



Aria Razfar

LRA Board of Directors Nominee

Biography

Dr. Aria Razfar is Professor of Literacy, Language, and Culture and affiliate with Linguistics and Medical Education at the University of Illinois Chicago. He earned his PhD from the University of California, Los Angeles in 2003. Dr. Razfar has established himself as one of the leading scholars in the fields of applied linguistics, education, and learning sciences. The U.S. Department of Education and the National Science Foundation have provided major funding for his research on language learning, mathematics, and science. In 2014, Dr. Razfar was recognized for his scholarship by being named the University of Illinois at Chicago's Researcher of the Year for the Social Sciences. Dr. Razfar has authored theoretically driven empirical studies and conceptual pieces that draw on qualitative and quantitative methods, sociocultural theories of learning, and the application of language ideologies in urban schools. His publications have appeared in premiere academic journals such as *Anthropology of Education Quarterly*, *Human Development*, *Linguistics and Education*, *Mind*, *Culture, and Activity*, and *TESOL Quarterly*. Dr. Razfar is also lead author of *Applying Linguistics in the Classroom: A Sociocultural Perspective* (2014) and *Action Research in STEM and English Language Learning: An Integrated Approach for Developing Teacher Researchers* (2022) (Routledge Press). He has served as one of the lead editors of the *Journal of Literacy Research*. lead served on the University Senate Conference, including three years as Chair of the Academic Affairs and Research Committee as well as Chair of the Discovery Partner Institute's Executive Committee.

Candidate Statement

1. AFFILIATION: University of Illinois Chicago

2. Academic Record of Accomplishments:

Dr. Razfar has established himself as one of the leading scholars in the fields of applied linguistics, education, and learning sciences. The U.S. Department of Education and the National Science Foundation have provided major funding for his research on language learning, mathematics, and science. My work draws heavily from the Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) tradition, especially in relation to second language learning, early literacy, and mathematics problem-solving. First, my work aims to expand the notion of context in learning and development to include language ideologies and critical notions of discourse. Second, my work uses CHAT to re-mediate and reconceptualize some of the problematic assumptions of Second Language Acquisition (SLA)

that currently dominate the fields of bilingual and ESL education. Third, I use CHAT to understand language learning in content areas such as mathematics and science, as well as in non-school settings. I have authored over 70 theoretically driven empirical studies and conceptual pieces that draw on qualitative and quantitative methods, sociocultural theories of learning, and the application of language ideologies in urban schools. Since 2018, I have had a courtesy appointment in the Department of Medical Education serving on dissertation committees. In addition, since 2023, I have been a lead investigator on an interdisciplinary team consisting of History, Emergency Medicine, Community Health, and Literacy/Education focused on Wellness, Narrative, and Long COVID. Our work received the Stephen Abrahamson Award for "Outstanding Innovations" at the 20th Annual Innovations in Medical Education Conference hosted by the USC Keck School of Medicine.

3. History of Involvement and Past Contributions to LRA

Aria Razfar has been an active member of the Literacy Research Association (LRA) since 2010. He has regularly presented at the annual meeting of LRA since 2007 covering a wide range of research topics related to literacy research such as early literacy, digital literacy, disciplinary literacy with an emphasis on STEM, sociocultural theory, third space, language ideologies, multilingualism, translanguaging, and transnational literacies. He has served on the Oscar S. Causey Committee including serving as Chair from 2017-2020. He was Editor (Dec. 2021-Dec. 2024) and Co-Editor (Jan 2019-Dec. 2021) of the *Journal of Literacy Research*. He has also played a significant role in LRA's various mentorship programs for junior faculty. Most notably, he has served as a mentor for 3 STAR (Scholars of Color Transitioning into Academic Research Institutions) Mentoring Programs. Since 2024, he has served as the Co-Director of the STAR program. From 2011-2015, he was elected Co-Chair of the Multilingual/Transcultural Literacies Innovative Community Group (ICG) and has continued to expand its social media presence.

4) Platform for future contributions to LRA as an officer of the organization

For nearly three decades, my scholarship has been focused on literacy education and teacher development for non-dominant linguistic and cultural populations. During this period, I have leveraged sociocultural and critical theoretical perspectives, quantitative and qualitative methodologies, and a firm commitment to educational and linguistic justice across the lifespan of learners, from early childhood to higher education. LRA has played a vital role in my personal and professional development since 2007. Over the last 15 years, the STAR program has enjoyed great success in providing valuable mentorship for junior faculty navigating the complexities of promotion and tenure in higher education. While there are significant support systems in place for junior faculty: research funds, mentoring, ongoing feedback and evaluations on performance, there is a tremendous need nationally, across all fields, to provide intentional support and mentorship for mid-career faculty. The process of becoming Full Professors and taking on more visible leadership roles within high profile academic organizations and universities remains cryptic for many. As an officer of the organization, I plan to continue serving our community with a particular focus on 1) Mid-Career professional development; 2) Enhancing research and teaching excellence beyond the

printed word; 3) Commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion in literacy research; 4) Mental health and wellness.

1) Mid-career professional development entails the full range of scholarly practices, namely research, teaching, service, and interdisciplinary work. Research shows there is an increasing need within higher education for faculty, particularly underrepresented faculty, to serve in a range of leadership capacities. Supporting Mid-Career faculty raise their research signature and enhance their teaching excellence will help facilitate our organization's impact not only on the field of literacy but other fields such as medicine, STEM, the arts & humanities, and beyond.

2) Enhancing research and teaching excellence beyond the printed word is necessary given the shifts in digital literacy and the increased emphasis on visual and auditory media, it is vital that our community adapts to these changes. Data visualization and integrating digital literacies in our scholarship, teaching, and service needs to be intentionally supported.

3) While LRA's commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion in literacy education has been commendable over the years, the legal challenges posed to this fundamental principle will be unprecedented in the coming years. As a community of literacy research scholars, we need to be prepared to advocate on behalf of our colleagues, the vulnerable communities we work with, and ourselves. Our community will need more preparation to navigate these challenges. As an officer of the organization, I want to reiterate my commitment to this principle and practice.

4) I will make mental health and wellness a priority as an officer entrusted with the stewardship of our literacy research community. The mental health crisis among faculty and staff in higher education is real. Studies have shown that faculty, students, and staff are experiencing depression, anxiety, stress, and mental exhaustion at equally high levels. Investing in mental, physical, and spiritual well-being can no longer be ignored.