



LITERACY  
RESEARCH  
ASSOCIATION

## Lara J. Handsfield



### Biography:

I am humbled and honored to be a candidate for Vice President-Elect of the Literacy Research Association (LRA). LRA has been my academic home for almost 20 years, providing me with both personal and professional inspiration and camaraderie.

I am a Professor of Elementary Literacy and Bilingual Education in the School of Teaching and Learning at Illinois State University, where I teach literacy and bilingual methods courses and graduate courses in theories of language and literacy. This and my experience as an elementary teacher frame my scholarship. In particular, I am committed to engaging *with* teachers in collaborative classroom inquiry and dissemination. My scholarship has focused on reading comprehension instruction in multilingual classrooms; classroom discourse, positioning, and identity construction; teachers' negotiations of multiple political and pedagogical demands in their teaching; and implications of post-foundational theories for relational and classroom-based qualitative research. Most recently I have collaborated with a fourth grade teacher to explore discursive positioning and identities and meaning making as they unfold during comprehension instruction.

In addition to books, I have published in an array of journals, including *Journal of Literacy research*, *LR-TMP (NRC/LRA Yearbook)*, *Reading Research Quarterly*, *Research in the Teaching of English*, *The Reading Teacher*, *Language Arts*, *Harvard Educational Review*, and *Linguistics in Education*. I also served for six years as Co-Editor of the journal *Action in Teacher Education*. My research has been funded by the Spencer Foundation, and in 2021 I received Illinois State University's Outstanding University Researcher Award.



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### History of Involvement and Past Contributions to LRA

I have served LRA in many capacities over the past two decades. In 2015 and from 2016-2019, I served as Co-Chair of the Research Committee. In this capacity I helped lead our committee's work exploring methodological diversity within the organization. In addition, I liaised between the Board of Directors (BoD) and scholars from the University of Texas, Austin as they generated their CITE (Critical, Interactive, Transparent, & Evolving) literature review and platform on initial teacher preparation in literacy. Finally, I helped run the If I Knew Then... What I Know Now study group during four consecutive conferences to support emerging scholars.

My leadership within LRA also includes serving as Area Chair (Area 2), a member of the Ethnicity, Race, and Multilingualism Committee, and active participant in the Multilingual & Transnational ICG. I attended my first LRA conference in 2005 and have attended every year since. I have also reviewed for the conference, *Journal of Literacy Research*, and *LR: TMP* consistently since 2005.

### Platform and Future Contributions

I share LRA's commitment to "humanizing literacy research and practice" ([LRA website](#)). But what does this mean? For me, humanizing practices are grounded in three interrelated principles: 1) **historical clarity**—a recognition of how long-standing historical inequities persist in current social structures; 2) **relationality**—interpersonal and community-centered dialogue and collaboration, and 3) **futurity**—"the capacity to look at things as though they could be otherwise" (Greene, 1985, p. 3). If elected, I would integrate these principles into my work leading the organization. Below I highlight three (of many) issues in which I would apply this humanizing lens.

**Conference Engagement and Planning.** One responsibility of the Vice President is to collaborate with the President-Elect and the BoD in conference planning, and such work must be done in ways that are responsive, flexible, and equity minded. The 2020 virtual and 2021 in-person conferences offer models in this regard.

Additionally, as literacy researchers we must own our history of helicopter research—flying into communities and classrooms to "collect" data, and then zooming back out to disseminate it. I believe that we must also push back against this model in our conference planning by connecting with local community organizations, teachers, and schools well in advance of the annual conference, inviting them into the conference community and entering their lands and lives with humility and with justice in mind.

**Methodological Diversity.** Humanizing practices are not limited to any one theoretical lens or research methodology. Issues of methodological and epistemological diversity have long been a focus of discussion (and contention) within LRA, and over the past few years the organization has revived conversations about how methodological and epistemological diversity can be



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supported. While I characterize my own work as “critical,” and “sociocultural,” strict classifications can be misleading. In the practice of research and teaching, boundaries blur, spawning theoretical, methodological, and pedagogical innovations (Quant-Crit anyone?).

If elected, I would continue to support ongoing reflection and engagement around methodological and epistemological diversity. Historical clarity draws our attention to lenses and practices that continue to be minimized or discounted (e.g., queer theory, indigenous epistemologies, black feminisms), blind spots that contribute to educational inequities. Futurity compels us to continue supporting programs such as STAR and creating dialogic spaces in which divergent work can be brought together and showcased. Such efforts are essential for addressing ongoing tensions around research methodologies and epistemologies within the LRA community.

**Communication and Public Engagement.** LRA members and leadership have taken important steps to increase the organization’s role in impacting educational policy and practice. Such efforts include the release of the reports and webinars on Racial Justice and Dyslexia Research in 2021, statements against Anti-Black and Anti-Asian Racism and Violence, engaging membership in productive conversations regarding sciences of reading scholarship, and the participation and leadership of LRA members on the 2026 NAEP Reading Framework Development Panel. Such work is crucial for increasing LRA’s impact in the broader field. If elected, I would continue such efforts with an eye toward equity and justice.

The past, present, and future work I’ve highlighted here involves swimming against the grain of dominant frames and forms of literacy research and practice. As such, they require material, financial, and human resources. LRA’s leadership has worked tirelessly to establish and maintain our financial stability—no easy task these days. As VP-Elect, I would seek ways to maintain our financial responsibilities in ways that enable more humanizing futures within our organization.

*Maxine Greene. (1985). The role of education in democracy. Educational Horizons, 63, pp. 3-9.*