

## CONVERSATION

# **“Our Work Has to Go Way Beyond the Classroom Doors:” A Conversation with Dr. Sarah Park Dahlen and Dr. Gabrielle Atwood Halko, Co-Editors of *Research on Diversity in Youth Literature***

**TERRI SUICO**

SAINT MARY’S COLLEGE

Literature for children and young adults has made considerable strides in the past few decades. Besides becoming a robust part of the publishing industry, youth literature has expanded the representation of people in the books as well as the authors who write the books. Thanks to movements like #WeNeedDiverseBooks and #DisruptTexts, greater attention has been paid to finding and promoting children’s and young adult books with diverse characters and that address topics related to different cultures, backgrounds, and experiences. The #OwnVoices movement has likewise advocated for books about diverse characters being written by authors who share identities with those characters.

This interest also illuminates the need for scholarly examination of diverse books and of books that have been viewed as promoting diversity as well as having researchers from diverse backgrounds be a part of the conversation. As a response to this need, Dr. Sarah Park Dahlen at St. Catherine University and Dr. Gabrielle Atwood Halko at West Chester University, along with several activist-scholars, founded *Research on Diversity in Youth Literature* (RDYL), a biannual journal dedicated to examining representations in children’s and adolescent literature. The journal, with Dahlen and Halko as co-editors, debuted on June 1, 2018, with a themed issue centered on Dr. Rudine Sims Bishop’s “Mirrors, Windows, and Sliding Glass Doors” and featuring #OwnVoices

scholars. Since then, RDYL has had a significant impact within and outside of academia. Notably, “The Cat is Out of the Bag: Orientalism, Anti-Blackness, and White Supremacy in Dr. Seuss’s Children’s Books,” an article in the journal’s second issue, was featured in various news outlets and prompted discussion regarding Dr. Seuss’s legacy.

While this is challenging, and sometimes contentious, work, Dahlen and Halko bring experience and expertise to this important undertaking. Both have extensive backgrounds in children’s and young adult literature, particularly in relation to the diversity and representations found in those books, and both have done publications and presentations on these subjects. Dahlen’s work includes co-editing the book *Diversity in Youth Literature: Opening Doors through Reading* and presentations at the Children’s Literature Association conference, the International Research Society for Children’s Literature conference, and the American Library Association conferences. In addition to creating and maintaining the “War Stories: Children’s Experiences of Occupation and Internment in World War II” resource website, Halko contributed a chapter to the forthcoming book *I Die Daily: Police Brutality, Black Bodies, and the Force of Children’s Literature* and has presented at the Children’s Literature Association Conference as well as the International Research Society for Children’s Literature.

**Terri Suico (TS):** How did you become interested in studying youth literature, and what prompted your focus and interest in diversity in youth literature?

**Sarah Park Dahlen (SPD):** I was an Asian American Studies major at the University of California Los Angeles. I got my BA and double majored in history and Asian American Studies, and then I went on to get my master’s degree in Asian American Studies. And this is kind of corny, but I was literally in a Borders bookstore – I had always loved reading as a child – so I walked into the children’s section, and I found the picture book *Smoky Night* by Eve Bunting. It was published in 1994, I believe, and it won the 1995 Caldecott, and so it had a big shiny medal on the cover.

It was really interesting to me because that book was set during the Los Angeles Riots of 1992. I was a child during the riots – I grew up in a suburb of Los Angeles, and my dad owned a grocery store in Inglewood – so it was really intriguing to me that there could be a picture book set during this really fraught and violent time period. In *Smoky Night*, there’s an ambiguously brown character; he’s either Latino or Black, we don’t really know. However, we know that the person who owns the store

across the street, Mrs. Kim, is Korean, we know that she speaks a language different from the protagonist. At the beginning of the book, they don't necessarily have a relationship, but by the end of the book, they have a relationship.

This was incredibly interesting to me that there could be a book about the LA Riots. Of course, it was like very simplistic compared to even my childlike understanding of the Riots. Also, this book was from the perspective of the ambiguously brown child, and so I wondered, "Are there children's books set during the riots from the perspective of Korean people?" We sustained around \$500 million out of the \$800 million of damages done in the riots. We were an integral part of that whole episode.

I started looking, and I didn't find a children's book like *Smoky Night* from the perspective of a Korean person. However, I found other picture books, and I found chapter books, and I found young adult novels that had Korean people in them. A lot of them were written by Korean Americans, and it just shocked me. I was such an avid reader when I was younger; I always looked for the Claudia Kishi books [in *The Babysitters Club* series], because it was fascinating to me that there were Asian Americans in children's books. But I didn't know that Korean people could write children's books, and I didn't know that Korean people could be in children's books. When I found all these books, I wanted to study them. Then I started thinking about getting a dual master's degree in Asian American Studies, which was my home discipline, and also in Information Studies. I started working with Dr. Clara Chu, who at the time was a professor in the Department of Information Studies at UCLA. She oversaw my thesis, which was on Korean American picture books, and then she encouraged me to get a PhD.

After I applied to doctoral programs, it was down to UCLA or the University of Illinois. I went to Illinois because of the reputation of the library and information science program, which is highly ranked, and the fact that there was also an Asian American Studies program on that campus. I knew that I would have the intellectual support and the community that I needed to be in an otherwise majority-white space.

From the get-go, I was interested in issues of diversity because I hadn't seen myself. Once I realized that Korean people could be in children's books, I was interested in studying that. That was my journey.

**Gabrielle Atwood Halko (GAH):** I kind of wandered into children's and young adult literature. I went to grad school to be a poet, and so my MFA and my PhD are both in Creative Writing. I was matched with a children's literature instructor who was doing an experimental version of a large lecture, collaborative learning, children's literature class when I was in grad school. Her name is Gwen Athene Tarbox, and she is probably my most influential mentor and now is someone who does comic studies.

When I was Gwen's graduate assistant, she modeled a syllabus for me that was pretty diverse. This was early 2000s. I don't think Gene Luen Yang's books were out yet, but we were reading Christopher Paul Curtis, we were reading Sharon Draper... the other names are going to escape me now. This was at a predominantly white institution in Michigan, in a class with two white women as the professor and graduate assistant and an overwhelming-white student population. Gwen made a point of bringing in multiple kinds of diversities in terms of race, ethnicity, ability, faith, and really pushed students to engage with those books.

While the project unfortunately never came to fruition, for a while our collaborative learning project with the students was that they were cowriting a book on children's and adolescent literature with us. The idea was for us to create a textbook that the students would co-write. Each small group of students adopted a book, contacted the authors of those books, and kind of made that their own. From there, I discovered children's literature. When it became time for me to think about a job in the field, children's literature was more practical in a lot of ways and was also something that I thought I would enjoy doing more for a lot longer. So that is the not-very-glamorous story of how I wound up in youth literature.

Regarding diversity, I'm very fortunate to have had that modeled for me from the beginning, although of course I'm always learning about how to problematize that, broaden that, and ask questions about particular books that might be presented as diverse but underneath are perhaps problematic or not as diverse as they appear.

**TS:** I can certainly relate to not seeing yourself in books or in popular culture growing up. What are some aspects regarding diversity in youth literature that you find exciting or intriguing right now? It seems like there has been some growth in terms of diversity in youth literature. While the presentation can sometimes be problematic, diversity is certainly more present than it was even 10 to 15 years ago.

**SPD:** As you said, the growth is incredibly exciting, especially seeing different genres, different formats, particularly the explosion of graphic novels. For instance, look at all the amazing work Gene Luen Yang has been able to do and the different kinds of stories he tells, ranging from *American Born Chinese* to *Boxers* and *Saints* to the *Secret Coders* books. I mean his range is just incredible.

Also, I recently finished reading *Dragon Pearl* (Yoon Ha Lee), which is one of the Rick Riordan books, and its fantasy/sci-fi; it's just so fun and amazing, and I really enjoyed reading that book. And I think of all of the untold stories that are now beginning to be told sort of with more urgency. My friend Paula Yoo is coming out with a book about the murder of Vincent Chin. There isn't yet a really comprehensive book on that topic, and yet that topic was so incredibly important to Asian American activism in the 1980s.

Thinking about all the untold stories that are now beginning to be told has been really exciting. Just seeing how there's a community of writers and illustrators who are Asian American, who are Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC), it's sort of unbounded because there are so many, you can't just list them. It's incredibly exciting, the plenitude of stories and the people who are creating them.

**GAH:** I would echo everything that Sarah said, and also say there is still not nearly enough [diversity in books and BIPOC producing books]. One of the wonderful markers for me, and for the field, is that when the six of us [who started the journal] got together to vent and started having the conversation that would ultimately result in the creation of *Research on Diversity in Youth Literature* (RDYL) We were actually able to go from talking about the idea of starting a journal to doing it.

Starting the journal came about because there was enough of a network. In our case, it was all women, and it was a diverse range of women in various ways. As Sarah said, the plenitude of literature, the connections and networking and, I would say, the support made RDYL possible. For as many times as I've seen people attacked and ground down, I've also seen a very particular kind of support. In my case, as a white woman, I've also seen people sometimes learning how to have somebody else's back and learning how to do some of that support in ways that I haven't necessarily had to think about before.

Right now, I think there are more opportunities [for books with diverse characters and for authors from diverse backgrounds]. However, I don't want to sound too Pollyannaish about that.

While that it is very exciting, I'm always wary about losing the reality of the way that the publishing industry still looks in terms of statistics, the way that racism is still very powerful, and the way that racism, sexism, different kinds of intersectionality are still really oppressive. I don't want to sound like I'm losing sight of those things.

**SPD:** Right, because for everything we've made, there has been significant pushback. While we celebrate these gains and these steps forward, we're very mindful of the response, primarily from white people, and how we continue to have to argue for our humanity and our stories.

**TS:** Have you gotten some pushback in terms of RDYL when you first published or in any subsequent issues? Have you gotten pushback or any critical response that was not constructive or did not add to the conversation, but was there to shut down the conversation?

**SPD:** As we wrote in the introduction to the first issue of RDYL, the journal was created because our work was not deemed scholarly. The essays that we wrote based on the Minority Scholars panel at the Children's Literature Association were not acceptable to the *Children's Literature Association Quarterly*. That's one of the reasons why we founded RDYL. The pushback we saw initially was in terms of people wanting to have particular conversations but not providing more platforms to have it. In our case, it was, "You can have a panel at the Children's Literature Association, but we're not going to let you publish your panel in the journal," which is what you need to get you tenured.

**GAH:** And I would say that, in some cases, people want the appearance of wanting to have the conversation more than they actually want to have the conversation.

**SPD:** That was the first pushback we got. We cannot ignore that RDYL came out of a situation like that, where we were not accepted by the association.

**TS:** I know that "The Cat is Out of the Bag: Orientalism, Anti-Blackness, and White Supremacy in Dr. Seuss's Children's Books," which was in the journal's second issue, was picked up by a lot of

news outlets, including NPR. Did you or the article's authors get any pushback or criticism when it came out?

**SPD:** When Gabrielle and I got that essay, we knew that it was going to be a firecracker. It was covered by a lot of different media outlets, and we have a list of all the different media outlets that we could track that covered it. We were going back-and-forth with Katie [Ishizuka] and Ramón [Stephens], the authors, asking "Have you seen it on NPR? Have you seen it on People.com?" and so Gabrielle and I created this list and had this ongoing email chain with them.

At one point, Katie and Ramón emailed us, and they said they had started to get hate mail, and it was really serious. If you look at the article on the different websites, it's the same article, it's just been republished. But the comments section is filled with comments like "Don't they have better things to do?" and "Oh my gosh, they want to censor everyone."

The hate mail that Katie and Ramón got directly at their place of employment was really significant for us. We reached out to my public safety unit and my upper administration, and Katie and Ramón reached out to their equivalent public safety units and made sure that they were aware of the situation. That was probably the biggest pushback that we've gotten to that article.

We know the article was shared, because it's open access. It was shared with so many school districts, library systems, and bookstores, and I know that the employees there were having really intense conversations about "what does this mean we do with our Seuss books, our Seuss programming," and things like that. We have a local bookstore here that had planned this Dr. Seuss program, and their decision was "We're going to go ahead and do it this year because we said we would, but starting next year, we're not going to do it anymore." A lot of the pushback that I saw was in places like the comments section, but not necessarily in formal scholarly response.

**GAH:** A lot of the comments was the equivalent of people putting their hands over their ears and saying, "Lalala, you can't tell me that my nostalgia is now going to be tempered by accuracy."

**SPD:** And I have to say St. Catherine University, my university that hosts the journal, was very supportive. They knew that there were ugly comments in the comments section, they knew that Katie and Ramón had gotten hate mail. Katie and Ramón took themselves off social media, and I took

myself off social media just in case, and the university was very supportive. They really said, “We believe in this article, we know that this is important work.”

**GAH:** At this point, the article has over 30,000 downloads, so it’s clear that it struck a nerve, whether people viewed it positively or negatively. And Sarah and I were both aware of some of the issues of representation and racism with work from Dr. Seuss’s early career. However, when we were reading through that article, both of our jaws kept dropping. I feel like it was a tremendous learning experience for us, as the editors, who already had some context.

**SPD:** We had also learned about Dr. Seuss’ racism in terms of the Japanese incarceration. Through Philip Nel’s work, we learned about how *The Cat in the Hat* is based on blackface and minstrelsy, and we knew a couple other things. But to see all of it together in one article, the impact of that was just mind-blowing.

**TS:** When you see it together, it’s so much harder to hand-wave it away. If it was just one occurrence that does not seem like that big a deal, it would be tempting to opt to look at the body of the rest of his work. But when you look at the body of the rest of his work, there are problems with racism and representation throughout it.

**SPD:** Yeah, when considering his personal life and his professional life and the works that he created for children, it’s just tremendous to see all of the issues together.

**GAH:** And there’s this narrative that acts as an excuse for the problems that pervade his work. His supporters say that the [racism and representation problems] were something he did when he was younger, and those were the times, and so his late work shouldn’t be judged by modern standards. Extending that reasoning, people today shouldn’t be judged for supporting or buying that work. We’re having that conversation in many ways in our culture right now.

**TS:** You mentioned the bookstore that was going to change their theme for its future events. Have you heard of any other shifts in terms of the conversation when it comes to Dr. Seuss, either in academia or outside of it?



**SPD:** I know at least one friend who is a librarian, who's taking down a Dr. Seuss poster in her library. And I imagine that there are things like this happening, but I don't know how much how much faith I have in this change being sweeping. In so many spaces, I've seen evidence of people who are not willing to have the conversation. For instance, so many librarians and people pushed back when the Laura Ingalls Wilder Medal was changed to the Children's Literature Legacy Award in 2018. There was a lot of resistance to that. Similarly, there are a lot of white people who don't want to acknowledge that Dr. Seuss was really problematic.

One of the things I think about in my teaching, and of course with the journal too, is we might not see a major shift right now. But if we're planting seeds, maybe these seeds might blossom under someone else's care later, and that's significant, too. If we can just push people along in the journey just a little bit, and maybe they'll move further a little bit later when we're not with them anymore. It's hard to change your mind like that.

**TS:** Thinking about the Dr. Seuss article and the conversations that had been surrounding it, what can the scholarly community do to help promote diversity in youth literature, both in publishing and in research? It sounds like both things are desperately needed. As the hashtag and the movement state, we need diverse books, but we also need scholars looking at diverse books, and we need scholars from diverse backgrounds looking at diverse books.

**GAH:** I would also have to add teaching as an essential part of this discussion. As Sarah said a few minutes ago, it's essential to plant those seeds and model for students, particularly students like the ones I have in my children's literature courses, most of whom are going to be teachers. I get a lot of education majors, and I have an opportunity to, in 15 weeks, show them a survey of children's literature that goes across multiple genres, but also highlights writers who are not white, writers who are not cis-hetero, writers who are not necessarily abled in the way that we tend to think of that term. There are lots of different kinds of families and lots of different kinds of storytelling norms, and readership reception norms, so teaching that is crucial.

Scholarship and publishing in some ways are tougher. Within publishing, we still cling to the idea that Christopher Myers talks about in his article, "The Apartheid of Children's Literature," where he talks about how the market is sort of this amorphous force that everybody claims is

responsible but nobody will actually address. For me, it's important to follow and amplify my friends who are writers and to support conferences and fellowships for writers who are not normally in the mainstream. In terms of scholarship, I hope RDYL is one way to fill the gap. We created specifically for this kind of work; it's all we do. Rather than having a single issue devoted to diversity, every issue is about that. It's a small stone in the pond, but it is something, and I hope that it will perhaps move other people to do similar things. Starting this was a lot of work. It remains a lot of work, but it's doable. It's not impossible.

I think at the heart of promoting diversity in teaching, publishing, and scholarship is community, communication, and modeling. At least for my students, it is vital that I model the possibilities for them to engage with children's literature. And, at the root of all of that is Dr. Bishop's "Mirrors, Windows, and Sliding Glass Doors," which seems to be a framework that my students get and one they really respond to.

We've gotten a lot of positive feedback from people, often privately, about how excited or relieved or pleased they are to see something like RDYL, and that they feel like it's going to offer some new possibilities in the field, particularly for junior scholars who, before us, had these established containers, but it was clear that these containers were only going to expand so much. I hope that they're right.

**SPD:** I agree with everything Gabrielle said. Obviously, we want people to read our journal, to read all the different articles, and to assign them, whether they're in classrooms or in a reading group for a library system or something similar. And I envision a world where Ramón and Katie are invited around the country to speak about Dr. Seuss so they can have face-to-face conversations with people about their work.

I would like scholars who are not necessarily children's literature scholars to take this work seriously and not to look at it as lesser than studying Chaucer or Dickinson. Instead, it would be great for them to know that children's literature is an important socializing tool and recognize that it's worthy of study. The stakes for children's literature are really high, because if books continue to show, for example, black young boys in a particular way, and that's the image that other people grow up with, that's going to impact policing and education and other elements of society. Real lives are at stake, so I hope scholars take children's literature seriously.

I have a lot of friends in Asian American Studies, since that is my home discipline, and whenever they say, “I’m making a syllabus for a new class, what should I teach?” I always try to say, “You should teach an article about children’s literature. You should assign a children’s book and see how our young people are being taught Asian American history” or something like that. These topics shouldn’t be taught only in a children’s literature class; it should also be taught in ethnic studies and in social studies and communication and all different kinds of disciplines.

Also, recognizing that we don’t exist only in the ivory tower, that our work goes beyond our classroom doors, is vital. Gabrielle and I were very happy to find that my university library already had an open source journal platform. There was no question that we wanted to create a journal that was open access because we know others – people in publishing, writers who are not connected to universities – that would also benefit from reading the research that we published. And we also hope, of course, that they will contribute as well and publish with us if they’re so inclined.

For us, for the scholars, it’s important to know that our work has to go way beyond the classroom doors and way beyond the classroom walls.

**GAH:** I would add that in volume one, issue two, we had a forum on life, death, and youth activism. This was in the wake of the Marjory Stoneman Douglas shooting. We were thinking about the young, particularly black students who had been in the media to say, “There are shootings at our schools all the time, where is the media for us?”

We wanted to make a space for youth activists where they could talk about what living as a student activist, often as an unwilling one, was like. This space could give them what they had told us they weren’t getting in the mainstream media. It was a fascinating experience that ended up with several young people contributing, and we know that some of the downloads for those articles are from the authors themselves. A group of young women co-wrote a novel together when they were still high school students. We also had a young woman who graduated, who wrote about organizing a walkout at her school to protest gun violence.

When Sarah talks about going way beyond the classroom, I think we see that reach into the larger community as an essential one, and any boundary between what we do and the larger world is permeable. This permeability was important when we thought about open access. These young women who are now in an academic journal can just go to the RDYL site and download the article

because there's no paywall, and they don't have to have a university affiliation. This openness feels like it aligns with RDYL's mission, which is about community, collaboration, access, and equity.

**TS:** In the introduction for the first issue, you wrote about how RDYL came to be and what its purpose was. Has your reasoning or purpose evolved since you originally conceived of the journal, or has it remained the same or been reinforced?

**SPD:** The purpose has definitely been reinforced. We thought very deliberately about pipeline issues and about mentoring. I don't know how clearly this came across in our introduction [for volume 1, issue 1], but when the three women of color and I were on the minority scholars panel for the Children's Literature Association, at the time we were all junior faculty. We knew that we needed to be published in a peer-reviewed journal, and that was one of the main reasons we wanted to turn our panel into a forum and publish it in the *Children's Literature Association Quarterly*, since it is the highest ranked journal for children's literature studies. And we don't know how much other people recognize that need as well as the fact that as women of color, we face multiple barriers, both visible and invisible, because of our histories and our identities.

Because of this, Gabrielle and I are very intentional about mentoring through the peer review process and making space and providing opportunities to junior scholars. We try to do this in a way that is not burdensome; we don't want to ask junior scholars to do work that is not going to be helpful to them. For instance, when we think about writing book reviews, we've asked several junior scholars who we know would do phenomenal jobs, and it also gives them the opportunity to write a critical book review. I think we take very seriously the opportunity we have to help someone advance in their career by publishing in a peer reviewed journal. That has just been reinforced throughout this process.

**GAH:** As one of the cofounders of RDYL, I am well aware of the privilege that I have as a middle-aged white woman who is tenured and an associate professor and the ways in which I can say and do things with less consequence than a lot of the scholars with whom I now spend the majority of my time. I hope that this is applied privilege. Instead of just talking about support and connection, this is a concrete way of mentoring a grad student through her first peer-reviewed publication and for making a place for a senior scholar in the field to collaborate with a grad student and publish

something. Or, as Sarah said, this is a way to reach out to junior scholars who we know who are trying to build that pre-tenure dossier and get the benefit of their unbelievable smarts and eloquence, and also have them get a publication, such as a critical book review, out of it.

We've also both looked at how we can continue to further the mission of helping people build their scholarly careers and continue to contribute to these conversations while also thinking about how the journal can be different.

**TS:** Something I greatly appreciate about RDYL is that it not only focuses on research on diversity in youth literature, but it also features a lot of scholars who are from diverse backgrounds. How intentional was this on your part? Do you reach out to particularly groups? Are you actively seeking people from particular groups and backgrounds to contribute?

**SPD:** Our first issue was themed "Mirrors and Windows and Own Voices," so we were very clear that those were the articles we were looking for. Contributors had to share an identity category with the topic that they were writing about. We did receive a couple essays where the writer was not clear about how this was an #OwnVoices article, and those articles we rejected. We also read the contributions very carefully to make sure that all of the articles in the first issue were written by people who identified about the topic they were talking about, and that was very intentionally done.

The second issue was unthemed, so it was just whatever came to us. The evaluation process was more focused on the rigor of the essay, as opposed to it having an #OwnVoices focus. For the second part of volume one, issue two, we intentionally sought out Breanna McDaniel to special-edit that section because we recognized that it was a topic that we have less experience with, particularly in relation to #OwnVoices. However, it was something that Breanna was knowledgeable in; she just came out with her picture book, *Hands Up*, and it was very much a response to Black Lives Matter. We recognized that Breanna was better connected to a community who might be able to submit essays on that topic, and we strongly believe that someone like her should special-edit that kind of a section, and it shouldn't be just Gabrielle and me. Moving forward, we're very deliberate about, when we do these themed issues, that it's #OwnVoices people who are guest-editing those special issues.

**GAH:** In terms of who serves on the editorial board, it is a reflection of the people who were part of the original conversation that led to the starting of RDYL, with one or two switches. One person said, “I’m so committed already, I need to be on the advisory board rather than on the editorial board,” and we pulled in someone to be on the editorial board who had not been there at the founding but who has been very supportive. With the advisory board, we wanted to have wide representation in terms of institution, area of study, and level in academia, from senior scholars all the way through pre-tenure folks. I actually knew a couple of activists from following them on Twitter. For instance, I knew Kayla Whaley’s disability studies work because of Twitter, and we sought her out to be part of the advisory board.

We were very intentional about pulling together the boards. They are big boards, and we had to stop at one point. But we are very grateful that everybody we asked said yes and that this was something people definitely wanted to be part of, to put their names on, to support.

**SPD:** Besides Kayla, we also have people like author Ellen Oh and publisher Jason Low on the advisory board, so we asked people who are not in academia to also serve on our board because we recognize that having our conversations together makes us stronger, as opposed to just academics having these conversations.

**GAH:** Again, we are really trying to model the community that is artificially divided in parts but is, in fact, this big network of a big web of people.

**SPD:** And these people are actually, in the end, trying to achieve the same thing – good books for young people, right?

**TS:** Where would you like the journal to go in the future? What are your hopes for RDYL?

**SPD:** I just hope it lasts, and I hope it continues to make an impact. I hope it continues to have a seat at the table at places like an editor’s roundtable, at academic conferences, professional conferences.

**GAH:** I hope at some point we’re not the editors anymore (laughs).

**SPD:** That's why we're mentoring!

**GAH:** But seriously, this is something that I still thoroughly enjoy. We do see this, and have seen it from the beginning, as something that is passed on, that different people in the community take up this work, take ownership of the work, and collaborate and share. We committed at the beginning to doing one themed and one unthemed issue a year, and so we're trying to line up the next couple of themed issues. We've also talked about adding in more features down the line, potentially a podcast, which is something we've wanted to do from the get-go, but both Sarah and I immediately said, "Not it."

We've already made some changes. Incorporating our own book review editor, Sonia Rodríguez, was a change that happened after we had done one issue. We have some things that we would like to fold in, and I keep saying to Sarah that we need to make a five-year plan for the journal where we can think about how we might incorporate some of these changes.

But other than that, echoing what Sarah says, I hope that more people become aware of the journal. I hope that the journal continues to be used, and that it will be viewed as an equally important resource within this field, and within the other interdisciplinary fields that it covers, to the journals that already exist. It would be great if we were spoken about in the same breath as some of the other established journals that are out there.

**TS:** This is a tricky question, because your energy and your time are probably taken up between like your duties at work and then RDYL, but what plans do you have for your own scholarship moving forward? What are you hoping to do?

**SPD:** I've been very fortunate to be involved in projects that have impacted the field in some way, such as doing the Diversity Baseline Survey with Jason Low, creating RDYL with Gabrielle, and our other colleagues. However, it has for sure taken time away from me doing research, specifically with Korean American and Asian American children's books, and I'm very hungry for that. I'm interested in specific research projects regarding Korean American children's books that I'd really like to get back to. My dissertation was on representations of Korean adoption in children's literature, and I want to go back to that and publish specifically on that.

While we are working on RDYL, I'm also cowriting a book on Asian American children's literature. Allegedly, the due date for the manuscript is August 1<sup>st</sup> (laughs), so that is a project that I'm working on. I don't know when I sleep. I'm also beginning to look at a folktale collection that I researched when I was in graduate school. I just got funding to pick up that project again, so that'll be something that I start this summer as well.

It's really hard to think about the balance when you spend so many hours of your week doing RDYL, yet you're also supposed to publish your own research. I'm sure you're experiencing this in your own institution, where you're being asked to do more with fewer resources. All of this is happening at the same time, and the thing that drives me forward is, our children cannot wait, this work has to be done, we have to create better books, we have to study the books that are out there to learn how to do this better. So that's what keeps me moving forward in terms of working on RDYL.

**GAH:** I knew when I took on RDYL that it would be one of the most important things that I would do in my career, and I'm good with that. My ongoing research includes analysis of Japanese American incarceration in children's literature; some of this work can be found at my website, War Stories ([www.kidsandwar.com](http://www.kidsandwar.com)). I have a book project in progress as well.

**TS:** Given the demands placed on pre-tenure faculty, I appreciate your focus on not just mentoring junior faculty but also giving them respectful work that can further their careers. I think often women and people of color are asked to do all of this service and additional work, and it can backfire on them if they say, "No, I have to prioritize my scholarship."

Is there anything else that you'd like to share, either about diversity in youth literature, or on RDYL, that we haven't talked about?

**GAH:** We try to be mindful with RDYL to replicate some things that are necessary in the institution, like offering a venue for scholarly peer-reviewed work, but we're also interested in intentionally disrupting and not replicating some other things traditionally found in institutions, such as the kind of work that you just talked about. I hope that we are mindfully resisting that model, because I don't think any of the people involved with RDYL have benefited from it, and I don't think it's something that consciously we want to try to reproduce.



**SPD:** I'm just proud of all the work that we've accomplished together. It's been a wild experience, and I'm excited to see the next issue that's coming out [in June 2019], and the essays that we'll publish in December. It's just really exciting.

**GAH:** I think we still both have that "Wow" feeling, because of course we see every word, at every stage. And we still get to the published issue, and I'm just dumbfounded every time. It's only happened twice, right, so when I say every time. But I just saw the cover for the third issue [volume 2, issue 1], and man, it's a stunner.

**SPD:** We're proud and excited, and I hope that other people are as excited as we are.

**SARAH PARK DAHLEN** is an Associate Professor in the MLIS Program at St. Catherine University. Her research is on Asian American youth literature and transracial Korean adoption. She co-edits *Research on Diversity in Youth Literature* with Gabrielle Halko, co-edited *Diversity in Youth Literature* with Jamie Campbell Naidoo, and co-edited the *Children's Literature Association Quarterly's Special Issue on Orphanhood and Adoption in Children's Literature* with Lies Wesseling. [sarahpark.com](http://sarahpark.com) @readingspark

**GABRIELLE HALKO** is an Associate Professor at West Chester University. She teaches courses in youth literature and culture, American poetry, and first-year writing. In her research, Dr. Halko focuses on representations of national trauma in children's literature, including WWII and 9/11. She is a co-founder and co-editor of *Research on Diversity in Youth Literature*.

**TERRI SUICO** is an associate professor of education at Saint Mary's College. She earned her EdD from Boston University School of Education and her MAT from Vanderbilt University. Her scholarly work has been included in several books. Most recently, her chapter on using *Loving Vs. Virginia* to teach and contextualize the struggle for marriage equality appeared in the book *Breaking the Taboo with Young Adult Literature*. She currently serves as the book review and interview editor for *Study and Scrutiny: Research on Young Adult Literature*.