

SCHOOL OF EDUCATION & PROFESSIONAL STUDIES

Disciplined Inquiry in Education Seminar Series

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Literacy Center Balcony

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READING EDUCATION AS A COLONIZING PRACTICE: THE ROOTS OF LAP-READING FROM EARLY COLONIAL CONVERSION TO FAMILY LITERACY CAMPAIGNS

Abstract: The practice of lap-reading to socialize children into the world of literacy was cast in the cauldron that shaped social and cultural values of American life. From early colonialism to the 1980s, lap-reading emerges as a cultural artifact rooted in the Anglican campaign to convert indigenous populations, the criminalization of the literacy education of slaves, the commercialization of reading practices among suburban, middle class, white women, the oppression of community education practices of the Black Power Movement, and the family values rhetoric that shaped social and education policy in the 1980s. Both empowering and disaffecting, lap-reading remains the premier representation of advice offered to caregivers for raising young readers. This inquiry explores what communicative practices are lost in this history of enculturation and what practices might be reawakened in literacy education to empower diverse communities.

