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Biography:

Barbara Laster is a researcher, children's book author, poet, and teacher. From 1974-1994, she was a reading teacher in rural Florida, the Appalachian region of Ohio, a small town in Massachusetts, and multiple secondary schools in Northern Virginia. As a Professor of Education at Towson University in Baltimore, Maryland, she has primarily taught teachers to become reading specialists for the last 25 years. Currently, Dr. Laster teaches courses on the cultural contexts of literacy, literacy theory and practice, new/digital literacies, disciplinary reading and writing, literacy interventions for special populations, literacy assessment, writing instruction, current topics in literacy, and clinical practica.

Among her publications are topics of differentiated instruction, emergent and developing writers, reading comprehension, teacher development, digital literacies, family literacy, reading clinics, international education, and diversity in public school settings. She has published over 50 peer-reviewed journal articles or book chapters in such publications as LRA Yearbook (now LR:TMP), Journal of Reading/JAAL, Reading Teacher, English Journal, Multicultural Perspectives, SITE Journal, Ed Leadership, Literacy Research and Instruction, Educational Leadership, and the Handbook of Research on Reading Comprehension. Besides her work with teachers across the United States, Dr. Laster has had the honor of working with teachers in Guatemala, Egypt, Greece, and Iceland. The United States Department of State has named Dr. Laster a Fulbright Specialist in Literacy Education.

Candidate Statement:

Thank you for considering my background and vision for LRA as you make the important decision about LRA Board membership. Why, you may ask, would I be a good LRA Board Member? Not only do I have experience, but more importantly, LRA is my professional home. I have been an LRA member since 1994 and have had the honor of contributing over 40 presentations to the annual conferences. Likewise, I have served on a number of professional organizations' Board of Directors, have interacted with K-12 schools and learners for decades, and have a professional portfolio that aligns with LRA's goals.

I have been a public school reading teacher or specialist at every grade level. Having taught in schools from rural Massachusetts to a prison town in Florida, I continue to provide direct teaching to individuals aged Pre-K through adult in the Washington DC area. Early in my career, I was an anthropology major and a secondary social studies education graduate of the University of Florida. My first fulltime job was as a Teacher Corps Project intern in Appalachia, where I earned my Master's Degree as a reading specialist from Ohio University.



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My doctoral studies at Virginia Tech concluded with a dissertation that examined the literacy and social studies learning of 2nd graders using some of the first computers in schools in Virginia. (Have you heard of Atari computers?!) We have come a long way in our use of technology for reading and writing (and understanding the affordances and concerns). The intersection of technology and literacies has been a continuing interest of mine.

I took the leap from public K-12 schools to higher education in 1994. I continue to work primarily in graduate education with a fantastic group of literacy colleagues at Towson University in Baltimore, Maryland. I teach courses in literacy theory and practice, new/digital literacies, disciplinary reading and writing, differentiation, literacy interventions for special populations, literacy assessment, writing instruction, current topics in literacy, and clinical practica. Occasionally, I have the opportunity to teach an undergraduate course that I helped design: Teaching and Learning in a Diverse Society.

My publications include aspects of many literacy topics, including but not limited to: comprehension, teacher development, family literacy, reading clinics, digital and multimodal literacies, differentiated instruction, emergent and developing writers, service learning, ethnic pedagogies, diversity in public school classrooms, and international education. My research has been published in the LRA Yearbook (now LR:TMP), Journal of Reading/JAAL, Reading Teacher, English Journal, Multicultural Perspectives, SITE Journal, Literacy Research and Instruction, etc. More details about my publications can be found on my Towson website <https://www.towson.edu/coe/departments/elementary/facultystaff/blaster.html>

Recently, I have provided many workshops for teachers globally. I am humbled to have been invited to some of these sites multiple times: Guatemala, Egypt, Greece, and Iceland. I have been named a Fulbright Specialist in our field.

I also bring a wealth of experience in organizational settings. Within the International Reading Association (now the International Literacy Association), I served on the 2010 Standards Committee, specifically on the new Diversity Standard subcommittee. I was also a member of the IRA Response to Intervention (RTI) Commission. For many years, I represented IRA on the National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities.

Within LRA, I served for many years on the Ethics Committee and on Field Council. I have been on the Lifetime Achievement Award committee. I have been a reviewer of conference proposals for our annual conference and for LR:TMP. I am proud to have proposed and act as the Chair of the Reading Clinics/Literacy Labs ICG, as well as the leader of the Reading Clinics/Literacy Labs Study Group for over 20 years. Recently, I assisted with forums in which we provided guidance for LRA conference proposal submitters and reviewers.

My vision for LRA is to heal internally, strengthen our central core of a wide range of exemplary research, and give greater external voice to our discoveries. First, I will continue building affinity groups and relationships among our members. I am particularly well-positioned to bridge professors from comprehensive universities with R1 institutions. I am also experienced with marginalized groups and issues of diversity and power. As an LRA veteran who was once without any sponsor or cohort, I will continue to bring together LRA newcomers and longtime members. As a Board Member, I will support

Received Jan 22, 2020



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the existing initiatives that are making a difference (e.g., S.T.A.R.) and will work collaboratively to create new possibilities for bringing an even greater range of voices into the organization. Secondly, I want to support the recent efforts to honor various types of research and to make sure our conference program is representative and inclusive. Thirdly, I want to see LRA members and the organization itself called upon more frequently to assist with policy and legislative initiatives. Giving more resources and support to our Policy and Legislative Committee is one avenue. We need a strong and consistent “seat at the table.” Finally, as a fiduciary, it is essential that each Board Member attends to the budget, and toward that end works to enhance conference participation.

This new decade finds LRA at an exciting and critical crossroads of opportunity. I want to help lead the organization and I know that my experience and passion can be of value to LRA. Together we will strengthen LRA, both internally and externally.