

The Role of Literacy Research in Racism and Racial Violence
Statement Endorsed by the Literacy Research Association
November 29, 2016

The Mission Statement of the Literacy Research Association states that, “the Literacy Research Association (LRA) is a community of scholars dedicated to promoting research that enriches the knowledge, understanding, and development of lifespan literacies in a multicultural and multilingual world. LRA is committed to ethical research that is rigorous, methodologically diverse, and socially responsible. LRA is dedicated to disseminating such research broadly so as to promote generative theories, informed practices and sound policies. Central to its mission, LRA offers mentorship and support to future generations of literacy scholars” (Literacy Research Association, 2015). According to this Mission, the Literacy Research Association is concerned with research that impacts policy for individuals from racially marginalized communities. People of color in the United States constitute a large number of these individuals whose experiences have become increasingly oppressed, life threatening and illegitimized (Bashir-Ali, 2006; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Mitchell, 2013). Issues of racism are not peripheral to literacy research, and literacy research need not remain peripheral to issues of racism. The Literacy Research Association resolves that we will not ignore issues of racism and become complicit in the perpetuation of racial inequities, neither in the field nor in the organization itself.

Children and youth in our schools today are living in a time of heightened racial violence, and these are the contexts in which literacy research examines issues that affect literacy learning and achievement. Historically, literacy research has played a role in promoting and sustaining, as well as interrupting deficit-centered narratives about the literacy practices of people of color (Dudley-Marling & Lucas, 2009; Willis, 2015). LRA stands poised to address issues of oppression against Black and Brown youth that begin within classrooms where certain ways of “doing” language and literacy aligned with and representative of White middle-class norms invalidates the literacy practices of Black and Brown youth in schools (Cline & Necochea, 2004; Hones, 2002; Suárez-Orozco, Pimentel, & Martin, 2009).

The role of literacy research in perpetuating or interrupting deficit-oriented narratives about the literacy practices of people of color is powerfully influenced by the racially-oriented challenges faced by scholars of color both in their home academic institutions and within professional organizations, including LRA. In order to build our capacity to address racial inequality in schooling and literacy research, LRA leadership and members have begun to confront our own racialized histories and colonizing practices that permeate LRA and that determine who is included and excluded within the research community. LRA acknowledges that racialization (and not only race), and linguisticism (and not only language), are pervasive in the 21st century. These continue to confront scholars of color and remain a challenge for Black and Brown youth, who like these scholars, have experiences that are discounted by the mainstream (Willis, forthcoming).

Within LRA, pockets of progress have emerged, and continued advancements are necessary to fulfill the responsibilities of the organization according to our mission statement. We will raise the visibility of anti-racist scholarship, particularly research that might shape more equitable educational practices for children and youth of color. We will critically examine our history as an organization and field to understand and respond to racist practices. We will raise our efforts to make visible and address the racism faced by scholars of color within the organization, in their academic institutions, and in their everyday lives. We will critically examine our decisions, leadership appointments, and governing documents. We stand united as officers, Board of Directors and members of the Literacy Research Association to take a public stance against racism and in support of equitable, inclusive, anti-racist educational practices and spaces.

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