed by open dialogue between the attendees and the panelists around the focal topic.

We believe that this Study Group series will help our community members develop the skills needed to maneuver the publication process and to contribute to literacy research in the years to come. This is an event that you don’t want to miss!

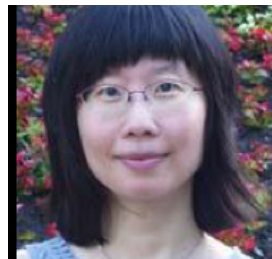
Day 1: Wednesday, December 4th

Designing the Study: Thinking Theoretically, Methodologically, and Ethically

Faculty Members: Each scholar is a member of the LRA research or ethics committees.



Dr. Maneka Brooks
Texas State University



Dr. Eva Lam
Northwestern University



Dr. Jon Wargo
Boston College

Questions that frame this session:

In what ways does theory inform your research?

How do you select your research theory and methods?

How do you ensure that your research is ethical?

Day 2: Thursday, December 5th**Writing the Study: I Have This Data, Now What?**

Faculty Members: Each scholar is a member of the LRA research or ethics committees.



Dr. Raúl Mora
Universidad Pontificia
Bolivariana – Medellín



Dr. Caitlin Ryan
University of North
Carolina at Wilmington



Dr. Allison Skerrett
University of Texas at
Austin

Day 3: Friday, December 6th**Publishing the Study: A Talk with Journal Editors**

Faculty Members: Each scholar is an editor of a journal.



**Dr. Catherine
Compton-Lilly**
University of South
Carolina



Dr. Gerald Campano
University of Pennsyl-
vania



**Dr. Kathleen
Hinchman**
Syracuse University

Questions that frame this session:

How do you begin your writing process?

In what ways does your theory guide your writing?

How do you know what aspects of your research to focalize in your writing?

Questions that frame this session:

What elements do you look for in selecting articles for the journal?

What is the review process like for your journal or for other journals to which you've submitted your work?

How should novice scholars go about selecting journals to publish their work?

LRA-DSICG Open Positions

We are currently seeking new members to join our team.

The mission of the Literacy Research Association Doctoral Student Innovative Community Group is to facilitate doctoral students' development as exceptional researchers, scholars, and teacher educators in the field of literacy. This task includes purposeful efforts to (a) encourage doctoral students' participation in the LRA, including annual meetings and publications, (b) meet the unique needs of doctoral students, (c) support doctoral students' professional growth, and (d) create a collaborative community of scholars.

Apply to be part of the DSICG Leadership Team

If you are a doctoral student and want to be a part of the LRA Doctoral Student ICG Leadership Team, you must:

- Read through the descriptions of the DSICG Leadership Team positions
- Decide which one or two positions you are interested in
- Complete the self-nomination form by Thursday, Dec. 5th at 6pm: <http://tiny.cc/DSICGSelf-Nom2019>
- Attend the DSICG Business Meeting in the morning on Friday, December 6. You will be asked to informally and briefly introduce yourself and express your interests in the position(s) for which you applied.

Important notes:

- You must attend the business meeting to be elected to a position.
- You are expected to attend the LRA Annual Conference during your year(s) of service.
- **Deadline: The self-nomination form is currently open but will close on Thursday, December 5 @ 6pm.**

Assistant Co-Chair (1 open position)

Responsibilities include facilitating the DSICG Proposal Mentoring Program, assisting the Co-Chairs with the year-long operation of the DSICG, contributing to the DSICG newsletter, and maintaining communication with LRA stakeholders. The person in this position automatically transitions to Co-Chair at the end of term. This is a 4-year commitment, as the Assistant Co-Chair moves into a Co-Chair position. Only individuals in the early stages of their programs should apply. Please review this timeline carefully: Year 1 (January - December 2020) = Assistant Co-Chair, doc student; Year 2 (January - December 2021) = Junior Co-Chair, doc student; Year 3 (January - December 2022) = Senior Co-Chair, doc student or in transition to Assistant Professor; Year 4 (January - December 2023) = DSICG Alumni Liaison, typically in position of Assistant Professor.

Conference Coordinator (1 open position)

Two-year, staggered position so that there is always at least one senior member. The Conference Coordinators are responsible for overseeing the DSICG events at the LRA conference. The Junior Conference Coordinator is responsible for leading the DSICG Happy Hour, and the Senior Conference Coordinator is responsible for organizing the Study Group Sessions for the upcoming LRA Conference in collaboration with the Junior Co-Chair. Responsibilities include contacting and confirming Study Group presenters as soon as the LRA SG proposal is accepted, communicating with SG presenters prior to the conference to obtain handouts and PPTs, providing these to the Tech Committee ahead of the conference so that

they may be posted online in the DSICG space, attending each SG and obtaining the presenters lunch/drink requests, setting up the space for the SG. The Conference Coordinators will become the contact person throughout the LRA conference and will stay in constant communication with the Co-Chairs through email/ phone/text message to ensure a successful conference.

Newsletter Editing Team (3 open positions)

Two-year, staggered position so that there is always at least one senior member. Responsibilities include overseeing the organization and publication of two DSICG newsletters (Spring/Summer, Fall), establishing deadlines for publication, writing pieces, commissioning pieces for the newsletter from our membership, working with the Newsletter Writers, and communicating with the DSICG stakeholders.

Newsletter Writers (4 open positions)

Serving a one-year term, responsibilities include writing at least one piece for one of the 2 newsletters (Spring/Summer & Fall).

Technology Committee (1 open position)

The team consists of four members. At least two of the positions are two-year positions so that there is always at least one senior member. Responsibilities include creating and maintaining the new DSICG website on the main LRA website, publishing the newsletter to the DSICG website, maintaining and updating the DSICG Facebook page, and creating and maintaining the DSICG Twitter account.

Historians (3 open positions)

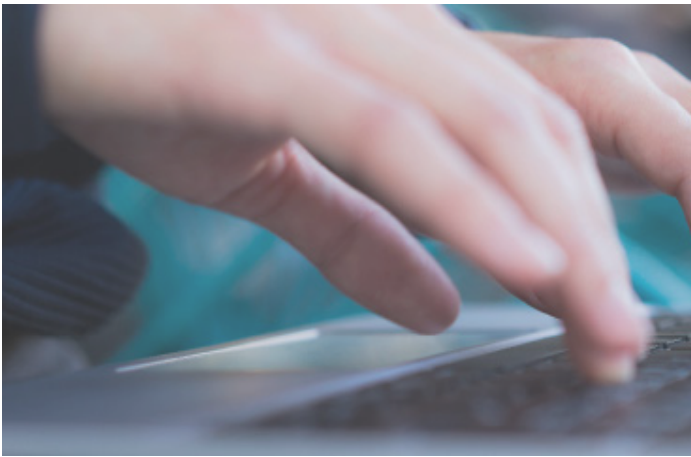
The Historians will work throughout the year to communicate with stakeholders, past and present, to obtain and document the history of the DSICG. This history will include past Study Group presenters, photos of past DSICG events, bios and information regarding the founding members and subsequent leadership teams, and any other pertinent historical information. During the LRA conference, the Historian's responsibilities will include photographing and documenting all DSICG events (SGs, Academia 101, Newcomer/ Graduate Student event, Happy Hour, and Business Meeting).

Treasurers (1 open position)

Each treasurer may serve a one or two-year term. Responsibilities include coordinating with LRA to manage the DSICG budget. The Treasurer works closely with LRA personnel in planning and facilitating the DSICG events at the conference, and the Treasurer is also responsible for obtaining all receipts from the conference and submitting them for reimbursement to the LRA board.

Membership Secretaries (1 open position)

Two-year, staggered term. Responsibilities include attending all of the DSICG events and recording attendee's names and contact information, updating and maintaining the DSICG listserv, creating and distributing the DSICG annual survey, distributing the DSICG newsletter, and maintaining the DSICG email account (lra.dsicg@gmail.com) and distributing emails to the appropriate leadership positions.



Become a Contributor



We are currently looking for additional DSICG Newsletter writers.

As we continue to evolve, the DSICG Newsletter staff hopes to include more voices from our community. We invite you to contribute!

Propose an article, column, infographic, or alternative media composition to the editors. We welcome all new ideas, and are willing to try new things!

Or, select from our pre-existing topics and columns.

Contact:

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Michael Young
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Raquel Wood
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Julia Morris
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Tools of the Trade

Transitioning to
Doctoral Studies

Technology

Writing

Research

Job Search

Conference
Advice

Balancing
Workload

Organization

Interviews

