

David B. Yaden, Jr., Ph.D.

Professional Background

Greetings to the community of LRA scholars. My name is David Yaden, and I am a Professor of Language, Reading and Culture in the Department of Teaching, Learning, and Socio-Cultural Studies in the College of Education at the University of Arizona. I am also Affiliate Faculty in two other university units—the Ph.D. Program in Second Language Acquisition and Teaching, an interdisciplinary doctoral program comprised of 16 departments campus-wide, and the Dept. of Public and Applied Humanities whose mission is dedicated to the development and application of humanistic inquiry for the betterment of the human condition. It is with great pleasure and humility that I stand for election as Vice President of LRA—a fellowship of colleagues with whom I have been now engaged with for over three decades.

I have had the privilege of working at several universities after having graduated from the University of Oklahoma; these include Emory University, the University of Houston, the University of Southern California and now the University of Arizona. Throughout my career, I have been primarily interested in the acquisition of literacy ability of bi- and multilingual children as well as developmental issues in early childhood education, family literacy practices, literacy research methodologies, sociohistorical approaches to literacy development and the application of complex adaptive systems theory to growth in literacy and language acquisition. Publications related to these interests have appeared in two books, *Metalinguistic Awareness and Beginning Literacy* and *Students' Knowledge About Words*, several book chapters, in journals such as the *Reading Research Quarterly*, *Journal of Reading Behavior*, *Visible Language*, *Reading Psychology*, *Reading Research and Instruction*, *The Reading Teacher*, *Journal of Reading and Language Arts* as well as in archival handbook chapters, including the *Handbook of Reading Research*, Vol. 3 (2000), the *Handbook of Research in the Teaching of the English Language Arts* (2003, 2011), the *Handbook of Research on the Education of Young Children* (2006, 2013, forthcoming), and the *Handbook of Research Methods in Early Childhood Education* (2014).

Most recently my service to LRA has included the editorship (2013-2016) of our flagship publication—the *Journal of Literacy Research*—the citation impact factor of which during our tenure nearly doubled. I have also served as the chair of the Ethics Committee where we wrote one of the organization's first statements of professional values and guidelines for fairness in the publication process. And, of course, I have regularly presented my research, organized symposia, introduced colleagues and graduate students to the organization, and participated actively each year in the events held during LRA's annual meeting.

Position Statement

I am encouraged by LRA's stance "to take a proactive leadership role with respect to diversity, equity, and inclusion," not only in our collegial ranks, but also for children, families and communities. Indeed, my own research efforts over the years have argued against language and literacy policies which create discriminating policies, curriculum, and instructional approaches that diminish the abilities, in particular, of children and communities speaking languages other than English. As a principal investigator in the Center for Improvement of Early Reading Achievement (CIERA), we created a heritage language preschool program for young, Spanish-speaking children which enabled them to acquire both Spanish

and English literacy at a quicker rate than even monolingual children. Similarly, our JLR editorial team took a stance against research which automatically assumed a “language gap” between emergent bilingual learners and their monolingual peers. Thus, I believe that now more than ever LRA must stand firm against those policies and instructional approaches which negatively impact all children, but particularly those of color and with various learning exceptionalities.

Recently I came across a statement in Denzin’s and Lincoln’s preface to the latest *Handbook of Qualitative Research* which resonated deeply with me, “It [the qualitative project] privileges practice, politics, action, consequences, performances, discourses, methodologies of the heart, and pedagogies of hope, love, care, forgiveness, and healing. It speaks for and with those who are on the margins. As a liberationist philosophy, it is committed to examining the consequences of racism, poverty, and sexism on the lives of interacting individuals.” But I immediately thought—should this not be the purpose of all research? And literacy research in particular—regardless of the methodology chosen? Should we not all be in the business, as my Public and Applied Humanities colleagues insist, of “bettering the human condition?”

The above goals certainly speak to LRA’s mission of being “socially responsible,” but they also raise issues for assessing our strategic aims as an organization in Policy, Advocacy and Communications. Do we as an organization know the “footprint” that we are leaving—not only as individual researchers, but as a professional body of scholars? While we have a goal to engage with the “public sphere” and with policymakers, I think all of us realized to our chagrin that juried journals and professional presentations are hardly the venue to do it. They surely benefit us as individuals within our institutions, but their broader impact is surely attenuated. How does our research or professional activity act as a catalyst for social change as we desire?

Since my entrance into organization some years ago, I believe we have made major strides both in diversifying the membership of the organization, its research scope, and in actually communicating our research into the public sphere through venues such as the Voice of Literacy podcasts, led by our own President-Elect, Betsy Baker. But there is more to do I think. While we seek to “promote generative theories, informed practices and sound policies,” what about pedagogies of hope, love, care, forgiveness and healing?” Are these not legitimate research aims as well? I would say, “Yes, most assuredly so.”

We have in this country powerful professional lobbies—the Women’s March Movement, the American Medical Association, insurance companies—what about research organizations? In the past we often hope against hope that our research will be noticed by someone with a policy bent. It’s time for LRA to further assert this agency itself. I will work tirelessly with my LRA colleagues to continue establishing our voice in the national conversation for “social change” and the betterment of the human condition through impactful, compassionate, publically-facing literacy research.