**LRA 2014 Alternative Session Proposal**: **Professors, We Need You!!! - Public intellectuals, Advocacy, and Activism**

**2014 LRA Conference, Marco Island, FL**

**Dec. 3-6, 2014**

**Background/Rationale for the Session**

Consistent with this year’s conference theme, “**The Dialogic Construction of Literacies”** this alternative session will engage participants in dialogue about how to transform the Literacy Research Association’s (LRA’s) role in advocacy for literacy learning and instruction among children, families, and educators through social media, open access spaces, and other channels.

LRA members may use online and social media tools to promote activism and advocacy to “envision a world in which all people have access and opportunity” (Delpit, 1992, p. 301). We argue that LRA as an organization should provide access to social media and advocacy tools to make available the “conceptual tools necessary to critique and engage society along with its inequalities and injustices” (Kretovic, 1985, p. 51). Advocacy research addresses issues of social justice, equity, and democracy with the objective of social transformation. Aiming to describe advocacy research and explore ideas about literacy and justice, this work is usually informed by critical literacy, the work of Paulo Freire, social constructivist theories. Literacy can be leveraged as an advocacy tool to apply multiple perspectives (Lankshear & Knobel, 1998) for decoding and encoding meaning (Smagorinsky, 2001) of literacy practices and events (Street, 1984). LRA as an organization can provide guidance and context on public issues involved in our field.

Advocacy for literacy learning in today’s reform era is constantly changing shape (Baumgartner & Jones, 1993). Federal and state policies can be created through many avenues, including legislative action, executive rule-making, court decisions, appropriations, and even through interpretation (Hill, 2001). Along with this ever-changing landscape, citizens are forced to adjust and become “entrepreneurs” (a term coined by Sheingate [2003]) in order to advocate.

Members of professional organizations, such as LRA, should expect that membership supports social and political capital that they could not have achieved individually (Coleman, 1990; Leana & Pil, 2006; Pil & Leana, 2009). To support members as advocacy “entrepreneurs,” several education-related professional organizations have constructed advocacy training and online networks for their own members (see International Reading Association’s “University of Advocacy” site (http://www.reading.org/general/Legislative/Resources.aspx), the Parent-Teacher Association advocacy toolkit (http://www.pta.org/advocacy/content.cfm?ItemNumber=1927&navItemNumber=558) and the National Art Education Association (http://www.arteducators.org/advocacy/advocacy-made-simple) for examples. In addition, organizations are getting more active on social media sites like Twitter (e.g., #PTAadvocacy) and creating online communities (e.g., http://www.causes.com/keepthearts) on Causes.com).

The Literacy Research Association has a history of investigating how critical literacy can help teachers and/or children advocate for themselves and issues in and out of the classroom (e.g., Scherff, 2012; Schmidt & Whitmore, 2010); however, we have not been as active in investigating how literacy practices might contribute to our own advocacy efforts to improve literacy education and learning. Literacy educators and researchers are uniquely situated to leverage critical literacy practices to advocate (Simon, Campano, Yee, Ghiso, Sánchez, & Low, 2012; Simon, R., Campano, G., Broderick, & Pantoja, 2012). Thus, we propose this alternative session to discuss how LRA members can, themselves, practice critical literacies as they engage in advocacy efforts through their own critically literate practices. One means for critical literacy engagement of LRA members is through social media and open access publications.

**Session Overview**

The session will offer an initial section provided by the Session Chair (Carla Meyer) in which we will frame the rationale and purpose for this session. The session will also have a projector displaying a “TodaysMeet” for the session enabling participants to post comments and questions in the backchannel during the presentations. The purpose of this discussion backchannel is to provide an opportunity for participants to have a voice, and document questions over the course of the session. These comments and questions will be reviewed by the session chair at the end of the session and incorporated into an action plan that will be presented to the Policy and Legislative Committee, the Technology Committee, and the Board of Directors.

**Why we need to advocate in the field of literacy education and research (ten minutes)**.

David Reinking will explain the origins of the session, describing conversations with the Committee and the Board of Directors. Next, the section will explore the history of advocacy within the organization and how it has evolved over time. Including in this discussion will be potential ramifications of advocacy for new, mid career and established scholars in the field. Committee members will share current initiatives, which use social media and technology as a means to publish within and outside the organization. Finally, this section of the session will conclude with an overview of the remaining session topics.

**Previous Work in Social Media and Literacy-related Policy Advocacy (thirty minutes)**

This portion of the session will be organized as an interactive panel to offer multiple perspectives on current initiatives underway from researchers at varying career stages that have been identified informally by other LRA members as particularly skilled and sensitive in this work. Each participant will provide a personal take on the role, grounded in his or her overall experience.

Each session leader will present (2 to 3 minutes) an overview of their work and information they will present. Participants will then rotate through the different groups to have an opportunity to have a discussion with the session leaders in an more intimate setting.

**Session Leaders.**

* Tobie Bass and Lindy Johnson, JoLLE Activist Literacies Conference Co-Chairs, will discuss using social media and digital storytelling to encourage their local community to support and engage in activist work. They will focus specifically on their efforts to support undocumented students amidst restrictive educational policies in the state of Georgia.
* Caitlin McMunn Dooley, LRA Policy and Legislative Committee Chairperson. Will discuss initiatives and pose questions about what role LRA should play as an organization and subsequent strategies for policy and advocacy updates.
* Amanda Hall, Joan Rhodes & Guofang Wan; Virginia Commonwealth University. Will share their efforts of advocating for the education of girls via screenings of the film Girl Rising and workshops. The goals are to raise awareness among the local community on inequities surrounding gender and educational opportunities, and act as a change agent in the local public.
* Phil Wilder, LRA: Research to Practice episodes. Will discuss the initiative to utilize video conferencing and social media opportunities to connect high-quality research to inform classroom instructional practice.
* Danielle Dennis, University of South Florida, will discuss our responsibilities as researchers to protect the identities of the children with whom we work while utilizing social media as a viable platform for sharing our research in schools.
* Tyler Rinker, University at Buffalo, will discuss the role of scholarly blogging as a means of reaching and including a broader audience with more accessible, multimodal content and generating community building dialogue among the field.
* Kathryn Ohle, University of Alaska Anchorage. Will discuss how universities are using social media to provide professional development to teachers in rural communities, increasing access to previously marginalized populations and sustaining local community resources using an eco-justice model.
* Richard Beach, LRA Past-President, University of Minnesota. Will discuss online initiatives involving the website, discussion forums, listserv, and opportunities for public scholarship.

**Opportunities for and Effects of Social Media and Literacy-related Policy Advocacy (twenty minutes)**

The Discussant (Norm Stahl) of the session will provide some framing thoughts to bring synthesis to the information presented by the speakers. The discussant will then open the floor to audience participation, inviting attendees to share both positive and negative experiences working as advocates in the field, framed anonymously and constructively. The Session Chair and Discussant will facilitate the discussion. Contributions will be recorded on a Google Doc presented to the group, with the intention of generating a draft of tips and suggestions that might be disseminated to the membership via the listserv or website forums, as a follow-up to the session.

At the end of the conclusion of the session, participants will be led through a guided brainstorming activity to create an action plan for future initiatives involving social media and literacy-related policy advocacy, using focus questions such as the following:

* What does publishing, social media, advocacy, and/or access mean to LRA as an organization?
* How freely open and available should LRA publications be accessible online?
* When LRA as an organization publishes a piece of social media or literacy-related policy, how am I involved?
* When LRA as an organization publishes a piece of social media or literacy-related policy, how can I make my voice heard?
* When LRA as an organization publishes a piece of social media or literacy-related policy, how can I comment, or respond to this initiative, policy alert, or publication?
* How might social media initiatives help to shape my ongoing scholarship and contribute to the field of lit eracy research?
* How might advocacy initiatives help to shape my ongoing scholarship and contribute to the field of literacy research?
* What kind of access would be useful to me as I move my current work toward publication?

**References**

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