



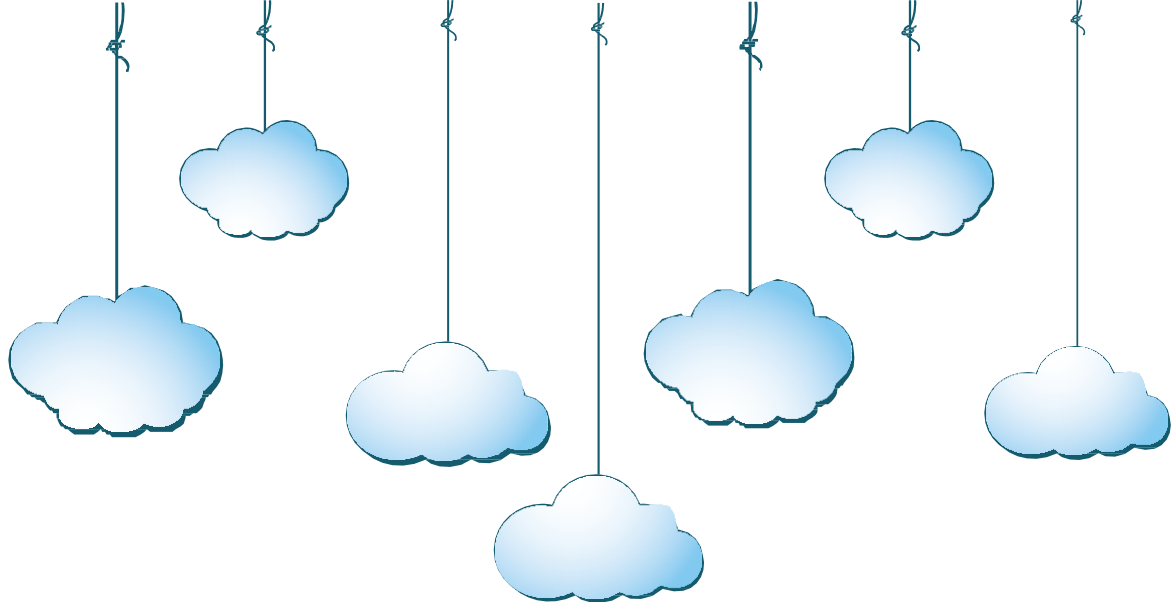
LITERACY
RESEARCH
ASSOCIATION



DSICG Newsletter

Fall 2020





From the Editors

We are excited to bring you this issue of the Fall DSICG newsletter as we prepare to come together virtually for the 2020 LRA Annual Conference. This year's conference theme asks us as educators and scholars to envision ways to come together and collaborate to continue moving literacy research forward. As such, this issue seeks to build on that theme by bringing together the voices of our community and encouraging ways to interact at the conference.

Among key contributions in this issue are reminders of the importance of racially diverse representation in our books, and a peek into the ways graduate students come together to create supportive communities of practice. Additionally, we provide information about meetings, working sessions, and networking opportunities occurring at the 2020 conference. Finally, we delve into the importance of this year's theme in an interview with LRA's President-Elect, Dr. Gwendolyn Thompson McMillon.

As an editing team, our hope is that this issue of the newsletter sheds light on the work our community continues to do. We invite you to get involved with DSICG activities, including opportunities to write for upcoming issues!

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Doctoral Student Innovation Community Group



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Email: lra.dsicg@gmail.com
 Facebook: [LRA-DSICG 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 student participation in the LRA, including annual meetings, study groups, and publications;
- (b) meet the unique needs of doctoral students as they create a community;
- (c) support doctoral students' professional growth as they advance in the field;
- (d) create a collaborative community of scholars.

*"Education can't
save us. We have to
save education."*

- Dr. Bettina Love



**Mission
Statement**

We Must Do Better and The Time is Now

by **Elizabeth Gibbs, Senior Writer**
Judson University

In 1965, a daring, former president of the International Reading Association wrote an article. An article that should have immediately changed the course of children's literature. However now, more than five decades later, the course of children's literature is much the same. Nancy Larrick studied the children's book industry for three years, surveying 63 publishing houses and 5,206 children's trade books published between 1962–1965. Larrick found that out of the over five-thousand books surveyed, only 349 of them included a person of color—a 6.7 percent average. Further, most of the titles stereotyped black children, only 12 simple picture books included an African American as the main character. Twelve books for a population of 6.3 million nonwhite children to see themselves represented in literature. Twelve books for children of color to try and relate to. Twelve books for teachers who served a majority population of black students to use in their classrooms. The published results of Larrick's study in *The All-White World of Children's Literature* (Larrick, 1965) should have changed the course of children's literature, but it did not.

The political, race-fueled fire of the late sixties and early seventies provided space for African American authors. Walter Dean Myers felt the era “was so outstanding that I actually thought we would revolutionize the industry” (Myers, 1986). By the end of the decade, however, the burning racial fire was but an ember and the racial landscape of children's literature remained relatively unchanged.

In 1985 a research library of the University of Wisconsin—Madison called the Cooperative Children's Book Center (CCBC) began collecting and publishing data around diverse texts. African American authored and illustrated children's books were first document by the CCBC in 1985, but it wasn't until 1994--nearly 30 years after Larrick's groundbreaking article--that the CCBC published statistics about children's books that featured stories ABOUT people of color not just BY people of color (Horn Book, 2017).

In these published statistics, out of the estimated 4,500 children's books published only 166 were about African American characters. This dismal 3.7 percent represented a decline in the representation of people of color in texts from Larrick's 1965 article and was not the only industry problem. Jaqueline Woodson shared her frustrations with the lack of growth regarding diversity within literature in her “Who Can Tell My Story” article for The Horn Book in 1998. Woodson noted that far too often, even though there were a few texts that featured stories about African American characters, these texts were written by white authors. Even though a movement to share diverse texts with children existed, authors of color were not being sourced to supply these texts (Woodson, 1998). Was it easier for the publishing houses to support the diversity movement by using white authors? Although Woodson called for literature that is written “from inside the house” by people who have “lived their stories,” there would be no immediate wake-up call in the industry.

The CCBC has continued to publish statistics about the diversity in children's books for the past 35 years. Slowly, the statistics have shown a steady pattern of growth. The most recent statistics from 2019 show that just 23 percent of children's books were written by people of color, while 29 percent were about people of color (CCBC, 2019). The number of children's books that are by or about people of color have increased, but is it enough? In a nation where nearly half of the children under 18 are of color, shouldn't the books they read at least be similarly represented?

For over half a century there has been a spotlight on the amount of diversity in children's literature. The ebbs and flows of the nation's racial divide has caused the spotlight to shine brightly or all but fade away; however, it is time to take control of the spotlight. Publishers must do better. Teachers and schools must do better. Researchers must do better. We must do better and there is no better time than now.

Sources

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Breaking Down Walls within the Ivory Tower: The Power and Potential of a Grassroots Doctoral Student Community

by **Olivia Murphy, Newsletter Editor**
University of Maryland

I recently had a book chapter accepted for publication about a doctoral student community of practice that I help organize at my university. The number two most surprising thing about the experience (second only to having a chapter get accepted in the first place; imposter syndrome is real, y'all) is the type of feedback I received. Along with all the standard revise-and-resubmit commentary, I also received specific side notes from all three reviewers and one of the book editors about the importance of the topic, and the need for more doc student grassroots communities of practice (CoPs) like ours in other Colleges of Education. Admittedly, I was surprised. I have presented about our CoP at a couple conferences and talked with other curious doctoral peers/conference session attendees about our group, but didn't realize how unique our CoP really was in the greater higher education world. And after the past hellish near-year of COVID-19 pandemic practice during which my doctoral CoP has served in turns as a pedagogical thinktank, a lifeline, a commiseration space, a help desk, and a place to just plain feel less lonely, what I really want--more than wonderful conversations with doctoral scholar-colleague peers, and more than a published chapter (no, seriously)--is for more spaces for ours to exist for education doctoral students everywhere.

So let me briefly explain, and then go do this at your institution in the spring. You won't regret it, and it is beyond worth the time and energy.

I assume if you're reading this newsletter you might agree: being a doctoral student of education is a tricky business involving myriad hats. There's the student hat, the researcher hat, the instructor of record hat, and maybe even the supervisor-of-student-teachers hat, all of which remain perched precariously on one head. I also assume that if you're reading this newsletter you might be able to relate to the following sentiment: when I and my doctoral scholar-colleague peers entered our program, we received little in the way of guidance or support, *particularly* when it came to our teacher educator roles as instructors of record and student teacher supervisors. This lack of support is problematic on two fronts: first, academia and specifically the student side of academia can be incredibly isolating and intimidating, and second, being a teacher educator is a completely different role than being a K-12 educator and requires a new set of pedagogical skills and approaches. As a novice teacher educator I received very little support, which was a sentiment shared by many of my peers.

It was out of this lack of guidance that, in Spring 2017, a group of doctoral students at my College of Education started a doctoral student led Teacher Education seminar that has affectionately become known as TEd.

TEd usually meets bi-weekly for two hours, and focuses on two specific goals: First, we choose a teacher education topic for the week, and read and discuss an article surrounding that topic. Second, we spend at least an hour on “problems of practice” during which time everyone in the group is invited to share challenges and wonderings that have come up in their teaching, their supervising, or their general being-a-doctoral-student-ing. As a group we troubleshoot these challenges/wonderings by sharing resources if we have them, sharing things we’ve tried in our own courses, brainstorming together, or just commiserating. In our off weeks we frequently visit each other’s classrooms observation-style to provide support (yes, even virtually!), and twice a semester we invite faculty in to join our community conversations.

I first joined the group in its first semester of existence and have been participating ever since--sometimes for credit, sometimes completely voluntarily--and at this point I co-lead TEd alongside a few other peers who have also been involved since inception. Over time, and especially during COVID times when our department has been extra silent by way of support as everyone tries to figure out the unknown of pandemic pedagogy, TEd has become the most important and frequent place I turn to for community, for help, and to develop my practice as a teacher educator and supervisor.

I can point to key aspects of my practice that have specifically developed because of my participation in TEd, and the number of emails in my inbox from TEd peers wanting to troubleshoot bits of pedagogy or tricky student happenings between seminar weeks is a testament that others feel the same way.

So my charge to you is this: if you, like me, find that other doctoral students have been the most useful and helpful aspect of your PhD experience; if you, like me, want an authentic space free of the pressures of power dynamics to ask questions and develop across aspects of your doctoral identity; and if you, like me, recognize that academia is isolating--especially during a pandemic--and can feel cold and lonely...consider creating your own doctoral community of practice. Our TEd turns three years old this spring and has a more robust participant list than ever before. I would love nothing more than to commemorate our three years of support and growth by seeing and/or helping other grassroot TEds pop up at Colleges of Education across the country. Now is the perfect time to start preparing for the spring semester, and I challenge you to assemble your own TEd as a doctoral student support system within your institution. If you do decide to take up this charge and have questions about how we got started or continue to organize our community I would love to answer them because, after all, in my experience doctoral students continue to be the best support for other doctoral students. Reach out at oamurph@gmail.com.

LRA-DSICG Calendar of Events

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 1

Annual Sara Bruce McCraw Doctoral Student Networking Session

8:00 AM - 9:00 AM CST

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.

Doctoral Student ICG Proposal Mentoring Project Luncheon

12:00 PM – 12:30 PM CST

Faculty and doctoral students involved in the 2020 Proposal Mentoring Project are invited to attend this luncheon. Please bring a lunch or snack to enjoy as we connect!

Doctoral Student ICG Business Meeting (elections)

12:30 PM – 1:00 PM CST

All doctoral students are invited to attend the business meeting. The LRA Doctoral Student Innovative Community Group (DSICG) is looking to recruit new officers! This is a great way to build relationships with doctoral students across the nation, and there are many opportunities for you to make the changes that you want to see in academia and literacy research.

Election & Voting Process

If you would like to nominate yourself for an available position, please fill out the self-nomination form:

<https://forms.gle/9RjUMKZCWgj7rEfz8>

The deadline for self-nomination is **Saturday, December 5, 11:59 PM PST**. We look forward to working with you!

Official voting will take place the week after the virtual LRA conference, and the voting portal will close on **Saturday, December 12, 11:59 PM PST**.

Everyone running for a leadership position should try their best to attend the Business Meeting.

2020 Elections: SELF-NOMINATION FORM for DSICG Leadership (December 2020)

This is the self-nomination form for all DSICG leadership positions.

DEADLINE TO APPLY: Saturday, December 5, 11:59 PM PST.

1. You can nominate yourself for up to two positions
2. The information you share here will be published on the DSICG voting form
3. All nominees should try their best to be present at the DSICG business meeting (Tuesday, December 1, 12:30 – 1:00 PM CST [1:20 – 2:00 PM EST])

A reminder of the available positions:

Assistant Co-Chair (1 opening)
Conference Coordinator (1 opening)
Newsletter Editing Team (2 openings)
Newsletter Writer (multiple openings)
Technology Committee (4 openings)
Historian (3 openings)
Treasurer (1 opening)
Membership Secretary (1 opening)

* Required

Email address *

Your email

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 2

Doctoral Student ICG Study Group Session #1 Session Focus: *Disrupting and Unpacking as Self-Work, Research, and Teaching*

11:00 AM – 11:45 PM CST

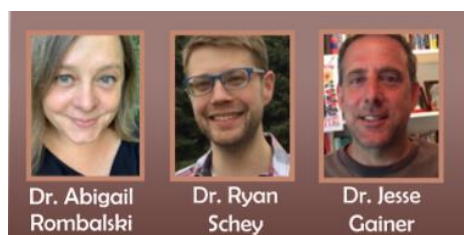
Doctoral students need to be aware of how to build relationships with multiple educational stakeholders, as well as how positionality influences all aspects of research. This panel features perspectives from experienced researchers on how to navigate the demands of academia while engaging in difficult conversations that forge power dialogues across often disparate commitments.

Panelists:

Dr. Abigail Rombalski,
University of Minnesota

Dr. Ryan Schey,
Auburn University

Dr. Jesse Gainer,
Texas State University



Dr. Abigail
Rombalski

Dr. Ryan
Schey

Dr. Jesse
Gainer

Academia 101: Navigating the Transition from Graduate Student to Professional

1:00 – 1:45 PM CST

In this alternative format session, graduate students learn about various literacy research and education positions from panelists who have recently made the transition themselves. Through sharing their experiences, panelists will help guide graduate students into future professional worlds. Ultimately, this session supports LRA doctoral students successfully become part of the next generation of literacy scholars who will continue to mobilize literacy research in transformative ways.

Presenting Scholars:

Dr. Earl Aguilera

Dr. Tracey T. Flores

Dr. Dani Kachorsky

Dr. Michael Young



Dr. Earl Aguilera



Dr. Tracey T. Flores



Dr. Dani Kachorsky



Dr. Michael Young

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 3

Doctoral Student ICG Study Group

Session #2 Session Focus: *Naming Reparations and Healing Within and Across Communities*

11:00 AM – 11:45 PM CST

Despite the many methodological and epistemological perspectives when engaging in literacy research, what is often missing are frameworks and role models necessary to establish relationships in our research, teaching, and service to collectively develop and implement humanizing projects that impact the field. This panel shares experiences with various opportunities for healing and more humanizing research across diverse theoretical, methodological, and pedagogical stance takings.

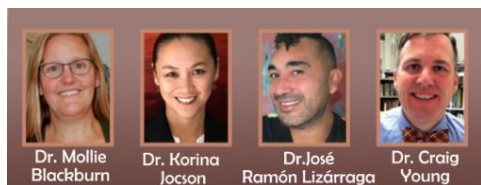
Panelists:

Dr. Mollie Blackburn,
The Ohio State University

Dr. Korina Jocson,
University of Massachusetts Amherst

Dr. José Ramón Lizárraga,
University of Colorado Boulder

Dr. Craig Young,
Bloomsburg University



FRIDAY, DECEMBER 4

Doctoral Student ICG Study Group Session

#3 Session Focus: *Futurities of Coalition: An Equitable, Just, and Radically Loving Table*

11:00 AM – 11:45 PM CST

Relationship building in research and teaching is difficult work, especially for emerging scholars who need support in forming lenses to approach dialogues “about our collective purpose as educational researchers” (Philip et. al, 2016, p. 16). This panel supports doctoral students in considering what their responsibilities are in how they leverage power and positionalities coming from the privilege of the ivory tower in working alongside various communities in research, teaching, and service. They share their personal stories of engaging in solidarity that foregrounds an equitable, just, and radically loving table.

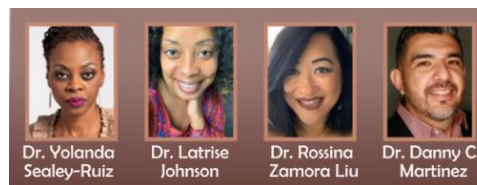
Panelists:

Dr. Yolanda Sealey-Ruiz,
Teachers College

Dr. Latrise Johnson,
University of Alabama

Dr. Rossina Zamora Liu,
University of Maryland

Dr. Danny C. Martinez,
University of California Davis



Doctoral Student ICG Happy Hour

6:45 PM - 7:30 PM CST

Join us for an opportunity to meet and socialize with other members of the DSICG community.

Build Connections and Make Changes: Becoming Involved in the DSICG

by **Tairan Qiu, Junior Co-Chair**
University of Georgia

The LRA Doctoral Student Innovative Community Group (DSICG) is looking to recruit new officers! This is a great way to build relationships with doctoral students across the nation, and there are many opportunities for you to make the changes that you want to see in academia and literacy research. If you would like to nominate yourself for an available position, please fill out the [self-nomination form](#). The deadline for self-nomination is Saturday, December 5, 11:59 PM PST.

Important Information:

- You may nominate yourself for up to two positions.
- Please write a short introduction about your *background, qualifications, and how you would serve in this role*. Include this introduction on the self-nomination survey for any position you would like to be considered for. This information will be included on the voting survey, and you will also share this introduction during our annual business meeting on **Tuesday, December 1, 12:30 – 1:00 PM CST**
- Official voting will take place the week after the virtual LRA conference, and the voting portal will close on **Saturday, December 12 at 11:59 PM PST**
- Terms begin immediately after the election and last for two years, unless otherwise noted.

DSICG Positions: Description & Availability

Assistant Co-Chair (1 position available)

Responsibilities include facilitating the DSICG Proposal Mentoring Program, assisting the Junior and Senior 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 the Junior Co-Chair at the end of term. This is a 4-year commitment (long but empowering), as the Assistant Co-Chair moves into the Junior Co-Chair, Senior Co-Chair, and DSICG Alumni Liaison position. Please consider applying if you are in the early stages of your Ph.D. program.

Technology Committee (4 positions available)

The team consists of four to five members. At least two positions are two-year positions so that there is always at least one senior member. Responsibilities include creating and maintaining the DSICG website, publishing the newsletter to the website and all media sites, maintaining and updating the DSICG Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram accounts. Additionally, the technology committee will be responsible for organizing and hosting webinars and digital networking sessions throughout the year.

Continuing Member: Tracy Donohue

Newsletter Editing Team (2 positions available)

These positions are for two years, and they are staggered so that there is always at least one senior member. Responsibilities include overseeing the organization and publication of two to three DSICG newsletters (Spring, Summer, Fall), establishing deadlines for publication, editing and writing (if needed) pieces, commissioning pieces for the newsletter from our membership and the scholarly communities, working with the Newsletter Writers, and communicating with the DSICG stakeholders. Familiarity with Adobe InDesign is beneficial.

Continuing Editor: Olivia Murphy

Newsletter Writers (Multiple positions available)

Writers serve a one-year term. Responsibilities include writing at least one piece for one of the DSICG newsletters (Spring, Summer, Fall). Pieces can be written in multiple forms (narrative, poetry, multimodal, visual, etc.) and are to help inform the DSICG community about the variety of literacy work being done in different learning environments. As we continue to move toward more equitable and antiracist practice, we encourage submissions exploring multiple cultures, backgrounds, language practices, and experiences.

Continuing Writer: Elizabeth Gibbs

Conference Coordinators (1 position available)

This team consists of two positions. These positions are two-year, staggered positions so that there is always at least one senior member. The Conference Coordinators are responsible for overseeing the DSICG events at the LRA conference. Responsibilities include planning and facilitating the DSICG Study Groups, maintaining communication with Study Group presenters regarding conference matters, and ensuring that the Study Groups go smoothly. Additional responsibilities include communicating and working with the Treasurers prior to the conference to help plan and facilitate the annual Happy Hour (providing any necessary signage for the restaurant/bar, reserving tables, etc.); and helping the Co-Chairs to facilitate the Business Meeting and Newcomer/Graduate Student event. 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.

Continuing Conference Coordinator: Scott Storm

Membership Secretaries (1 position available)

This position has a two-year, staggered term so that there will always be one person in the position. Responsibilities include attending all DSICG events and recording attendees' names and contact information, updating and maintaining the DSICG listserv, creating and distributing the DSICG annual survey, working with other committee members (Co-Chairs, Technology, Newsletter Editors) to distribute the DSICG newsletter, and maintaining the DSICG email account (lra.dsicg@gmail.com) and making sure emails get to the appropriate leadership positions.

Continuing Membership Secretary: Mellissa Teston

Historian (1 position available)

The Historian works throughout the year to communicate with stakeholders (past and present) to obtain and document the history of the DSICG. This includes past Study Group presenters, photos of all DSICG events at the conference, biographies and information regarding the founding members and subsequent leadership teams, and any other pertinent historical information that helps others understand us as a community. During the annual LRA conference, the Historian's responsibilities include photographing and documenting all DSICG events (Study Groups, Academia 101, Newcomer/Graduate Student event, Happy Hour, and Business Meeting).

Treasurer (1 position available)

Each treasurer may choose to serve a one-year or two-year term. Responsibilities include managing the DSICG budget, planning and facilitating the DSICG Happy Hour with the Conference Coordinator at the annual LRA conference, and obtaining all receipts from the conference and other spending and submitting them for reimbursement to the LRA board.

Continuing Treasurer: Andrew Vardas-Doane

For More Information

If you have questions, would like more information on any of the positions, or have trouble with the digital self-nomination form, please contact the Co-Chairs:

Tairan Qiu (tqiu19@uga.edu)

Reka Barton (rbarton2@sdsu.edu)

Building Community through Apprenticeship

by **Reka Barton, Assistant Co-Chair**
San Diego State University

The Tenth Annual Proposal Mentoring Project (PMP) began in January when LRA's Doctoral Student Innovative Community Group (DSICG) extended participation invitations to graduate students and university faculty in the LRA community. Following the excellent outcomes from previous years, this year's Project was another success! We cannot express our gratitude enough to all who participated this year.

The Proposal Mentoring Project & Pairing

The goal of the PMP was to (1) support doctoral students' navigation of the LRA proposal writing and submission process as they prepare to present their own research and (2) build relationships between students and faculty outside of their institution. This year, we paired 31 doctoral students who were interested in submitting a proposal to the annual LRA conference with 31 mentors who apprenticed them through their proposal revision and submission process. Comments from both doctoral students and mentors demonstrate that through this mentoring process, students and professors had opportunities to build strong professional relationships.

"I always appreciate meeting doctoral students from other institutions, and this year, my mentee had expertise in areas that are not as familiar for me--and served as a resource for me later in gathering new readings."

"Meeting new, amazing literacy colleagues; sharing ideas; and hearing of the proposal acceptance!"

Feedback from Participants

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

Both the mentors and mentees provided us with great suggestions that will help us develop this Project into a more robust opportunity for all participants. Additionally, they commented on their experiences. 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 previous 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 indicated that it was extremely helpful to have a pair of extra eyes on their proposal and that this was a very meaningful apprenticeship for them.

"Mentor can be very helpful in guiding the proposal writing, from which I learn a lot."

"I was able to get valuable feedback for my proposal."

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. Mandy Stewart, Texas Woman's University
- Dr. Maria Hernandez Goff, California State University, Fresno
- Dr. Andrea L. Tochelli-Ward, Le Moyne College)
- Dr. Saba Khan Vlach, University of Iowa
- Dr. Emily Hayden, Iowa State University
- Dr. Vaughn W. M. Watson, Michigan State University
- Dr. Kelly Johnston, Baylor University
- Dr. Colleen Whittingham, University of North Carolina Charlotte
- Dr. Earl Aguilera, California State University, Fresno)
- Dr. Becky Beucher, Illinois State University
- Dr. Cynthia Brock, University of Wyoming
- Dr. Kelly Chandler-Olcott, Syracuse University
- Dr. Katherine K. Frankel, Boston University
- Dr. Chris Chang-Bacon, University of Virginia
- Dr. Judith Lysaker, Purdue University
- Dr. Dana Robertson, University of Wyoming
- Dr. Christian Ehret, McGill University
- Dr. Chinwe Ikpeze, St. John Fisher College
- Dr. Juliet Halladay, University of Vermont
- Dr. Qizhen Deng, Boise State University
- Dr. Katie Bernstein, Mary Lou Fulton Teachers College, ASU
- Dr. Joanne Marciano, Michigan State University
- Dr. Dani Kachorsky, Texas A & M University, Corpus Christi
- Dr. Ted Kesler, Queens College, CUNY
- Dr. Raúl Alberto Mora, Universidad Pontificia Bolivariana
- Dr. Joy Myers, James Madison University
- Dr. Seth Parsons, George Mason University
- Dr. Tracey Pyscher, Western Washington University
- Dr. Katie Sciurba, San Diego State University
- Dr. Frank Serafini, Arizona State University
- Dr. Elizabeth Stevens, Roberts Wesleyan College
- Dr. Thea Williamson, Salisbury University

Anticipating the DSICG Proposal Mentoring Project for Next Year

Shortly after the LRA 2020 December conference, in January 2021, DSICG members can expect to receive an invitation email for the eleventh annual PMP. Prior to that, please reach out to the DSICG Leadership Team with any questions regarding the Project. We value the success of members of our community and we are committed to improving the program based on the feedback we received. We plan to cultivate experiences for everyone that are both meaningful and fruitful. We appreciate your continuous support for the PMP and the DSICG. Cheers to another great year!

Interview with Dr. Gwendolyn Thompson McMillon, President Elect of LRA

by Lakeya Omogun, Senior Co-Chair
The University of Texas at Austin



Gwendolyn Thompson McMillon, Ph.D., is a Professor of Literacy in the Department of Reading and Language Arts at Oakland University in Rochester, Michigan. Her research focuses on examining literacy experiences in the African American Church, making home-school connections, and developing ways to utilize out-of-school literacy experiences to improve in-school literacy teaching and learning.

What drew you into your leadership role in LRA?

When I first started attending LRA, one of the things that I noticed was that there were not a lot of African American scholars in leadership roles. So, I was asked if I was interested in becoming a Field Council Representative by the chair of my department at Oakland University. She was finishing up her term and suggested that I consider it. I saw that there were not a lot of African American members and thought it was really important for me to embrace that opportunity, not just to recruit African Americans but people in my region as well. I thought -- well here's an opportunity. I'll see what difference I can make. So, I should just sort of embrace the moment.

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

One memory that greatly impacted me was my first LRA presentation. Ron Kramer, one of the mentors from my department, showed up. Kathy Owl, Taffy Rafael, and my advisor Pat Edwards were there, too. So, all of these people who mentored me in some capacity were my only audience members, and that was it [laughs]. Some people have all of these great first LRA moments with 50 attendees. Nope. However, I took my presentation very seriously and did my best. It became an opportunity for me to get feedback, and what an audience to get feedback from, right? They sort of took me under their wing and guided me. It was more like a mentoring session than a presentation.

Later in the conference, Nell Duke scheduled me to speak on a panel. She was at Michigan State at the time, so I knew her really well. It was about literacy researchers at different stages of their careers, and I had just gotten hired as an assistant professor. I used all the advice from my personal presentation to guide my panel session. I was shining really brightly. So, that was my most memorable moment. Nobody came to my session except for my mentors, but we all took it seriously. They mentored me through the process. If there had been 50 people, I wouldn't have had the same kind of experience. So, the next session, hey...I was a superstar at the next one.

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?

I think it's definitely changed for the better. I was in graduate school between 1996 – 2001. When I first got to my PhD program, I wanted to answer some of the questions that I had in my master's program. Some of my master's professors told me that I needed to go get a PhD to answer the questions that I asked during class. They told me that I had the skill set to answer them at the doctoral level. My main question was: *Why were many of the African American children that I knew superstars in this church context but considered at-risk in school?* I noticed this while subbing after transition from my previous career as a stockbroker. I believe that I was called to become a teacher and pursued high school teaching. Some of my students were in special education and disillusioned with the whole education process, but at church they were literal superstars. They could do all these great things and were quite articulate, and I would ask questions about this. No one could answer them. Then, one of my teachers told me to get a doctorate. I applied to Michigan State and got in.

When I got there, I didn't share my research interest about the church. In my mind, there was this separation of church and state. So, I just focused on African American children's academic achievement. Later, I found out about a Spencer research training grant at Michigan States. I shared it with my mentor, Pat Edwards.

When she asked me what I would study, I finally admitted my interest in Black children's experiences in the Black church and their contradictory experiences in school. She told me that it was fascinating, no one was doing it, but I probably wouldn't get the award. That's because it was due a week later, and I didn't have time to flesh it out. She told me to apply anyway because it would force me to think about things. I didn't win, but I was a semi-finalist. That experience gave me time to dive deeply into the literature. There wasn't much literature on out-of-school literacy experiences like there is now.

Today, a lot of us focus on what's happening in the community and participatory research. It's valued now. Back then, it was sort of like...huhh, maybe. I was even encouraged to switch my topic. Now, the field is more open to community-based research. There were few people talking about it back then, but there's an understanding that what happens outside the classroom matters. It's more valued now.

The other change has been the switch from traditional strict methodologies. Before, researchers were expected to stick with a certain way of conducting studies. Now, the field is more open to, I think, methodologies for people whose research focuses on African Americans and Indigenous people. Some of the traditional methodologies don't work for us in the same kind of way. I am appreciative of this because I've turned away from research at times. I've felt like it's unethical to sit and watch someone suffer and not try to help them. That's not okay with me. Just because a researcher is "outside", it doesn't mean that they can't intervene.

Community-based participatory research is just the opposite of that because you have people coming in to help you identify the problems and the solutions. So, research is not just for research sake.

The change that I foresee looking is a continued look at research to impact more people beyond those who read journals and attend conferences. If we really want to make a difference, we have to make sure that we're broadening our audiences. For example, talking about family literacies – doesn't it make sense for it to reach families? We should write in ways and present it so that communities have access to our research. So, I think it's important for us to open up access for the people that we're talking about. We need to not only talk about them but talk *to* them and *with* them.

How did this year's conference theme come to be, and what does it mean to you personally?

This year's conference theme is *All of Us are Smarter Than Each of Us: Collaborate for Impact*. I actually started working on this theme prior to being elected as Vice President. I'm all about working together and unifying things, and in fact, I feel like I'm divinely called to bridge gaps. So, as I've worked in leadership in LRA, I've sat back and watched how things have gone. I want to say that I believe that conflict precedes progress. With this in mind, I believed that my job would be to unify and bridge gaps. I do believe that it takes many different pieces to come together to solve one particular problem. An academic problem can't be solved by looking at it from just an academic perspective. We have to look at the person's emotional and physical state. There are so many ways to look at a problem.

In my research, it's important for me to look at various kinds of methods and understand that we need all the stakeholders at the table. We need a lot of different perspectives from community members, teachers, and policy makers. That's what I tried to do with this conference. I tried to make sure that everyone isn't a literacy researcher, even though this is a literacy conference.

The theme is indicative of who I am and what I believe. I really do believe that we need to open up our field and understand that the only way that we can solve the problems that we have is to include a lot of different perspectives – different methodologies, different theoretical perspectives, and all of them can be valued at the table. I am setting the welcome table and inviting everyone to come so that we can solve these issues and make an impact. Many people have invested their time and effort into LRA, and I'm able to build on this foundation.

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

My favorite part was working with the area chairs and the tech committee. I can't even put into words how phenomenal the area chairs have been. Normally, they meet and start their work in January with the proposal and review process. Well, imagine 2020. I don't even need to say anything else [laughs]. So, I met with them at the conference in 2019 and made plans to meet in Chicago in June for a one-and-a-half-day marathon to get all the work done. They started work. In February, we started hearing about this "flu thing". By the end of the month, we all knew it was COVID-19. By March, everyone's children are home from school.

The universities switched to online learning. With all of these sudden changes, they continue to attend the meetings in March. Normally, we have one area chair meeting a year. This year, we've maybe six so far. In November, we've had one every week.

When I first met with them, I said okay, "I don't know if we're gonna meet face-to-face or virtual. I gathered feedback. The area chairs talked and spoke from their hearts. They said that there was no way that we could disappoint people who submitted LRA proposals. It felt especially unfair for people who were going up for tenure and new jobs. We had to figure it out. Then, they told me to communicate this to the board. I did. They went through the proposal review process as if we were preparing for a face-to-face conference. The technology team stepped in. I have to just give shout outs. I told them that I know nothing about a virtual conference. Headquarters stepped in as well. We listened to about 25 different demos about how to do a virtual conference. The board met a zillion times trying to figure out how to navigate the contract. So, everybody just stepped up to the plate. It was absolutely amazing. Nobody complained about having too many sessions. During our meetings, you'd see little kids and babies in the background. My 5th grade nephews were always in the background of my meetings busy with something [laughs]. My favorite part was watching LRA leadership step up to the plate while all of this was happening. We lacked certainty about the future, but it's coming together now. I believe that's the beauty of this whole thing.

2020 has been a tough year, but it's been one of the most rewarding years that I've been in LRA. Everybody stepped up to the plate to handle everything they were supposed to do and more.

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?

This theme is especially for early career scholars and doctoral students. No matter how much we know, we don't know everything. So, have an open mind and an open heart to other people. Value diverse opinions, diverse perspectives, diverse methodologies. Your way may be the best way at a specific time, but don't get stuck in one particular frame of mind, way of thinking, perspective, or methodology. Be open to others because we have to do whatever it takes to solve and address problems. Understand that you're not alone. It's important to collaborate with others. It's okay to invite someone else in and have someone get some of the credit. Are we about credit or solving the issues? Let's not get so caught up in the credit. I know it's important to get citations, but when you collaborate you can always talk about what you added. We talk about meritocracy, and I think too many people get caught up in getting merits on their own. It's an illusion. When I was in corporate America, I would say, follow your heart and the money will come. You need to do something that is important to you, without getting paid, and without getting credit. If you do it well, you will get credit. Your time will come. The money will come. You can always write grants.

If it doesn't, you still lived a full, complete, peaceful life. That's what self-actualization is all about isn't it? Reaching those goals that are lofty, and I know making money is important now! I'm saying follow your heart. Finally, don't be afraid to help others reach their dreams and goals.

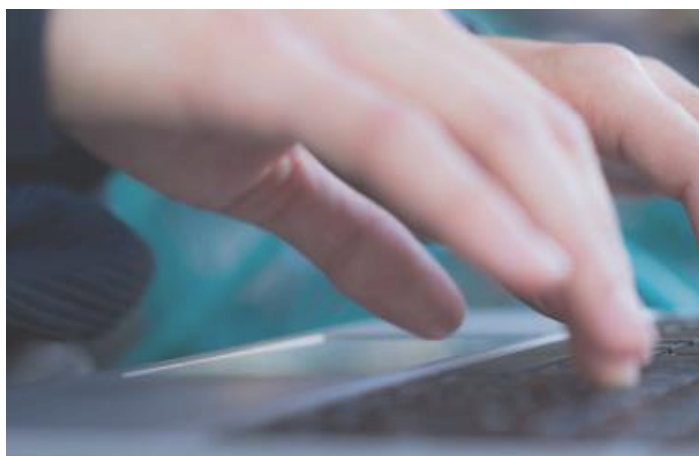
What are your goals for this year as LRA President?

I have three specific things that I want to do. I want to continue to see the organization unified. I talked about bridging gaps. That doesn't mean that we're all going to agree on things. It means that we agree that we value diverse voices at the table. I'm not just talking about diversity in terms of race and ethnicity, but I am talking about that as well. So, diversity in a lot of different ways so that we value people's work so that they feel wanted and needed in the organization. I believe that there is room for all of us within the Literacy Research Association. So, that's one thing that I want to do.

Second, I want to make sure that we work really hard to support our membership outside of the conference. I've heard people say we're more than a conference. We're a community, and we've been challenged by past presidents to come together as a community. So, how do we do that? I think there are ways that we can do things between the conferences – mentoring and providing information that will support us.

Finally, I want to help people understand that if we collaborate, we can have a great impact in the field. One of the things that I want to push for is LRA actually impacting the field. How do we do that?

Allowing our voice to be heard. Multiple voices. We won't always agree on everything, but there are some things that we actually agree on. Those are the things that we need to push out there. Right now, we have three literacy research reports that are in draft mode. The board approved the authors to put the drafts together. On Saturday, December 5th, those literacy research reports drafts will be discussed at the conference. I'm hoping that we'll have collaborative discussions, and the literacy research reports will be disseminated during my presidency. I've worked really hard during my Vice Presidency role to make sure that we go through the cycle, to make sure that they would be disseminated. Also, I'm hoping that related policy briefs would be disseminated. It's time to make sure that we have a voice in the field and move beyond talking to each other. There are pockets of hope where people are doing wonderful things, but folks don't necessarily know about it because they're staying in their silos. If we come together and start talking across the table, we can really begin to solve some of the problems that we care so much about. To have a greater impact is to collaborate and make sure our voices are being heard broadly.



Become a Contributor



We are currently looking to increase and diversify our DSICG newsletter voices!

As the DSICG newsletter continues to evolve, we continue to want to hear more voices from our community. After doing some important reflecting about the lack of diverse authorship in past newsletters, we are especially hoping for more contributing authors that represent a variety of cultures, languages, viewpoints, and experiences. Additionally, we are looking to diversify the genres of content we offer to make The Newsletter more multiliterate.

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