

LLRC and L&L: Just Married!

KATHY HIBBERT

Past President of Language and Literacy Researchers of Canada
The University of Western Ontario

When Roz Stooke and Suzanne Smythe Chaired the Pre-CSSE LLRC Conference that led to this Special Issue, they were also marking a significant change in the relationship between two organizations. The membership of the *Language and Literacy Researchers of Canada* voted to enter into a partnership with *Language and Literacy: A Canadian Educational e Journal*. The partnership reflected a mutual desire to strengthen and promote scholarship in the Canadian language and literacy community. As we begin this new chapter in our organizational life, it is interesting to reflect back to its beginning.

June 3, 1986 marks the first recorded meeting of the *Language Arts Researchers in Canada*. Then Chair Linda Phillips introduced a Steering Committee comprised of Laurie Walker, University of Lethbridge, Ruth Egan, University of New Brunswick and Mary Clare Courtland at Lakehead. Their mandate was: 1) to negotiate membership status in the Canadian Association of Curriculum Studies (CACS) as a Special Interest Group; and 2) to draft a constitution for the organization. Twenty-two people attended that meeting. Sampling the foci of the symposia and conferences held over the subsequent twenty-five years offers a glimpse into the changing literacy context:

1988: Symposium “To raise and define issues whose resolution would contribute to a clarification of literacy as an educational target of the twentieth century”

1989: CACS-LARC Invitational Conference (1990s) – UNESCO designated 1990 as the International Year of Literacy: “Literacy is no longer defined as the ability to read and write to some level of performance; it is seen as the mastery of a range of uses of language, both written and spoken.”

1991: Symposium on “Accountability in the Literacy Development: Evaluative Decisions”

1993: Symposium on “Meeting the Language Needs of ESL Children”

According to Julie-Ann Kniskern,

[T]he politics of literacy at the time... with the emphasis on standards and testing and phonics as the main way to teach reading, and a “scientific approach to literacy research” as a result of the *National Reading Report* in the USA helped to shape what was occurring in LARC.

This context prompted Julie-Ann to call for a “cross country check-up” to learn what was happening across Canada in order to establish a national voice.

By 2000, Marilyn Chapman, Trevor Gamble, and Julie-Ann Kniskern drafted a position statement: *Taking a Stand Toward a LARC position on literacy research, curriculum, instruction, and assessment in Canada*. This initiative was picked up by Rachel Heydon, Luigi Iannacci, Roz Stooke and I, as we were reconsidering who LARC (as it had been conceptualized) was including, and more importantly, who it might be excluding. Given the changes to the definitions of literacy in the preceding decades, the membership voted to revise the name to the *Language and Literacy Researchers of Canada*, and to host a pre-CSSE conference as a means of bringing literacy researchers together in a single place for a day. A web presence was built to facilitate communication and share information. Ten years later, with active membership reaching as high as 175, we are proud to say that language and literacy research in Canada is thriving. The position statement, first drafted in 2000, was vetted widely and after much dialogue, ‘published’ and posted on the website. It was also sent to all Ministers of Education and Deans’ of Education across Canada to demonstrate that Canadian literacy researchers had a position that was contrary to what was occurring in the USA. It was a great beginning.



This new partnership -an ‘arranged marriage’ of sorts - reflects a maturation of the organization and positions the group well for the future. It also offers some financial support, as \$5.00 per LLRC membership fee will be forwarded to support the journal on an annual basis. I encourage all language and literacy researchers in Canada to support these efforts by joining LLRC (<http://www.csse-scee.ca/membership/>). New initiatives are underway to facilitate these connections. Watch for a space on our website that will allow members to add their name, contact information, links to their homepage, willingness to serve as reviewers for LLRC/ L&L and their areas of research interests and related initiatives. Cheers, to a long and successful union!

Figure 1. President of LLRC, Kathy Hibbert (Right), presents first ‘support payment’ to Co-Editor of *L&L* Lynn Wiltse (Left).

Author Biography

Kathy Hibbert is Assistant Professor at the University of Western Ontario in London, Ontario. Her research interests revolve around the scholarship of teaching and learning and the pedagogy of multiliteracies of professional communities of practice. She is interested in creating intellectually engaging spaces for educators in order that they may best serve their learners.