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## In Memoriam

# Celebrating a life: A tribute to Suzanne Wade

My first encounter with Suzanne was in St. Petersburg, Florida just about 20 years ago. The National Reading Conference met there periodically, and at this conference Suzanne was recruiting me for a job at the University of Utah. Both she and another faculty member invited me to have a drink with them. I needed the invitation because Utah was not a place to which I would have even considered to apply. But Suzanne was utterly charming at that first meeting. Her warm smile and gentle affect were completely disarming, and many of the hesitations I had about living in Utah melted away during that first meeting. In a matter of a short hour, I was seriously considering Utah as a place to work and live, and I left our meeting promising I would apply for the position.

When I moved to Utah and to the university, I found out that Suzanne's warm smile and gentle affect that I observed at that first meeting were absolutely genuine. That's who she was. She never tried to be anybody else. She never played games with people. She never tried to impress people. She always assumed the best of people and treated them as if they were the best. We often use the term "gentleman," but never the term "gentlewoman." But, if one term could sum up the essence of a woman like Suzanne, it might be a "gentle woman." Suzanne was as gentle a person as I have ever known in my lifetime. She was kind, considerate of others, and she walked softly on the earth. At the same time, she exuded an enthusiasm for life and all it had to offer.

When I first knew Suzanne, she and I were part of a group of 10 relatively new assistant and associate professors in the department at the University of Utah. We hung out together as a group after work and enjoyed a lively social life. We constantly teased each other about some unique and quirky aspect of our personalities. We often teased Suzanne about her "hippy" roots. She was one of the first of the baby boomers, and the turbulent 60s and early 70s made their mark on her. At Harvard, she lived in a community house as a single mother with her then young daughter, Jenna, and several other intact families; we called it a commune.

Suzanne was raised in New York and, until she came to Utah, had never been in the West. One great story of Suzanne was of her "hiking" the red cliffs of Moab, Utah in a dress, holding down her wide-brimmed floppy hat on her head and twisting her ankles in her high heels on the slick rocks. It took her awhile to adapt to life in the West, but she did. Eventually she learned how to ski, and she loved it. We used to tease her about her ideal skiing day, one run down the hill, a hot toddy by the fire, another run down

the hill, another hot toddy by the fire, and so forth. She had a marvelous ability to laugh at herself, and nobody thought those stories were funnier than Suzanne did. She used to laugh at herself constantly, even near the end of her life when things became grim. She never lost her sense of humor and her ability to see humor in everyday life.

Suzanne was a wonderful colleague to me and to everyone with whom she came into contact. Always the good citizen, she gave of her time and her thinking freely. She particularly excelled in planning, whether it was for the Graduate Program, the Secondary Reading Licensure program, an ad hoc committee, or a reading conference for 800 people. She planned meticulously, attending to every detail. As a result, nothing was left to chance, and everyone knew that if Suzanne planned it, it would go well.

Perhaps Suzanne planned so carefully every event in which she was involved because of her deep faith in community. Suzanne believed in community. She built communities all around her—of learners in her classroom, of colleagues in the department, of peers in professional organizations. She believed in being inclusive, and she practiced it in her personal as well as her professional life. Everyone was always included in whatever Suzanne did, whether it was for work or for pleasure.

This inclusion played out in her work. Suzanne's mentoring of doctoral students was widely known as exceptional. In fact, many of her publications were with her doctoral students. She developed early and lasting collaborative relationships with them. These relationships began right at the point of the conceptualization of her studies. She would work beside her doctoral students, developing a study, collecting and analyzing data together, and interpreting results together as well. Further, she always authored pieces with them. She was never one to take the credit for herself only.

Suzanne was one of those people who remind us that speed is not the essence of good thinking. Suzanne was a very thoughtful, even contemplative woman. When given a question, she would think for a minute or so and hesitate, almost so that sometimes one would not think she had a response at all. Then out would come a clear and concise response or a new idea or a new way of looking at something. I would think, "Oh, yes, I had not thought of that, but you are exactly right. What a great way to look at that." This thoughtful, meticulous thinking perhaps defined her work as a reading researcher and educator.

### **Her passion**

Suzanne had many passions, and living life to its fullest was one of them. A passion was her work. The passion she had for her work in reading and literacy was another defining feature of her life.

Suzanne received her doctorate in 1984 from the Harvard Graduate School of Education, interestingly, as a young single mother. After a 2-year educational sojourn with young Jenna to East Asia, including the Philippines and China, she accepted a position at the University of Utah. There Suzanne helped build a strong literacy program that remains to this day.

Over her years at the University of Utah, Suzanne became a nationally recognized scholar in literacy. Her accomplishments in the field were numerous and impressive. Her articles were published consistently in the top journals in the literacy field, including *Reading Research Quarterly*, *Review of Educational Research*, *Journal of Educational Psychology*, *Educational Psychology Review*, *JRB: A Journal of Literacy*, *The Reading Teacher*, and *Journal of Reading*. These journals attest to Suzanne's academic stature in the area of lit-

eracy. She and a co-author also contributed an invited chapter to the prestigious third edition of the *Handbook of Reading Research*.

Suzanne's contribution to the reading and teacher education fields was significant. During the 1990s she conducted cutting edge research that contributed unique and new conceptualizations about learning from text. This work began with her first published piece based on her work at Harvard and published in the *Review of Educational Research* (Wade, 1983) and later with a colleague (Reynolds & Wade, 1986). Additional contributions included several seminal works in this area, including a practical piece in *The Reading Teacher* called "Using Think-Alouds to Assess Comprehension" (Wade, 1990). This is one of Suzanne's best pieces in that it summarized a body of fairly new research and demonstrated a practical application of that research that was new to the field. It was clearly written, succinct, and provided teachers with a useful, alternative way to informally assess comprehension. I consider the think-aloud to be a far superior informal measure of comprehension than the "retell" method that is popular today. It is unfortunate that the think-aloud did not catch on among teachers as a valid informal measure of comprehension.

Over the course of Suzanne's work on learning from texts, she became particularly interested in how interest affects learning from text, and out of that interest came several research articles, including ones in *JRB: A Journal of Literacy, Reading Research Quarterly* and the *Journal of Educational Psychology*.

Our University of Utah group would often tease Suzanne about her excellent 1993 piece in *Reading Research Quarterly* entitled, "Seduction of the Strategic Reader: Effects of Interest on Selective Attention and Recall" (Wade, Schraw, Buxton, & Hayes, 1993). She adopted and expanded the concept of "seductive details" from an article by her colleague Ruth Garner and colleagues (Garner, Gillingham, & White, 1989). Seductive details are those details in an expository text that grab readers' attention right away and, unfortunately, can lead readers away from the most important information in a text. Readers then remember the seductive details and forget about the most important information. We teased Suzanne about her title "Seduction of the Strategic Reader." "Leave it to Suzanne," we would say, "to find a way to connect reading with sex."

Another outstanding piece came out of this period of Suzanne's work. In 1994 she and her colleagues (Wade, Thompson, & Watkins, 1994) published a chapter called, "The Role of Belief Systems in Authors' and Readers' Construction of Texts." This piece demonstrated Suzanne's more creative side in that it examined how adult readers from different walks of life created meaning out of a text about the Civil War. She and her colleagues interviewed people with different careers and conducted think-alouds of their interpretations of a Civil War text. What became readily apparent from readers' think-alouds were the differing versions of the meaning of the text based on readers' background knowledge. This was one of Suzanne's best studies in that it was a fresh approach to examining readers' prior knowledge and its effects on learning from text.

A longstanding interest of Suzanne's was inclusive education. This interest began soon after she started her academic career at the University of Utah and was interspersed with her work on learning from text. In the late 1990s, she became increasingly interested in using case pedagogies to study inclusive education. She wanted to study how case pedagogies could be used to develop critical reflective thinking on inclusion among pre-service and in-service teachers. These interests resulted in two books on case pedagogies and inclusive education, *Inclusive Education: A Casebook and Readings for Prospective and Practicing Teachers* (2000) and *Preparing Teachers for Inclusive Education: Case Pedago-*

*gies and Curricula for Teacher Educators* (2000). Suzanne edited the books, but she also contributed to them as well through individual chapters. As well, she developed most of the cases for these texts and some of the accompanying teaching notes. The cases are superb and offer a unique approach to teacher education through individual vignettes of classroom occurrences. To develop the cases, Suzanne conducted extensive interviews with parents of students with disabilities, teachers, special educators, and administrators.

The cases are far closer to real classroom experiences than existing textbooks on teaching and reflect an approach to teacher education that is grounded in the real life experiences of teachers and students. At the same time, Suzanne's work with cases in pedagogy reflected an entirely new way of thinking about teacher education. In the late 1990s, Suzanne and her colleagues published a chapter that reviewed their research on cases (Moje, Remillard, Southerland, & Wade, 1999). This chapter was reviewed by Kenneth Zeichner in his AERA Division K 1998 Vice-Presidential Address. In that address, Zeichner described the work reflected in that chapter as exemplifying the new, high-quality scholarship in teacher education. He described the results of Suzanne and her colleagues' work and those of two other scholars as providing "a disciplined inquiry" that will prove to be useful as "a model for prospective teachers and teacher ed students of the kinds of inquiry that more and more teacher educators are hoping their students employ." These three studies represent a whole new genre of work by practitioners that we will be hearing a lot more about in the next few years." Scholars who make a mark in their field are not necessarily the ones who publish the most. It is creative and innovating thinking that make a mark on the field. It is also the ability to identify early on the areas of research that need fleshing out and to do some of the fleshing out before others. Suzanne was one of those scholars.

Suzanne's list of honors and awards attest to her stature as a scholar. She was awarded a fellowship from the National Academy of Education Spencer Fellowship and the Career Development Award from the Joseph P. Kennedy, Jr. Foundation for her work and interest on inclusion. More recently, she was elected to the Board of Directors of the National Reading Conference, and last year she just completed her Presidency of the Utah Council of the International Reading Association. While President, she provided oversight of the highest attended state conference for the Utah Council of the International Reading Association. In the College of Education, she was a recipient of the Outstanding Teaching Award and the College of Education's Research Award. Additionally, Suzanne was awarded the University of Utah's highest teaching award, the Distinguished Teaching Award. This last award is given university-wide to a distinguished faculty member who has demonstrated exceptional teaching skills.

*"One Short Sleep Past, We Wake Eternally"*<sup>1</sup>

It was less than 2 years ago when Suzanne and I learned of the death of a colleague in the reading field. We were both shocked and saddened by this death, so sudden and final. I remember Suzanne saying, "Why are all our colleagues dying?" We looked eyes on each other and wondered about ourselves, the baby boomers who once thought life ended at 30, but thereafter thought we would remain 30 forever. Now, as I sit here, Suzanne is gone, and it is difficult to contemplate in light of that conversation not so long ago.

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<sup>1</sup> Donne, J. (1633). *Death be not proud*.

I recently picked up the book *Death Be Not Proud* (Gunther, 1949). I had read it many years ago but had forgotten its content. A few paragraphs into the Forward immediately said “Suzanne” to me and I devoured that book. The book is a memoir about the author’s son, Johnny, and his sudden and tragic journey to his death at 17. Johnny developed a brain tumor that took his life 15 months later. At 61, Suzanne developed lung cancer that took her life 15 months later. Certainly, Suzanne enjoyed a much longer life than Johnny. But, Suzanne had many more years of life in her, and living that life well was what she had been doing.

I mention the book because of the similarities between the way Johnny and Suzanne journeyed through their tragic ordeals and left the world. Suzanne experienced her illness with grace, courage, dignity, and a deep spirit that will forever remain with all those who knew her during those final months of her life. I must say I was always astonished when I walked away from my visits with her during that time. She was a gracious and courageous woman always, but never more so than when she reflected on her plight and on the tragic and ironic nature of her illness. For Suzanne had never smoked in her life, nor had she ever been around second hand smoke. No one in her biological or extended families had ever smoked. There was no known reason for her developing lung cancer. But she did.

Over the last several years of her life, Suzanne’s world was full of what she loved most in the world—her loving husband, Alan; her devoted children, Jenna, Chris, Jackie, and Matt; her beautiful bundle of grandchildren; her wonderful and supportive friends and colleagues; and her work. She continued her passion for her work, and, while she adored her family and spent much time with them, she had no intention of retiring. We spoke about this often, as we were hearing more about our peers and colleagues nationally who had retired or were about to retire. “I don’t plan on retiring,” said Suzanne. “I love doing what I am doing and I’m going to continue.”

Suzanne will be missed by the many who loved her as a person and as a professional who contributed so much to the field of literacy.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Note: In memory of Suzanne’s experience as a single mother at Harvard, Suzanne and Alan made arrangements with the College of Education at the University of Utah to endow a scholarship to support a single parent who is a student in the College. To honor Suzanne, you may send donations to the *Suzanne Wade Scholarship for Single Parents*, Dean’s Office, College of Education (please make checks payable to the “College of Education” or “University of Utah” and write “Wade scholarship” in the memo field).

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