

USU College of Education and Human Services Professor and NRMERA Conference Keynote Speaker Presents Research on Hope in Education



Suzanne Jones, Ph.D. (left) with current and former doctoral students at the NRMERA conference.

Suzanne Jones, Ph.D., professor in the School of Teacher Education and Leadership (TEAL) within the Emma Eccles Jones College of Education and Human Services, was honored to present a keynote address at the Northern Rocky Mountain Education Researchers Association (NRMERA) conference held in late October in Salt Lake City.

Founded in 1984, NRMERA is a regional affiliate of the American Educational Research Association (AERA) that welcomes educators and researchers nationwide. The organization hosts an annual conference and publishes a peer-reviewed journal providing a supportive environment—particularly for graduate students—to present research, receive feedback, and build professional connections. The conference brings together the top minds in education, with a particular emphasis on promoting quality educational research and applying those results in public schools.

“It is a well-deserved honor for Dr. Jones to present the NRMERA keynote address,” said Steven Camicia, department head of TEAL. “Her work illuminates how hope, identity, and efficacy shape student persistence,

teacher resilience, and the overall quality of learning environments. This deeply informs her mentoring of students in the School of Teacher Education and Leadership. By drawing on these insights, Dr. Jones helps students build knowledge, confidence, and a strong professional identity, fostering their growth and long-term success.”

A nearly 20-year member of NRMERA, Jones has served on the NRMERA executive board (2020-2022), published two papers in the organization’s journal *Educational Research: Theory and Practice*, and presented at the annual conference almost twenty times, often with a doctoral student as co-presenter.

Jones’s research interests include hope as a motivational factor of learning, collective classroom efficacy, teacher efficacy, conceptual change, and emotions in learning—topics that made her a perfect candidate to present the keynote at this year’s conference.

Jones co-presented with her longtime colleague from UNLV LeAnn Putney, professor emerita, on the conference theme, Education Equals Hope. Their address highlighted foundational theories of hope as a motivational element of learning. Jones and Putney also shared their research on how collective classroom efficacy engenders educational hope.

“Giving the keynote was an absolute joy,” said Jones. “I loved being able to share why hope is such a powerful driver of learning and belonging in our classrooms. I hope attendees left feeling inspired to cultivate environments where every child can see possibility, believe in their potential, and feel supported by a collective sense of hope.”

A two-time Graduate Mentor of the Year Awardee for TEAL (2019 and 2024), Jones says that for her the high point of the recent conference was the successes of her graduate students. Former TEAL doctoral students Don Mendenhall, Brad Dutson, and Jake Earnest, as well as current doctoral students Matthew Huffaker and Lorissa Nelson, participated in five additional presentations related to their dissertation research studies. Included in these was a special Presidential Invited Session entitled “Navigating the Waters of the Graduate Student Experience” in which these former and current USU students provided advice and lived experiences on graduate school benchmarks, including selecting a committee, preparing for and defending comprehensive exams, the dissertation, and life after the dissertation.

"I would put them in front of any group of scholars at any level—national or international—and they would do as well as any senior scholars. They were that good," praised Jones. "Their sessions were full and the attendees were engaged and had questions for them. It was so rewarding to watch them grow. That's my passion: helping my students reach their goals and be successful."

A native of Utah, Jones earned her bachelor's degree in elementary education from the University of Utah in 2000 along with her master's degree in teaching and learning in 2002. After teaching sixth grade for two years in a Title 1 school in the Salt Lake City School District, she returned to higher education, receiving her Ph.D. in educational psychology from the University of Nevada Las Vegas in 2008. Jones joined the faculty at USU in 2010.