

American Reading Forum 2024 Conference
December 11-14, 2024 | Sanibel Island, Florida

Call for Proposals

Mindful Literacy: Literacy as an Umbrella for the Whole Person

A recent New York Times article described how somatic experiences, a focus on the physical, may be the key to improving mental health and addressing emotional needs (Dominus, 2023). Experts in psychology and trauma sensitive teaching and learning have known this for years (Payne et al., 2015; Treleaven, 2012). Many books for young children provide space for teaching somatic experience (i.e. *The Happiest Tree: A Yoga Story; Kiyoshi's Walk*). Following the upheaval and isolation of COVID-19, however, the immediate concerns of the education community have changed. Trauma sensitive teaching and understanding the mental health needs of all children is more than a moral imperative; it is now needed to sustain teachers and maintain systems of education (Fisher et al., 2020; Kuhfield & Tarasawa, 2020). In literacy classrooms P-12, researchers are seeing children underperforming in large part due to increased numbers of children not having basic needs met (Barnes et al., 2022; Maslow, 1987).

The COVID pandemic continues to have an adverse effect on the literacy environments in which children learn and grow. Teachers noted that the pandemic had a profound impact on the social and emotional growth of students, putting their development at risk (McGee et al., 2022). UNESCO notes that the school closures associated with the pandemic have negatively affected learning by depriving children of opportunities to grow and develop socially. Studies note that skills gained from SEL, including self-management, responsible decision-making, and relationship skills extend far beyond the classroom (Varghese & Natsuaki, 2021). In literacy classrooms, self-management and relationship skills are necessary for successful small-group literacy instruction but are also needed for students to do the independent work demanded when gaining literacy skills (Pressley et al., 2023).

Teacher educators and colleagues come together annually to discuss how to make the lives of literacy teachers and children better. However, many mental health experts encourage us to consider self-care prior to caring for others (NIH, 2023). With this in mind, our team envisions ARF 2024 as a time to spend time thinking about not only “whole child” wellness through literacy, but “whole system” wellness. What might a joy-sustaining literacy classroom look like? A joy-sustaining school? A joy-sustaining teacher education program? We envision ARF 2024 as a time for discussion and healing.

References

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Vision and Focus

This conference seeks to consider literacy as a vessel for engaging the *whole person*. As a place where discussion occurs within and without sessions, the conference chairs envision ARF 2024 as a place for healing for ourselves, teachers, students, and communities. A focus on self-care through collaboration will be evident. The conference chairs and keynote speakers will offer healing practices and dialogue opportunities while encouraging participants to continue collaborations and healing work beyond the conference.

Themes and Subthemes

- Social work tenets in literacy education
- Trauma sensitive literacy teaching
- Healing spaces in literacy classrooms
- Critical literacy
- Culturally relevant phonics instruction
- Critical pedagogy in literacy
- Culturally Sustaining Literacy Pedagogies
- Social/emotional learning in literacy education
- Creating/sustaining trauma-sensitive communities through literacy

Important Dates

August 1, 2024 – Deadline for session proposals

September 1, 2024 – Feedback on proposals will be sent out via email

October 1, 2024 – Deadline for graduate student proposals

October 15, 2024 – Early bird conference registration ends

November 1, 2024 – Feedback on graduate student proposals will be sent out

December 11-14, 2024 – Conference @ Sundial Resort, Sanibel Island, FL

Session Types

- **Paper Sessions:** The program committee will schedule two to three papers on related topics in a session. Each presenter will have 20 minutes to share their paper, with the final 15 minutes of the session allotted for discussion. Each paper session will have an appointed discussant to facilitate the session.
- **Symposia (75 minutes):** Those proposing a symposium should assemble a session on one topic or multiple related topics focused on the conference theme. Symposium proposers should name their chairs, discussants, and others who may have a specific role in the program. Novel approaches, ways of presenting, and/or ways of involving the audience are welcome in the symposium sessions.
- **Problem Courts (75 minutes):** These sessions are intended to function as forums for discussion of a persistent problem of practice or opportunity for growth in literacy research and instruction. Presenters should expect to open the session by briefly posing a problem (supported by theoretical and/or empirical evidence and connected to the conference theme). This is followed by 20-30 minutes of facilitated, critical conversation with the audience about the ways in which this problem or opportunity has been treated in the past, what has advanced progress, and what has hindered it. In the final 20-30 minutes of the period, the emphasis of the discussion should move toward developing concrete action items that individuals or small groups can continue to pursue in their contexts. These might include directions for research, research-practice partnerships, or other steps to be initiated once the conference is completed.
- **Round Tables (previously “Advancing Literacy”):** Round table presentations should describe an ongoing study, work in the planning stages, or theoretical work. The program committee will organize presentations into thematically appropriate groups. Each presenter will have 15 minutes to share, with the final 10 minutes of the session allotted for discussion.

Program Co-Chairs

WRITE@KSU Team (Wellbeing, Reading, Interventions, Trauma, and Engagement)

- **Dr. Megan Adams** is an Associate Professor of Reading Education in the Department of Secondary and Middle Grades Education and the co-Director of the Academy for Language and Literacy at Kennesaw State University. Megan is a Qualitative methodologist and is passionate about serving teachers and learners in various ways. Megan's research can be found on Research Gate and Google Scholar.
- **Dr. Allison Garefino** is a Research Scholar in Wellstar College of Health and Human Services at Kennesaw State University and Clinical Director of the Children and Family Programs. She brings over 20 years of experience in training, implementation, and evaluation of psychosocial interventions. Trained in Participatory Analysis for Community Action (PACA) as a U.S. Peace Corps Volunteer, her interests include clinical implementation and research, focusing on the intersection between well-being and pedagogy. She has significant experience implementing randomized controlled trials in both laboratory and community settings.
- **Dr. Paula Guerra** is a Professor of Mathematics Education in the Department of Elementary and Early Childhood Education at the Bagwell College of Education (BCOE) at Kennesaw State University. Her research interests include teaching and learning math for social justice, comparing pre-service teachers' experiences and reactions to teaching math for social justice, the experience of girls, especially Latinas learning mathematics, and the experiences of Latinx pre- and in-service teachers in the US.
- **Dr. Virginie Jackson** is an Assistant Professor of Literacy Education and Program Coordinator in the Department of Elementary and Early Childhood Education in the Bagwell College of Education (BCOE) at Kennesaw State University. She teaches undergraduate and graduate reading methods, reading assessments, and pre-school curriculum courses. Virginie's research focuses on culturally responsive early literacy practices and critical literacy development of young learners. Her work centers on the preparation of preservice teachers to teach culturally and linguistically diverse students in engaging, multi-model, and multifaceted ways.
- **Dr. Sanjuana Rodriguez** is an Associate Professor of Reading and Literacy Education and Co-Director of the Academy for Language and Literacy at Kennesaw State University. Her research interests include early literacy development of culturally and linguistically diverse students, Latinx children's literature, and the experiences of Latinx pre-and in-service teachers.