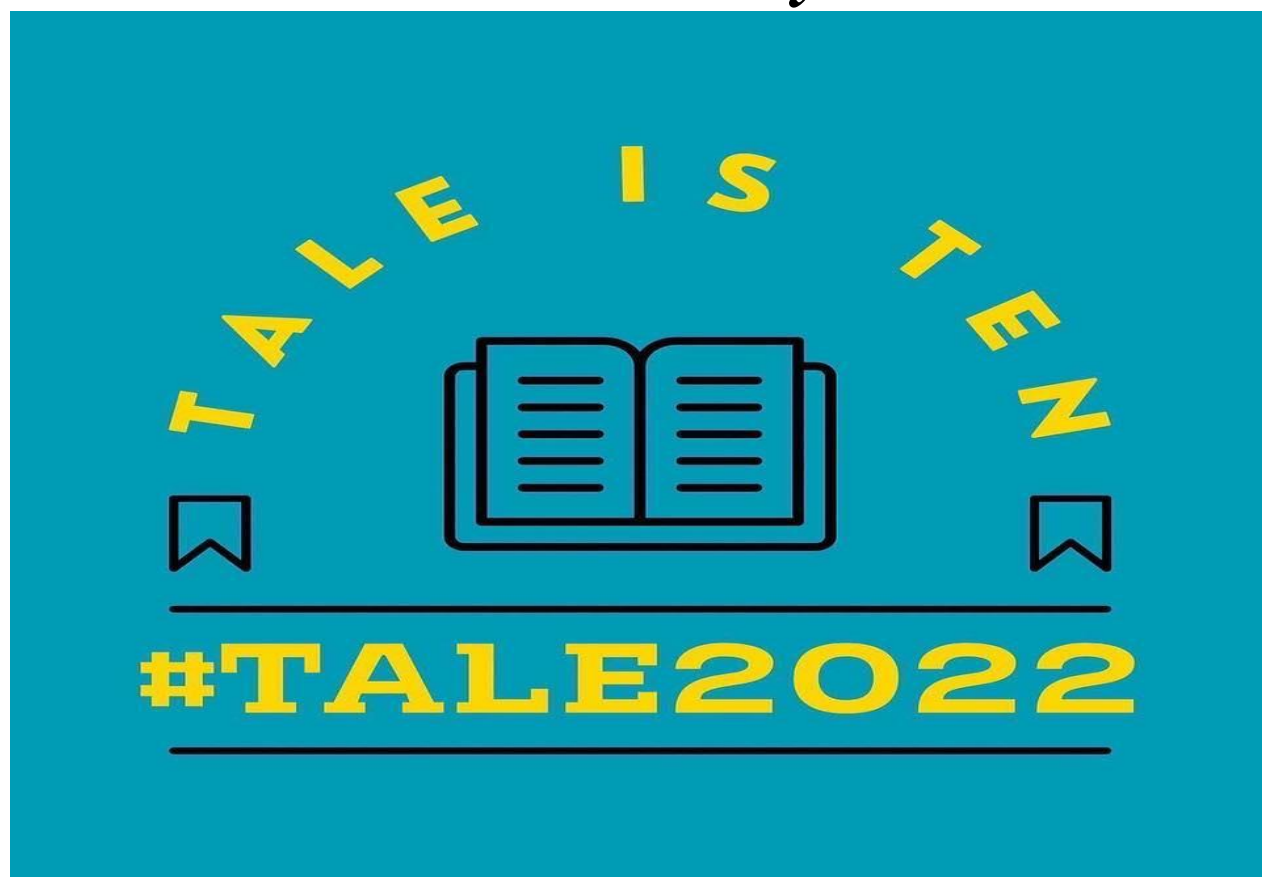




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Ten Year Anniversary Edition



Texas Association for Literacy
Education Yearbook
Volume 9:
*TALE Turns Ten: A Decade of Literacy,
Service, and Advocacy*
October 2022

TEXAS ASSOCIATION FOR LITERACY EDUCATION YEARBOOK

Volume 9: ***TALE Turns Ten: A Decade of Literacy, Service, and Advocacy***

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Amy Cummins, PhD, works as Professor of English in the Department of Literatures and Cultural Studies at the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley. Amy supports pre-service teachers of English Language Arts and Reading. She also teaches the English course on "Children's and Adolescent Literature." Amy has been a member of TALE since the organization's first year, and she expresses appreciation for all the leaders and members who have helped sustain and build TALE through its first decade and beyond.



Chanelle Maynard, EdD, is an Assistant Professor of Education at Schreiner University in Kerrville. She has been an educator for 28 years and taught in the United Kingdom before moving to Texas. She started her career as a special education teacher before earning the degrees MSc in Child Health Multidisciplinary Therapy from the University of Southampton, and an MEd in Advanced Literacy Instruction from Concordia University. Prior to her time at Schreiner, she served as a literacy coach and reading specialist, and an adjunct lecturer at Sam Houston State University and the University of Texas, Permian Basin. She graduated with a Doctorate in Literacy from Sam Houston University. Her research interests include technology integration in literacy instruction, disciplinary literacy, and writing practices.

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TALE Turns Ten: A Decade of Literacy, Service, and Advocacy

In 2012, the newly formed Texas Association for Literacy Education (TALE) held the first annual literacy conference. Over the next ten years, the TALE Annual Conference would go from a small gathering of literacy educators and leaders to later host hundreds of speakers and thousands of attendees—teachers, administrators, district coaches, college professors, teacher candidates, graduate students, and well-known authors from throughout Texas and the United States. We are grateful to the founding members of this organization, those who still stand with us in the present, and those whose spirit and dedication to literacy live on in our memories and our advocacy for literacy education.

In 2021-2022, the COVID-19 pandemic still loomed, and it was a beyond challenging time for all in education. We saw teachers leaving the profession at an alarming rate, as well as how the lack of safety in our schools changed communities forever and brought great tragedy to our state on numerous occasions. In such dark and often hopeless times, our organization really had to dig deep and determine how we could best be there to support and uplift our membership.

Though it has been a very tough time, all was not lost. TALE had the honor of awarding two of the first ever Jack Cassidy Memorial Scholarships for graduate students pursuing literacy related degrees in honor of one of TALE's founding members, Dr. Jack Cassidy. The organization also formed the TAIR Emerging Literacy Leaders Grant program and awarded two \$500 grants to attend the 2022 TALE Annual Conference and was provided a mentor from the TALE Board of Directors. It is the hope that with each of these awards, our organization will continue to grow and bring amazing and impactful leadership to our organization.

We also continued to provide virtual professional development opportunities. The first was conducted by Past TALE Chair, Malene Golding of Golding Touch Education Consulting, in which she shared an insightful presentation on Tier 1 Instruction titled "Creating a SWRLing Classroom." Dr. Carol Revelle of Texas A&M University-Commerce presented a session titled "Holding Up a Mirror to the ELAR Comprehension TEKS," and she discussed comprehension strategies and reading skills. Dr. Rebecca Harper of Augusta University engaged us with a timely and relevant presentation about writing strategies that span across the curriculum and beyond the classroom in a session titled "Write Now and Write On."

It has been a wonderful journey, and exciting to watch the growth of TALE over the past ten years. From the leadership to the service projects and initiatives launched, TALE is thankful for your support and excited to be moving into another decade of promoting collaboration, best practices, and advocacy. We will continue to be a premier state literacy organization and continue to grow as a united force and a network with a mission to "promote literacy that will enhance the lives of all Texas citizens personally, socially and economically."

We will be back together for our next annual conference on February 24-25, 2023, in Houston, Texas. Thank you for allowing me to serve as your Chair during the 2021-2022 term. We look forward to you joining us in Space City, as we "blast off" into the literacy realm with our theme "Houston: We Have Literacy."

Sincerely,

Dr. Kamshia Childs
TALE Chair, 2021-2022

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A Decade of Literacy, Service, and Advocacy: A Ten-Year History of TALE

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Abstract

The year 2021 marked the 10-year anniversary of the Texas Association for Literacy Education (TALE). The current study is a historical inquiry that explores the following research questions: (a) between the years 2011 and 2021, what contributions gave value to the mission of promoting literacy and enhancing the lives of all Texas citizens personally, socially and economically, and (b) who have been the characters of this narrative, who specifically has been influenced, and where have these contributions been made? The historical inquiry was informed by data sources including the following: archived newsletters, yearbooks, Executive Board meeting minutes, personal communications, journal issues, the organization's website, and personal interviews. Findings of the historical inquiry are reported as a narrative account of TALE's history between the years 2011-2021. The year 2022 is also partly included as that was the year that TALE publicly celebrated the 10th year. The resulting narrative is arranged chronologically and by themed subsections according to the Presidents and Chairs who have led TALE.

Keywords: *historical inquiry, leadership, literacy, literacy organizations*

Texas is known as *The Lone Star State*, but in 2011 a small group of K-12 educators and university professors—led by Dr. Jack Cassidy—decided that Texas should not be one of the only states without a state-level International Reading Association (IRA) affiliation. (IRA was later renamed the International Literacy Association.). That small group, consisting of less than 20 educators, gathered at Dr. Cassidy's home on August 27, 2011, and the outcome of that meeting was to start an email campaign aimed at connecting Texas educators from across the state. The

campaign led to the founding of the Texas Association for Literacy Education (TALE), and at TALE's first conference, which was co-hosted with The Specialized Literacy Professionals (SLP) and The University of the Incarnate Word (UIW) in San Antonio, IRA Past President Karen Bromley presented TALE with its official IRA charter, making TALE an official state-level IRA affiliated organization.

Throughout TALE's first 10 years, the shared mission was always "to promote literacy that will enhance the lives of all Texas citizens personally, socially and economically" (TALE,

n.d., para. 2)—and that still remains true today. That mission has guided TALE’s advocacy work, development of service committees, and design of professional development opportunities—as well as other accomplishments of the organization over the last 10 years. TALE has arrived at its 10-year anniversary with membership reaching over 600 members, and with multiple connections throughout Texas. This article retells TALE’s first 10 years using a historical inquiry methodology in which the organization’s newsletters, President’s messages in conference yearbooks, and the official TALE website were analyzed to tell the story of how TALE has made an impact through the lens of the organization’s own Mission Statement. Past and current members of TALE’s leadership (e.g., Presidents and Executive Board Members) as well as Board of Director meeting minutes were also consulted in capturing the organization’s decade of literacy, service, and advocacy.

Methodology

Historical Research

Historical research tells the stories of those who contributed to the forming of a unique narrative (Schrag, 2021). With the careful crafting of the organization’s name so that its acronym formed the word *TALE*, Jack Cassidy presupposed that a great narrative would in fact develop around the organization. Though there are many perspectives to tell within the narrative, one perspective historical research can look for is *evolution* through the contributions, trends, motives, and influences uncovered through the exploration of various documents. Those documents may include, but are not limited to archived newsletters, yearbooks, minutes of meetings, personal communications, journal issues, websites, and personal interviews. From this narrative, value and perspective of the past brings to light significant individuals, events, or actions that form the developing story. Historical research offers an opportunity for educational organizations to take time to chronicle their past, highlighting significant events as well as how and why change was made. More importantly, because the history of TALE is a young

narrative, it becomes the starting place for a future narrative to be added (Albulescu, 2018; Henry, 2006; Rury, 2006; Schrag, 2021).

Research Purpose

The Princeton Guide to Historical Research (Schrag, 2021) instructs historical researchers to begin by asking a sound question about the past so that it is clear what will be learned from the inquiry. For the question of this historical inquiry, we will return to the past. In 2011, when the organization was formed sitting in the home of Jack Cassidy, the mission for the organization was established as the following: “The mission of the Texas Association for Literacy Education is to promote literacy that will enhance the lives of all Texas citizens personally, socially and economically” (TALE, n.d., para. 2). From this mission statement the research team formed the following guiding questions to assist with uncovering the historical narrative of TALE:

1. Between the years 2011 and 2021, what contributions gave value to the mission of *promoting* literacy and *enhancing* the lives of all Texas citizens *personally, socially, and economically*?
2. Who have been the characters of this narrative, who specifically has been influenced, and where have these contributions been made?

Research Design

The scope of the research design encompassed the years 2011-2021. Since historical research tells the story, the structure of a narrative will guide the inquiry. The characters of this narrative will include the leadership of TALE and those within the body of the organization charged with building infrastructure for the members. The inquiry will continue to look at the ‘who, what, when, where, and why,’ or the evolution of a “system of thought” by the organization that shaped the narrative from a multitude of primary source artifacts (Henry, 2006, p. 349). The artifacts analyzed include newsletters, annual yearbooks, Board of Director

meeting minutes, and the TALE website. Personal communications with past and current members of leadership (e.g., Presidents and Executive Board members) also provided information that contributed to the formed narrative. While analyzing artifacts, the following lenses taken from the research questions guided the critical storytelling: *promoting literacy, enhancing lives, as well as personal, social and economic impact.*

Specific Sets of Sources

Archival Textual Sources. To construct a historical narrative, nine volumes of TALE newsletters (a total of twenty-three issues) were reviewed specifically for the Presidential/Chair message, committee engagement reports, and membership contributions. Additionally, Presidential/Chair messages in nine yearbook issues were critically analyzed. Archival sources were requested such as Board of Director meeting minutes, and leadership personal communications. From this request fifty-two Board of Director meeting minutes were critically reviewed. The TALE website was also used to confirm accuracy of individuals mentioned in leadership and/or recipients of awards.

Interpreting Sources (Data Analysis)

Historical research falls in the category with other methods that analyze data like ethnography, grounded theory, and qualitative content analysis (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). When analyzing text data for this historical research, the approach was aligned with that of qualitative content analysis and looked “for the subjective interpretation of the content of text data through the systematic classification process of coding and identifying themes or patterns” (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005, p. 1278). Like qualitative content analysis, historical research seeks to uncover from documents the textual message from documents or other sources through repetitive cycles of *critical reading, memoing/note taking, and pattern recognition* (Bhattacharya, 2017; Schrag, 2021). This was the process used in our analysis.

Critical Reading. Metaphorically, critical reading is likened to the act of mining. A historical researcher approaches the artifact with an understanding that it has several layers of meaning. The first act of reading is simply breaking the surface or engaging in a “cold” read which unearths a surface level meaning or “meaning at face value” (Schrag, 2021). During this cycle of analysis, the researcher becomes familiar with the text. Often, a more active or “warm” read (second or third read) is required of the researcher to break the surface of meaning and to locate more significant statements of historical relevance (Schrag, 2021). During this active read, several aspects of the documents can be determined such as significant statements about what the author or source is trying to address, what the hidden agenda in the message could be, what question the author was trying to answer, what problem they were trying to solve or address, who the audience is, and what the solution is (Wineburg, 2001). After each cycle of critical reading, the historical researcher engages in memoing or notetaking to begin to recognize patterns in what the historical characters did or said. For our analysis, each document went through the following cycles: (1) an initial cold read to capture reflections of the document, (2) a second warm read to extract significant statements, and (3) a reflection on the document's historical relevance through memoing/notetaking. A final cycle was completed that looked for patterns in the memos/note-taking reflections.

Memoing/Notetaking. Managing data of historical research requires the researcher to take a bottom-up approach to an inductive process of analysis or mining, extracting, and refining (Schrag, 2021). During the critical reading of documents/artifacts and memoing/notetaking, the researcher captures thoughts, emotions, realizations, questions, connections, and other cognizant ideas in relation to the significant statement that was discovered. Such significant statements may highlight moments in history when the historical characters of TALE were promoting literacy, enhancing lives, and/or having a personal, social, or economic impact. This allows for the artifacts to become more

manageable. While memoing can be organized in a variety of ways, journaling allows the researcher to reflect on the significant statements and reduce thoughts through coding, labeling or noting other questions as a result of reflecting on the reduction process. From these smaller units, the historical researcher then memos on the interrelatedness of the chunks of data being collected for patterns that begin to tell the story of the project (Bhattacharya, 2017; Nespor, 2006; Schrag, 2021). This process occurs and reoccurs after the initial critical cold and warm reads. For our research, we used a digital spreadsheet platform to store the cycles of memoing/notetaking and journaling.

Pattern Recognition and Narrative

Representation. During and after the memoing process, the researcher organizes the chunks of data (codes/labels/thoughts) into categories, which begins the process of recognizing patterns. Returning to the research focus, the historical inquiry of the TALE history seeks to uncover systems of thought related to the lens of promoting literacy, enhancing lives, and impact personally, socially and economically. Bhattacharia (2017) suggests to “Look across and within categories to identify patterns that arise to the surface . . . Write reflexively about pattern identification and the connection . . . to other parts of your research [such as questions].... Look for silences, contradictions, and tensions. . . . Discuss your process and findings. . . . Modify and revisit . . . as many times as necessary” (p. 151). Additionally, Nespor (2006) reminds researchers to consider these concepts when looking for patterns: Follow the movement of ideas over the data, consider the pace and location of the moment, consider when movement of events were hot or when they became cold or left the narrative, and consider how the movement was influenced or motivated in terms of events, people, things, or ideas. From these patterns, a historical narrative can be formed.

Characters in the TALE Historical Narrative

TALE’s first 10 years has been a decade of literacy, service, and advocacy. Important to that narrative are the many characters who have led

the organization in meeting its own mission of “promot[ing] literacy that will enhance the lives of all Texas citizens personally, socially and economically” (TALE, n.d., para. 2). The following is the story of TALE’s first decade. The story stretches from 2011 to 2021; however, we also include some insights from 2022 as that was when TALE’s first 10 years were publicly celebrated. In honor of those who have led TALE, the narrative that follows is arranged chronologically and by themed subsections according to the TALE Presidents and Chairs of the last 10 years. Included with these individual narratives are the leadership contributions uncovered as each President/Chair left their impact on the organization.

Jack Cassidy (2011-2012) Building Legacy by Building Community

Dr. Jack Cassidy, founder and first President of TALE (2011-2012) is also the creator of the annual *What’s Hot in Literacy Survey* as well as Past President of IRA and the College Reading Association (now renamed the Association for Literacy Educators and Researchers). At the time of starting TALE, Dr. Cassidy was Professor Emeritus at Millersville University and retired from Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi (TAMUCC) where he was Associate Dean for Graduate Studies and a Professor in the College of Education. In addition to starting TALE, Cassidy was also the founder of SLP. Cassidy’s annual publication and his connections to other organizations played an instrumental role in the startup of TALE.

In May of 2011, the previous Texas State IRA affiliated group known as the Texas State Reading Association (TSRA) disbanded after 40 years of operation due to financial difficulties as well as difficulties with recruiting and retaining officers. In August of 2011, Cassidy assembled a group of educators at his home to discuss forming a new state IRA affiliated group—TALE. Among the small group of educators that gathered at Cassidy’s home were Caroline Denny (who served as TALE’s founding President-Elect), Sharon O’Neal (who served as TALE’s founding Vice President), and Patricia Durham (who later served as TALE’s

fourth President). Also included were Sheri Vasinda (who served as the founding Secretary), Stephanie Grote-Garcia (who served as the founding Treasurer and webmaster), and Jim Hoffman (who drafted TALE's bylaws and surveyed Texas educators about their expectations for TALE). Others attending were Corinne Valadez, Sarah Womble, Gwynne Ash, Jeanne Cantu, Jean Farmer, Gina Moats, Jan Sounders, Misty Sailors, and Drew Cassidy—all of whom were instrumental in the startup of TALE.

At that initial meeting, Cassidy announced two ideas for raising startup funds for TALE. First, he shared that he and Stephanie Grote-Garcia would use his *What's Hot in Literacy* research to create an edited book. That book was published by Kendall Hunt Publishing in 2012 under the title of *Literacy Trends and Issues: What's Hot*. The book included chapters on the eight hottest literacy topics for 2012, and profits from that publication went to TALE and SLP. Cassidy also announced that startup funds would be earned by a co-hosted 2012 Literacy Summit. That event held February 3rd and 4th was co-hosted with UIW and SLP. That event also held the theme of Cassidy's *What's Hot in Literacy*. Cassidy and Grote-Garcia served as co-chairs for the event. SLP supported the national event by recruiting well-known speakers such as P. David Pearson, Jerry L. Johns, and Karen Bromley. SLP also recruited additional presenters from 15 states and eventually over 200 educators from around the country. At the conclusion of the Literacy Summit, Cassidy presented Dr. Bromley with the formal application to be officially chartered as an IRA affiliated group. Bromley later took the application to the IRA Board, and on February 25th of 2012, TALE was officially chartered.

Following the Literacy Summit began the work of creating an Executive Board and establishing bylaws. An innovative and financially responsible precedent of virtual quarterly meetings allowed for board members from across the state to meet with no expense for travel taken from the budget. In June 2012, the first Executive Board meeting was held via Google Hangouts (which was later moved to

Zoom). To ensure transfer of documents to future Executive Boards, documents would be housed in a Google Drive account. By the end of the first year of meetings, the official bylaws were voted on, decisions for virtual elections were made, membership plans were made, and conference procedures were planned. After the first virtual elections, TALE's first leadership team included the following:

- Executive Committee: Carolyn Denny (President), Sharon O'Neal (President Elect), Patricia Durham (Vice-President), Sheri Vasinda (Secretary), Stephanie Grote-Garcia (Treasurer)
- At-Large Directors: Paul Haupt, Kim Reznicek, Melissa Caraway, and Marilyn Cook

Board members were appointed and were randomly assigned different term limits to allow time for nominees to be voted in by members.

At the end of TALE's inaugural year, Jack Cassidy had built the foundation for this state literacy community to grow. The members of this community would soon have opportunities to engage and collaborate with local, state, and national literacy educators and leaders on important issues and trends of literacy learning. By laying this foundation, a literacy environment was created that would expose Texans to literacy needs and practices to embrace and at times to challenge. Through Jack Cassidy's vision of a Texas state literacy organization, TALE would become a platform for engaging literacy educator voices, a space for collaborating with other literacy organizations, and a valuable resource for professional growth.

Carolyn Denny (2012-2013) Forming Procedures and Partnerships

Carolyn Denny was the founding President Elect of TALE and served as the organization's second President. Her term was the fiscal year of 2012-2013. At the time, she was an elementary Language Arts and reading curriculum specialist

for Northside Independent School District in San Antonio. She was also Treasurer for the Coalition of Reading and English Supervisors of Texas and Past President of the Alamo Reading Council (a local council of IRA).

During Denny's presidency, she continually communicated that the first year of TALE was focused on formation in response to Texas educators' expectations; here, she was referring to the initial survey sent by Jim Hoffman to Texas educators. The survey was sent to gauge interest in starting TALE and to identify their expectations of such an organization. From the survey results TALE created goals for the organization, and Denny provided updates for TALE's progress on these goals. Specifically, she wrote,

[O]ne major expectation was for the association to support the development of all aspects of literacy. Another was for the association to reach out to other state literacy organizations. Both of these expectations are well on their way to being fulfilled. (Denny, 2012, p. 1)

Examples of the discussed development during Denny's presidency include the publication of book reviews in the newsletter (which initiated when Leslie Haas was editor and still continue today), the launch of TALE's Facebook page (@texasreaders.org), the approval of bylaws for the organization, and the formation of TALE's journal known as the *Texas Journal of Literacy Education* (TJLE). Even more evidence of TALE's growth was that membership grew to 200 by the second year. This growth was initiated and sustained through the work of the elected leadership. Those individuals that served during the 2012-2013 term were the following:

- Executive Committee: Carolyn Denny (President), Sharon O'Neal (President Elect), Jack Cassidy (Past President), Patricia Durham (Vice President), Sheri Vasinda (Secretary), and Stephanie Grote-Garcia (Treasurer)

- At-Large Directors: Kim Reznicek, Kim Skinner, Paul Haupt, Melissa Caraway, Marilyn Cook, and Ann Whiteside.

TALE developed through successful partnerships as documented during Cassidy's presidency and during Denny's presidency. TALE continued to build partnerships with other organizations. In 2013 IRA had their annual conference in San Antonio. For that international event, TALE cosponsored a special session with the Texas Association for Improvement of Reading (TAIR) and the Texas Council of Teachers of English Language Arts (TCTELA). The session was titled *Making a Difference: Texas Authors, Texas Teachers and Texas Literacy Organizations Focus on Critical Reading*. The session was a professional development rooted in teaching nonfiction texts, and Texas authors demonstrated how to cultivate critical thinking, reading, and writing with students at both the elementary and secondary levels. Cynthia Levinson, author of *The Youngest Marcher: The Story of Audrey Faye Hendricks, A Young Civil Rights Activist*, was among the authors who presented.

By the end of Carolyn Denny's leadership year, efforts for hosting the TALE Conference in Round Rock, Texas, were in forward motion. Procedures were developed about conference presentation proposals, hosting institutions, budgets, hotels, social event night, and keynote speakers. TALE's relationships with TAIR and TCTELA would become a lasting friendship as the three organizations continued to work side by side to meet the needs of all levels of Texas literacy educators.

Sharon O'Neal (2013-2014) Building Momentum and Voice

Sharon O'Neal served as the founding Vice President of TALE and moved into the role of the organization's third President during the 2013-2014 term. O'Neal's leadership team included the following:

- Executive Committee: Patricia Durham (President Elect), Roberta Raymond (Vice President), Sheri Vasinda

(Secretary), and Stephanie Grote-Garcia (Treasurer),

- At-Large Directors: Frances Gonzales-Garcia, Laurie Sharp, Amy Cummins, Paul Haupt, Kimberly Reznicek, and Kim Skinner
- TALE's first IRA State Coordinator: Lorene Reid

During the summer of 2014, TALE sent Stephanie Grote-Garcia, Roberta Raymond, and Patricia Durham to the IRA's Leadership Academy—an opportunity that would later change TALE's infrastructure as Durham, the following President, used the training content in her strategic planning the following year.

During O'Neal's presidency, TALE held its 2nd annual conference on October 12, 2013, at the Texas State University campus in Round Rock. Keynote speakers included IRA President Maureen McLaughlin and Texas author Xavier Garza. The theme of the conference was *Building Momentum*. The motto of the conference quickly became *Dang* as O'Neal welcomed keynote speaker Maureen McLaughlin to the state of Texas and presented her with a "Dang" t-shirt.

Memorable from the 2nd annual conference was the announcement of *The Jack Cassidy Distinguished Service Award*. Dr. Cassidy's dedication and service to the field of literacy represent a large part of TALE's history. The award continues to recognize educators who support literacy education in the State of Texas, and Cassidy, the first recipient, was presented with the award at the 2013 TALE literacy conference. Nominations have been accepted annually since then, and any Texas educator whether public, elementary, secondary, or university level is eligible to receive the award. The following individuals have also been honored with the award: Stephanie Grote-Garcia (2014-2015), Susan Szabo (2015-2016), Rosalind Horowitz (2017-2018), Laurie Sharp (2018-2019), and Patricia Durham (2019-2020).

Building Momentum was the ideal theme of the 2013 conference because TALE was set on a

path of continued growth. The first editorial team of *TJLE* was identified and included Leslie Haas, Deborah Lee, Susan Szabo, and Sheri Vasinda. Not only was a peer-reviewed journal fully formed, but the first editorial team also arranged the first TALE social media professional chat on Facebook. For the first chat TALE members were encouraged to read the article "Sharing Common Ground: Texas and the Common Core State Standards" (Vasinda, Grote-Garcia, & Durham, 2013) and to post questions to the authors.

Other evidence of TALE's momentum building was the expansion of the newsletter. Jodi Pilgrim served as newsletter editor, and the publication continued to grow in its focus of advocacy and a bulletin for TALE updates. The newsletter started introducing more tools and resources for teachers with a high focus on technology, STAAR, dyslexia, and House Bill 5. The inclusion of a "President's Message" set the stage for future presidents to speak to the members directly. As President, Sharon O'Neal used this platform to speak to members about the importance of taking time professionally (and to find a space) that allows for growth as a literacy educator. Her messages carried the theme of teacher and student empowerment, and this theme was captured throughout the 2013 newsletters.

Under O'Neal's leadership, TALE made its first advocacy position statement to the Texas Education Agency (TEA) about high school English requirements. O'Neal promoted literacy through bringing the voices of key literacy leaders to Texas and considered the importance of promoting literacy from all parts of Texas, especially the south, as seen in the south Texas authors sharing literacy moments at the conference. TALE also saw momentum building within membership, leadership, and with publications to offer members more opportunities to share, engage, and promote literacy.

Patricia Durham (2014-2015) Strategically Designing Infrastructure

For the first three years, TALE focused on growth, and by year four, the organization began to strategically increase engagement and advocacy efforts for members. Several foundational initiatives were started during Patricia Durham's presidency that would bring TALE members together throughout the year and allow their voices to be heard statewide. For example, Durham welcomed members to tell their stories using Think Alouds as transformative thinking through initiatives such as Texas TALEs, which called on members to post their literacy stories (tales) on Facebook throughout the year.

The first book studies were offered to TALE members during this time. The chosen books included *The Book Whisperer* by Donalyn Miller (2009) and *Igniting a Passion for Reading* by Steven Layne (2009). Both authors were keynote speakers at that year's TALE conference which took place on February 21 at Sam Houston State University The Woodlands Center. The conference was chaired by Roberta Raymond and Patricia Durham, and approximately 225 members attended the conference. In her President's message in the newsletter, Durham addressed the social aspect of "conference" and how that year's event helped continue the momentum of transforming literacy in the lives of Texas students and teachers. Her message was that the conference is a platform for literacy educators to tell their tales of teaching and how participating creates its own literacy experience.

Connected with the conference was a book drive for the Huntsville Area Literacy Council. Also offered at the conference was a chapter leadership workshop in which TALE leaders and local chapter leaders worked together to develop their leadership skills. TALE supported attendance at the annual conference by awarding three Conference Registration Fee Grants; the grants covered the registration fees for one elementary school teacher (K-5), one middle school teacher (6-8), and one high school teacher (9-12). As the second recipient, Stephanie Grote-Garcia was awarded the 2014-2015 *Jack Cassidy Distinguished Service Award* for her work in building relationships and organizing the groundwork for TALE.

Leadership Contribution

Using the guidance obtained from the IRA Leadership Academy, the first Strategic Committee met to form TALE's Strategic Plan. The committee was chaired by Durham and included Stephanie Grote-Garcia, Roberta Raymond, and Laurie Sharp. This plan promoted designing infrastructure for the organization and measurable outcomes that would support the mission of TALE. Through the new structure of TALE, four committees were formed: Membership Development, Educator Empowerment, Advocacy Development, and Community Involvement. These committees established their own SMART goals that extended the mission and engaged membership. By establishing leadership branches of TALE, more members had the opportunity to be active in promoting literacy in Texas, and there was now a plan for engaging and retaining members as well as recruiting new members with clear measurable goals. Beginning in 2015, as evident from recorded minutes, Executive Board meetings became more action-based per sub-committee reports, and by the end of the year TALE's leadership team was organized into committees designed to promote awareness, engage, retain, and recruit. Durham's elected leadership team included the following individuals:

- Executive Committee: Roberta Raymond (President Elect), Robin D. Johnson (Vice President), Sheri Vasinda (Secretary), Stephanie Grote-Garcia (Treasurer)
- At-Large Directors: Mary LaFleur, Karen Sykes, Frances Gonzales-Garcia, Laurie McAdams, Kimberly Reznicek, and Amy Cummins
- TALE's first IRA State Coordinator: Lorene Reid

The Advocacy Committee also had their first message in the newsletter. At that time, Laurie Sharp was director of TALE's Advocacy Committee. Messages from the committee included updates of the 84th Texas Legislative

session that began on January 13, 2015 and ended on June 1, 2015. Sharp encouraged TALE members to contact their state representatives. This would be the first of many opportunities for TALE member voices to be heard.

Durham served as TALE's Strategic Planning Committee chair, the TALE IRA state coordinator search committee chair, as well as a TEKS Advocacy Representative and a member of the Writing Committee for the ELAR TEKS revisions. As a TEKS Advocacy Representative, Durham testified to the Texas State Board of Education (SBOE) regarding the voices of TALE membership during the ELAR TEKS revisions. Her leadership established the foundation for strategic growth.

Roberta Raymond (2015-2016) Building Capacity for Strategic Growth

Roberta Raymond served as TALE's fifth President, and during her term she continued to nurture TALE's relationships with other organizations—a virtue deeply rooted in TALE's history. Members of Raymond's elected leadership team included the following individuals:

- Executive Committee: Robin D. Johnson (President Elect), Laurie A. Sharp (Vice President), Jill R. Culmo (Secretary), Sandra Murillo-Sutterby (Treasurer)
- At-Large Directors: Mary LaFleur, Karen Sykes, Alida Hudson, Kathy Stephens, Jake Hollatz, and Teddi Martin
- State IRA Coordinator: Lorene Reid

Also important to the leadership team was Jacqueline Ingram who served as the Membership Director. Additionally, *TJLE* welcomed its second editorial team consisting of Chase Young, Bethanie Pletcher, and Sherrye Garrett.

TALE's first conference was held in 2012 and was put together through a partnership with UIW and SLP, and just like then, TALE once

again partnered with UIW and SLP for the 2016 conference. The conference took place on February 12 and 13 at UIW. This was the first conference that awarded attendance scholarships to a K-5th, 6-8th, and 9-12th educator. Stephanie Grote-Garcia, Elda Martinez, and Jack Cassidy co-chaired the conference which had over 300 attendees. Members were able to mingle with each other at the Friday night "Meet and Greet" that has become a tradition at the TALE conference. Unique to this conference were the food truck options offered for lunch on Saturday which was a way for TALE to economically impact small businesses of San Antonio and to bring members in contact with the city's unique food cultures. Keynote speakers at the conference were Jack Cassidy, Stephanie Grote-Garcia, Evan Ortlieb, Linda Gambrell, Victoria Risko, Jill Lewis-Spector, Estanislado S. Barrera IV, Donald J. Leu, and Marcie Craig Post. Also presenting were children's authors Guadalupe Garcia McCall, John Micklos Jr., Sonia Gensler, and Johnathan Rand. As the third recipient, Susan Szabo was awarded the 2015-2016 *Jack Cassidy Distinguished Service Award* for her work in establishing *TJLE*. Following the conference, the Yearbook was published under the editorial team of Elda Martinez, Jodi Pilgrim, and Laurie Sharp.

Leadership Contribution

The year of 2015-2016 was focused on strategic planning and organizational growth. Each of the strategically created committees (i.e., Advocacy, Membership, and Community Involvement) aided in building infrastructure within the organization. Between monthly Executive Board meetings, these committees met to establish yearly goals that would engage and recruit members.

Advocacy Committee. Led by Laurie Sharp, the Advocacy Committee defined purpose and set goals to enhance TALE members' awareness of legislative issues, educate about advocacy skills, and demonstrate advocacy efforts. With the goal of bringing awareness to members, TALE Advocacy Alerts were blasted out to members about national and state legislation such as HB 742 and the reauthorized Elementary and

Secondary Education Act (ESEA) also known as the No Child Left Behind federal legislation (Student Success Act/Every Child Achieves Act of 2015) as well as TALE's advocacy efforts with the SBOE related to the ELAR TEKS revisions. Both Raymond and Durham participated in the Literacy Coalition that advocated and presented a literacy framework which was used during the rewriting process.

TALE's Advocacy Committee recognized two outstanding Texas State Legislative Education leaders for their efforts in promoting literacy for all students. These teachers included Barbara Cargill (SBOE Member, District 8) and Patricia "Pat" Hardy (SBOE Member, District 11). Both were recognized for their efforts and support of the statewide Literacy Coalition during the Texas SBOE's ELAR TEKS review and revision process. Also, during Raymond's presidency, the Advocacy Committee continued to grow a strong national presence. In reflection of the advocacy efforts, the committee worked throughout the year to submit the TALE application for the ILA Advocacy Award.

During the 2016 ILA conference, TALE was recognized with an Advocacy Award for the first time. ILA presents this award annually to state and provincial councils that demonstrate how they are working to affect educational policy and legislation through effective advocacy at the local, state, and/or national levels. This award recognized TALE's ongoing efforts to educate about, advocate for, and support the importance of lifelong literacy learning.

Membership Committee. The year of 2015-2016 saw membership grow, allowing TALE to start using a new membership registration system. Headed by Jacqueline Ingram, the Membership Committee began to streamline membership which allowed TALE to use membership data such as geographic location and type of literacy educators to inform decision-making related to conferences and professional development needs. The new membership system also allowed TALE to connect committees with members to foster more engagement opportunities. Recruitment efforts were started that focused on marketing

the benefits of becoming a TALE member. This was turned into a flier that was posted at various literacy institutions and schools across the state.

Community Involvement Committee. The first year of the Community Involvement Committee, led by Mary LaFleur, focused on engaging membership through the slogan "Spreading Random Acts of Literacy." In 2015, the committee created parent resources for home/family literacy and held several book drives and donations with local communities such as the Corpus Christi and Alamo Reading Councils, Alpha Psi Omega, Tarleton State University National Honorary Society, TAMU-CC's Student Reading Council, HEB, and Half-Priced Books. Additionally, the conference raised 500+ books for Catholic Charities' newcomer program. This book drive partnered with the San Antonio Fiesta Flambeau Parade mascot Torchy. Also, each book collected had a sticker stating it was a TALE donation.

Robin Johnson (2016-2017) Impactful Advocacy and Engagement

In the January of Robin Johnson's term, the International Reading Association had rebranded itself to be the International Literacy Association. This rebranding brought about some obstacles for TALE, but after much deliberation, TALE's Board of Directors (i.e., Mary LaFleur, L. Karen Estes-Sykes, Alida Hudson, Jacqueline Ingram, Kathy Stephens, and Sonja Gaddy) decided to remain fully affiliated with ILA. Under the leadership of Johnson and her executive board (i.e., President-Elect Laurie Sharp, Vice President Brad Womack, Secretary Micheal Kessner, and Treasurer Teddi Martin), TALE continued to engage with members during an annual conference and through the opportunities offered by TALE's many committees. In fact, this was the first year that all of TALE's committees were represented in the newsletters.

Leadership Contribution

Advocacy Development Committee. After receiving the ILA Advocacy Award in 2016, the committee members developed their own

Advocacy Award and recognized Judge Joe, Justice of the Peace, Precinct One in Nueces County with the honor. The award was given to Judge Joe because of his commitment to literacy among parents of school-age children who appeared in his courts. Instead of assessing high fines, Judge Joe required parents to read a book and create a book report with their children. Leadership for this committee shifted to Sonja Gaddy and Melinda Butler who continued sending advocacy alerts to members about H.B. 610 (ESSA), H.B. 21, S.B. 3, and from ILA concerning the LEARN Act. For the second year in a row, TALE was awarded the Advocacy Award from ILA.

Membership Committee. Led by Jacqueline Ingram, the Membership committee aimed to grow membership and balance the geographic representation of membership across the state. Through a new membership tracking software, demographic data could now be sorted to uncover the under-represented areas of Texas. With this information, action plans were created to encourage more membership in those locations and across the state.

Community Involvement Committee. The Community Involvement Committee, led by Mary LaFleur, spearheaded several efforts to advance literacy, including donating several boxes of books and establishing the organization's first Little Free Library. The library was in partnership with Catholic Charities and was located at the Auburn Creek Apartment Complex in San Antonio, which housed many refugee families, giving the children and young adults access to books. The ribbon cutting ceremony and blessing were held on June 20, 2016, for World Refugee Day. Additionally, the committee held a Parent's Night at the Magdalena House. The night was filled with ladybug themed literacy activities. In early 2017, the committee organized the second Little Free Library sponsored by TALE in Rockport with books specifically donated by TALE President Robin Johnson. New to this committee was organizing the first TALE Outstanding Literacy Program Award which would be awarded at the annual conference. Following this effort, Matt Panozzo stepped in to

be Director of the Community Involvement Committee while LaFleur continued to be a member of the committee.

Communications/Publications Committee.

Other big news for TALE's committees during Johnson's presidency included Alida Hudson assuming the role of Communications Director. Within this committee those responsible for the newsletter, journal, yearbook, Facebook, and Twitter would send updates to the director. In July of 2016, TJLE had a 17% acceptance rate and featured *What's Hot for Texas Literacy* by Jack Cassidy, Evan Ortlieb, and Stephanie Grote-Garcia (2016). The annual conference yearbook was led by Jodi Pilgrim and her editorial team of Laurie Sharp and Elaine Hendrix.

To engage more members with publication opportunities, the committee began an annual conference session on "How to Get Published with TALE." A new element added to the social media outlets as a way to link one form of TALE communication to another was to add the "Author/Article" spotlight. Three times a year one author/article from the journal, newsletter, or yearbook would be spotlighted, and readers would be directed to the website via a link to read more.

Educator Empowerment Committee. Led by Kathy Stephens, the committee began its first effort to bring services to literacy educators in Texas such as creating new educator packets and hosting book studies. Members of this committee included Patricia Durham, Michele Staples, Leslie Has, Victoria Vanzura, Stephanie Jenkins, and SuHua Huang.

Conference Alive and Well!

Like in previous years, TALE held a well-attended conference. The theme of the 2017 conference was *Literacy, Alive, and Well! Supporting Effective Literacy Instruction for All Learners*. The event was held in February at Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi (TAMUCC). Over 300 attendees were present, including 146 presenters, 102 undergraduate or graduate students, and 11 sponsors. The

TAMUCC Barrio Writers presented their work at the TALE social, while a book drive was held for the Women's Shelter of South Texas and the Bokenkamp Children's Shelter. The conference was filled with invited speakers such as Emily Smith-Buster, the 2015 awardee of the NCTE Donald H. Graves Award for Excellence in the Teaching of Writing. Texas authors were well represented at the conference, with the following authors being only a small portion of those who that presented: Melissa Leach, Karin Perry, Van G. Garrett, Diana López, and Jeff Anderson. Additionally, the 2017 *TALE Outstanding Literacy Program Award* went to Giesinger Elementary School in Conroe ISD.

Laurie Sharp (2017-2018) Empowerment through Community Adversity

In 2017, TALE's elected and appointed positions grew to include new leaders. At the same time, ILA was still completing their strategic plan for renaming and rebranding the organization from IRA to ILA. ILA's plan impacted chartered chapters operating at the state level that chose to maintain their affiliation. Following a number of meetings among the Board of Directors and consultation with TALE's membership, TALE had opted to remain fully affiliated with ILA as a state chapter and henceforth consented to the adoption of resolutions in February of 2018 that included amended Articles of Incorporation and Bylaws for consistent governance. The amended Articles and Bylaws reflected changed titles of Board Officer positions (e.g., title of President changed to Chair) to conform to best practices for non-profit organizations with volunteers, rather than paid employees. TALE's elected leadership for the Board of Directors for the 2017-2018 term are represented below, with changed titles from the amended Articles and Bylaws:

- Executive Committee: Laurie Sharp (Chair), Brad Womack (Chair-Elect), Robin Johnson (Past-Chair), Malene Golding (Vice Chair), Micheal Kessner (Secretary), and Codi Freeman (Treasurer)

- At-Large Directors: Alida Hudson, Kathy Stephens, Jacqueline Ingram, Sonja Gaddy, Kamshia Childs, and Julie Teel-Borders
- ILA State Coordinator: Jill Culmo

Additional leaders were assigned to lead TALE's committees as the Chair and included: Sonja Gaddy and Melinda Butler (Advocacy Development), Matt Panozzo (Community Involvement), Kathy Stephens and Stephanie Grote-Garcia (Educator Empowerment), Jacqueline Ingram (Membership Development), and Alida Hudson (Communication Committee).

TALE's annual conference in 2018 was held February 23-24 at West Texas A&M University in Canyon, Texas. During this event, 559 literacy educators, pre-service teachers, vendors, and distinguished guests from Texas and beyond traveled to attend the event. Keynote presenters at the conference included Gwynne Ash, Frank Serafini, Ruth Culham, and John Erikson. Rosalind Horowitz became the fourth recipient of TALE's *Jack Cassidy Distinguished Service Award*, which recognizes a TALE member who has made significant contributions to literacy education in the form of scholarship, teaching, and professional service within TALE and the education profession. Following the 2018 conference, TALE saw a 29% increase in membership.

During Laurie Sharp's term as Chair, TALE continued to promote literacy, enhance lives, and create moments of personal, social, and economic impact right from the beginning of her term. TALE's committees were actively engaged and achieved a number of significant accomplishments. Below are historical narratives that highlight a few of these accomplishments.

Leadership Contribution

Advocacy Development Committee. During the 2017-2018 term, Sonja Gaddy, Melinda Butler, and Amberly Walker served as Co-Chairs for TALE's Advocacy Development Committee and worked in collaboration with the following committee members: Sara Ranzau, Connie

Briggs, Ashley Thomas, Angela McNulty, and Amy Sharp. This committee worked to affect educational policy and legislation through effective advocacy at the local and state levels by focusing on two specific issues during this term: (a) address specific literacy needs of underserved student populations, and (b) increase awareness and inspire activism among TALE members. To address these issues, members of TALE's Advocacy Development Committee engaged in efforts throughout the year to educate TALE members about advocacy skills and specific legislative issues, create an organizational plan that promoted a commitment to building advocacy skills within TALE's membership, and activate TALE members to participate in activities related to educational legislation. These efforts were directly aligned with ILA's Advocacy Award program, and for the third year in a row, TALE earned recognition. Brad Womack accepted ILA's Advocacy Award on behalf of TALE at the reception held for ILA 2017 Literacy Leaders Awards during ILA's annual conference in 2018. (See <http://tale2019.weebly.com/> for documentation and supportive evidence of TALE's advocacy efforts during the 2017-2018 term.).

Three examples of advocacy efforts led by TALE's Advocacy Development Committee occurred during the 2018 TALE Conference held in Canyon. First, the Co-Chairs and committee members held a meeting that was open to all conference attendees that addressed advocacy etiquette and provided first-hand tips for communicating with local and state representatives effectively. Second, one of the Co-Chairs, Amberly Walker, was a co-presenter for a conference session that provided attendees with information on the newly adopted English Language Arts and Reading state standards. Third, two outstanding individuals, Letricia Niegos and Carol Wickstrom, were recognized as recipients for the Leadership in Literacy Award. This award was established by TALE's Advocacy Development Committee in 2016 to recognize the efforts of a leader in Texas who promotes literacy for all students.

Community Involvement Committee. During the 2017-2018 term, Matt Panozzo served as Chair for TALE's Community Involvement Committee and worked in collaboration with the following committee members: Stephanie Jenkins, Roberta Raymond, Meghan Sankowski, and Brittany Vaughn. In August of 2017, much of the Southeast Texas coast was affected by a Category 4 hurricane named Hurricane Harvey. As a result of catastrophic damage caused by the storm, thousands of students and hundreds of educators in more than 200 public school districts and charter schools in Texas were impacted economically, personally, and socially. Literacy needs during this time of adversity did not go unnoticed by members of TALE's Community Involvement Committee, who gathered input and referrals for school campuses that suffered extensive or major damage. On behalf of the Community Involvement Committee, Matt presented information to the Board of Directors and prioritized the following five school campuses that demonstrated the greatest losses: Hilliard Elementary School and Thompson Intermediate School located in Houston, Rockport-Fulton High School located in Rockport, Lemm Elementary School located in Klein, and Oak Forest Elementary School located in Vidor. For each of these school campuses, TALE issued a \$1,000 donation to support their post-Harvey recovery efforts for replacing literacy resources.

During the 2017-2018 term, TALE's Community Involvement Committee engaged in three additional activities that left literacy footprints across Texas. First, three Little Free Libraries were established in San Antonio, Corpus Christi, and Houston to promote lifelong reading among children and young adults. Second, the Chair and committee members facilitated the selection of outstanding reading and language arts programs at all grade levels in Texas for ILA's Exemplary Reading Program Award. Third, the Chair and committee members initiated the development of a web-based resource repository for literacy strategies and resources accessible from the Community Involvement webpage on TALE's website. (See

<http://www.texasreaders.org/community-involvement.html>.)

Educator Empowerment Committee. During the 2017-2018 term, Kathy Stephens served as Chair for TALE's Educator Empowerment Committee for the first six months. Stephanie Grote-Garcia assumed the role of Chair in January of 2018 and worked in collaboration with the following committee members: Lashera McElhany, Carolyn Davis, Stephanie Jenkins, Tommye Hutson, Suhua Huang, Laurie Sharp, and Malene Golding. This committee sought to empower TALE members in ways that develop voice, ownership, and leadership of their professional literacy landscape, with a particular focus on pre-service teachers, beginning teachers, experienced teachers, literacy leaders, and teacher educators. To achieve this goal, the Educator Empowerment Committee offered multiple professional development opportunities for TALE members throughout the year.

One example of professional development opportunities resulted from a partnership formed with the Center for the Collaborative Classroom, a non-profit organization dedicated to providing quality professional learning to teaching professionals. The Center for the Collaborative Classroom offered the following webinars at no cost to TALE members: (1) *Culturally Responsive Teaching in the Student-Centered Classroom*, which was held in October of 2017 and featured Dr. Sonia Nieto, a recognized expert with diversity, equity, and social justice in education; and (2) *Best Practices in Writing Instruction*, which was held in November of 2017 and featured Dr. Marisa Stuke, a Regional Director with the Center for the Collaborative Classroom. A second example of professional development opportunities implemented during the 2017-2018 term was a series of Twitter chat sessions. Each Twitter chat session was moderated by either the Chair or a committee member and offered an interactive platform for TALE members to build a professional community through literacy-focused conversation.

Membership Development Committee. During the 2017-2018 term, Jacqueline Ingram served

as Chair of TALE's Membership Development Committee and worked in collaboration with the following committee members: Kelly Johnson, Micheal Kessner, and Ann Marie Smith. In conjunction with ILA, the committee developed a plethora of recruitment and retention materials, such as brochures, letters, and social media content. The committee also engaged in a range of recruitment and retention activities for TALE members. One example of an activity that focused on recruitment involved a collaboration between the Chair and the ILA State Coordinator who worked together to identify ILA members in Texas who were not yet TALE members. The Chair performed outreach to these individuals via email and encouraged them to become TALE members. At the conclusion of the 2017-2018 term, TALE's membership had grown to 433 members, which was a significant increase from the previous term.

Communication Committee. During the 2017-2018 term, Alida Hudson served as Chair for TALE's Communication Committee. In her role, Alida had oversight of individuals who assumed leadership for specific communication and publication outlets. Below is a snapshot of each outlet, including respective accomplishments.

- Kamshia Childs, Coordinator of TALE's social media accounts on Facebook and Twitter – Following the 2018 TALE Conference, both the Facebook and Twitter accounts had nearly 1,000 followers.
- Sara Ranzau, Editor of TALE's newsletter – Three newsletters were released during the 2017-2018 term that included organization and committee updates, spotlights of TALE members, original authored works, and book reviews.
- Chase Young, Editor of *Texas Journal of Literacy Education* – TALE's peer-reviewed journal continued its publication dissemination of original research and practical articles that relate to literacy education. The final issue

released during the 2017-2018 term (i.e., Summer 2018 issue) had resulted in a 26% acceptance rate.

- Laurie Sharp, Elaine Hendrix, and Lucinda Juarez, editorial leadership team of TALE's Yearbook – TALE's Yearbook continued to serve as the annual peer-reviewed publication of conference proceedings. The editorial leadership team engaged 26 reviewers who reviewed 23 submissions, of which 16 submissions were included in the final publication.

Brad Womack and Laurie Sharp (2018-2019) Leveraging the Power of Social Media

During the 2018-2019 term, TALE's elected leadership for the Board of Directors were the following individuals:

- Executive Committee: Brad Womack (Chair), Malene Golding (Chair-Elect), Laurie Sharp (Past-Chair), Alida Hudson (Vice Chair), Rebekah Piper (Secretary), and Codi Freeman (Treasurer)
- At-Large Directors: Kelli Bippert, Kamshia Childs, Jacqueline Ingram, Sonja Gaddy, Matt Panozzo, and Tara Wilson
- ILA State Coordinator: Jill Culmo

Leaders who were assigned to lead TALE's committees as a Chair included: Melinda Butler and Amberly Walker (Advocacy Development), Matt Panozzo (Community Involvement), Stephanie Grote-Garcia (Educator Empowerment), Jacqueline Ingram (Membership Development), and Alida Hudson (Communication Committee). In October 2018, Brad had to step away from the role of Chair due to unforeseen circumstances. As Past-Chair, Laurie Sharp stepped into the role of Chair to maintain continuity for TALE.

TALE's annual conference in 2019 was held February 28 through March 2 at the Waco Convention Center in partnership with the

School of Education at Baylor University. Featured speakers at the event included Stephanie Harvey, Richard Gentry, Jan Burkins, Kim Yaris, Janet Wong, Sylvia Vardell, Kylene Beers, Bob Probst, and Debbie Diller. New ideas and approaches contributed to the continued growth in participation at TALE's annual conferences, and the 2019 conference employed use of a mobile app and surprised attendees who were beginning teachers with welcome packets filled with teaching supplies. Laurie Sharp became the fifth recipient of TALE's *Jack Cassidy Distinguished Service Award* for her advocacy work with TALE and leading the organization with a strong service-focused mindset.

Leadership Contribution

Becoming a Larger Literacy Community.

Throughout TALE's early history, the organization collaborated regularly with other literacy organizations. This continued to be the case during the 2017-2018 and 2018-2019 terms. In 2017, Laurie Sharp engaged in initial conversations with the Texas Association for the Improvement of Reading (TAIR) about facilitating a merger with TALE. TAIR, the first membership organization for literacy in Texas, was founded in 1947 by 100 people who were identified as reading leaders by superintendents of every school system in the state with 500 or more students. TAIR has an extremely rich history of supporting the professional growth of literacy teachers, which directly aligns with TALE's mission. After much discussion and strategic planning with Board members, TAIR found a new virtual home with TALE in 2019 to promote literacy leadership through grants and awards (Texas Association for Literacy Education, 2022a).

Advocacy Development Committee. During the 2018-2019 term, Melinda Butler and Amberly Walker served as Co-Chairs for TALE's Advocacy Development Committee and worked in collaboration with the following committee members: Connie Briggs, Melinda Miller, Sonja Gaddy, and Angela McNulty. As mentioned previously, the Texas Education Agency (TEA) launched a review and revision

process for the English Language Arts and Reading Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (ELAR TEKS) in 2015. During this multi-year process, TALE leadership (i.e., Patricia Durham, Roberta Raymond, Robin Johnson, Laurie Sharp) were actively involved in a collaboration among state-level literacy organizations to provide input and feedback on the work group recommendations, as well as keeping organizational members informed of possible changes. The TEA finalized the revised ELAR TEKS during the 2018-2019 term for school districts to implement in the subsequent school year. As such, TALE's Advocacy Development Committee shifted its focus to develop informational resources to acquaint literacy professionals with changes to the ELAR TEKS and instructional resources to support their effective implementation. For example, Melinda and Amberly mobilized teams of TALE members to create informational resources for families that increased their knowledge of the revised ELAR TEKS, as well as ways to support their student's learning at home. In addition, Melinda Butler and Amberly Walker facilitated monthly discussions focused on distinct strands of the revised ELAR TEKS on Twitter using #TALEtalks.

Beyond advocacy for the revised ELAR TEKS, members of the Advocacy Development Committee participated in a tabling event at the 2019 TALE Conference. At their table, committee members invited attendees to compose a postcard to their state representatives concerning literacy matters. Lastly, Melinda and Amberly collaborated with Kamshia Childs to blast out frequent Advocacy Alerts on TALE's social media channels. Many Advocacy Alerts were shared and liked by followers, thereby demonstrating prominent levels of engagement. It is no surprise that the work of the Advocacy Development Committee during the 2018-2019 term earned TALE's recognition as an ILA Advocacy Award recipient for the fourth year in row at ILA's annual conference.

Community Involvement Committee. During the 2018-2019 term, Matt Panozzo served as Chair for TALE's Community Involvement Committee and worked in collaboration with the

following committee members: Roberta Raymond, Stephanie Jenkins, Emma Sobey, Tara Wilson, Brandy Sue Alexander, and Andrea Elizondo. Together, members of the Community Involvement Committee launched multiple initiatives focused on increasing book access within targeted areas in Texas. First, committee members secured bundles of books and donated them to volunteer stewards for two Free Little Libraries previously established by TALE. Those libraries were located in San Antonio (volunteer steward, Mary LaFleur) and in Rockport (volunteer steward, Robin Johnson). Matt also engaged in planning discussions with Tara Wilson to establish a new Little Free Library in Midland under Tara's stewardship.

Another way in which the Community Involvement Committee increased book access during the 2018-2019 term involved their book donation to Windham School District's Youthful Offender Program. Committee members secured forty different young adult books to support reading for pleasure among youth offenders. Lastly, members of the Community Involvement Committee organized TALE's annual service project that takes place in conjunction with the conference. During the 2019 TALE Conference, committee members received book and monetary donations that were to the Baylor Center for Developmental Disabilities.

Educator Empowerment Committee. During the 2018-2019 term, Stephanie Grote-Garcia served as Chair for TALE's Educator Empowerment Committee and worked in collaboration with the following committee members: Stephanie Jenkins, Lashera McElhany, Carolyn Davis, Laurie Sharp, Ramona Pittman, Tommye Hutson, Suhua Huang, Malene Golding, Pearl Garden, Kristi Morale, Silvina Salazar, Elaine Hendrix, Tasha Vice, Amy Sharp, and Tara Wilson. Stephanie worked in collaboration with committee members, Kamshia Childs, and Matt Panozzo to plan and implement a book club for literacy professionals using TALE's Facebook account and Padlet. Virtual Book club discussions used the hashtag #TALEBookClub and focused on empowerment topics for literacy educators, such as fostering a love of reading in the classroom.

The first book under discussion was *From Striving to Thriving: How to Grow Confident, Capable Readers* by Stephanie Harvey and Annie Ward. Committee member Amy Sharp hosted the discussion, which engaged 119 TALE members. As a result of the success with the first book club discussion, the Educator Empowerment Committee planned and implemented a second book club discussion. The second book under discussion was *Being the Change: Lessons and Strategies to Teach Social Comprehension* by Sara Ahmed. TALE members Sarah Aguirre and Damaris Gutierrez hosted the discussion.

ILA held their annual conference in 2018 at the Austin Convention Center. The Educator Empowerment Committee planned for an extremely generous donation from conference vendors. This donation consisted of several pallets of books. To distribute book donations effectively, Stephanie Grote-Garcia used her professional connections in the San Antonio area to donate literacy resources to teachers and children's and young adult books to the San Antonio Salvation Army. Grote-Garcia also collaborated with the Community Involvement Committee to donate book starter packs for their Free Little Libraries.

Lastly, Stephanie Grote-Garcia and Rebekah Piper hosted an exhibitor table at TEKS CON 2018 that was held August 1st in San Antonio. At their exhibitor table, Stephanie and Rebekah gave away 20 picture books as door prizes. Stephanie and Rebekah also held brief conversations during the event with about 50 teachers from different grade levels concerning the newly revised ELAR TEKS. At the end of the 2018-2019 term, Kristi Morale assumed the role and responsibilities of Chair for the Educator Empowerment Committee. At the time, Kristi was an elementary literacy educator in Fort Bend ISD, a doctoral student at Texas Southern University, and founder of The Innocent Brown Girl Project (see <https://www.theinnocentbrownproject.com/>).

Communication Committee. During the 2018-2019 term, Alida Hudson served as Chair for TALE's Communication Committee and had

oversight of individuals who assumed leadership for specific communication and publication outlets. Below is a snapshot of each outlet, including respective accomplishments.

- Kamshia Childs, Coordinator of TALE's social media accounts on Facebook and Twitter – TALE's social media accounts reached the following number of followers: Twitter - 1,178 followers, and Facebook - 1,057 followers. Kamshia created a new Instagram account for TALE and secured 44 followers after only two months. TALE's activity on Twitter was growing, so Kamshia secured a Wakelet account with which to archive hashtags and compile online resources into groups organized by topic. TALE's Twitter account also hosted #TALEtalks, which were informal chats moderated by a TALE member about a variety of literacy related topics.
- Melissa Walker, Editor of TALE's newsletter – TALE's newsletter continued to feature book reviews and a wide variety of advocacy news.
- Amy Burke, Editor of *Texas Journal of Literacy Education* – TALE's peer-reviewed journal welcomed a new editorial team led by Amy and included the following Co-Editors: Connie Briggs, Betsy Kaye, and Mandy Stewart. The journal received increasing attention with approximately 3,000 hits per month and 30 reviewers from around the United States who served on the Editorial Review Board. The journal changed its physical appearance and moved to a new web domain accessible from TALE's website (see www.talejournal.com).
- Elaine Hendrix and Heather Pule, editorial leadership team of TALE's Yearbook – TALE's Yearbook continued to serve as the annual peer-reviewed publication of conference proceedings.

At the end of Sharp's presidency, she was elected to the ILA Board of Directors. Also, during her term Sharp helped coordinate TALE's merger with TAIR, which included establishing the TAIR committee.

Malene Golding (2019-2020) Leading Outside the Box

As the ninth leader of TALE, Malene Golding would leap into a normal year of literacy leadership but end her tenure like no other had before. TALE's leadership included the following individuals:

- Executive Committee: Alida Hudson (Chair Elect), Jacqueline Ingram (Vice Chair), Shelly Landreth (Treasurer), and Rebekah Piper (Secretary)
- At-Large Directors: Kelli Bippert, Kamshia Child, Codi Freeman, Pearl Garden, Matt Panozzo, and Tara Wilson
- ILA State Coordinator: Liza LaRue
- Committee Chairs: Jacqueline Ingram (Membership Development), Brandy Alexander (Community Involvement Director), Kristi Morale (Educator Empowerment Director), and Sara Ranzau (Advocacy Development Director).

TALE's 2020 conference was hosted by the University of Texas Permian Basin, and the Chairs of the event were Shelly Landreth and Tara Wilson. The event was held on February 28 and 29 at the Odessa Marriott Hotel and Conference Center and carried the theme of *Leap into Literacy*. Participants enjoyed local culture with a performance by the UTPB's Ballet Folklórico. Saturday of the conference was TALE t-shirt day as members were encouraged to show community by wearing the first official t-shirt for the organization. Additionally, the conference partnered with the local Ector County ISD to financially support one of the literacy leader speakers for the event. Such keynote speakers included Laurie Sharp, Donalyn Miller, Kylene Beers, and Bob Probst. A variety of authors were also present including

Chris Barton, René Saldaña, Jr., A. G. Howard, and local award-winning poet Loretta Diane Walker. As the sixth recipient, Patricia Durham was awarded the 2019-2020 *Jack Cassidy Distinguished Service Award* for her work as a founding member and past president, as well as the organizational voice at several TEA Board Meetings regarding the revisions to the ELAR TEKS.

Local Councils and Special Interest Committees: GHALE and R.E.A.D.@TALE

During this year, the first local council following the new ILA guidelines was created in Houston, led by Malene Golding, and called GHALE (Galveston-Houston Associate for Literacy Education). Additionally, TALE expanded in offering the Special Interest Committee (SIC) called R.E.A.D. @ TALE, which stands for Really Engage and Accept Diversity. This SIC provided a platform and shared resources to support the needs of all students and teachers in Texas no matter their background. Nine collaborators from the following areas were involved: Houston, Dallas, San Marcos, San Antonio, the Panhandle, and the Rio Grande Valley.

For many TALE members, this would be the last time to engage with society in person for more than a year as within weeks the state, country, and world would quarantine due to the global COVID-19 pandemic. At no other time in the history of TALE has the organization needed to rise to such a level of service than in the Spring of 2020 to meet its mission to "promote literacy that will enhance the lives of all Texas citizens personally, socially and economically" (TALE, n.d., para. 2). Nearly all schools in the state of Texas and in our nation closed face-to-face learning and immediately moved online. During Golding's tenure, TALE would become a source of guidance on navigating an unforeseen shift to virtual/online literacy learning that would stay the course over the two-year battle to return to safe, traditional classroom learning.

Leadership Contribution

Advocacy Development Committee. Sara Ranzau and the Advocacy Development Committee began this year targeting how to help educators advocate for themselves legally and confidently as well as working to expand what it means to advocate for literacy. Topics of interest were the reliability of STAAR and the upcoming Reading Academies. The need shifted during the middle of the year to sending TALE Advocacy Alerts of reposts from TEA about pandemic updates. During this time, the committee created a Podcast found on the organization's website (Texas Association for Literacy Education, 2022b) which informed members about "Book Challenges." In August of 2020, members were welcomed back to a new school year and encouraged to reflect upon their classroom library to ensure that it featured diverse children's literature. Members were also provided related resources found on the TALE Advocacy tab of the website. Continuing with their mission, the committee was awarded the 2020 *ILA Advocacy Award* for the fifth year.

Community Involvement Committee. Brandy Alexander led the Community Involvement Committee in efforts to provide more resources on the Community Involvement tab for educators. Such resources included parent resources for a variety of topics such as primary and secondary literacy, writing, and understanding the ELAR standards. There were updates to the website related to diversity and inclusiveness for representation of authors of multiple backgrounds, and ethnicities. Additionally, the Community Involvement Committee partnered with Harris County Department of Education and received three free conference registrations to the Garcia Early Education Winter Conference happening Saturday, January 30.

Communication/Publications Committee. The committee, led by Alida Hudson, continued to involve members using social media with the #TALEtalks Twitter chats. Malene Golding hosted a chat session on Sustained Silent Reading as well as talks hosted by Alida Hudson. However, as the year progressed, chats were postponed so that Twitter could be used as a space for conversations among teachers

relating to navigating teaching in the online space. A new hashtag was created #TALEOutsideTheBox in order for teachers to share online resources and creative ways that they were using to teach online.

The 2020 conference yearbook was themed *Leap into Literacy*. The editorial team included Associate Editor Katina Thomas as well as the two Co-Managing Editors Elaine Hendrix and Heather Pule. Like previous yearbooks, the 2020 conference yearbook is available on TALE's website. Melissa Walker continued as the newsletter editor.

Educator Empowerment Committee. The Educator Empowerment Committee, led by Kristi Morale, continued to offer virtual book studies during Golding's term. Matt Panozzo and Chanelle Maynard offered a book study for Ernest Morrell's and Pam Allyn's (2015) *Every Child a Super Reader: 7 Strengths to Open a World of Possible*. Roberta Raymond, Jacqueline Ingram, and Gayle Butaud hosted a book study for *This is Balanced Literacy, Grades K-6* (Fisher et al., 2019) which had 110 participants. These participants were split into three Padlet groups for collaboration each week. Participation in the book studies earned continuing education credits for those participants who were certified Texas teachers.

Alida Hudson (2020-2021) Building Virtual Community in Uncharted Territory

During Hudson's term, she steered the organization and its 600+ members through the uncharted territory of the COVID-19 pandemic. With the 2021 TALE conference being canceled, Hudson shifted TALE from a face-to-face conference to a series of virtual professional development events. These virtual events occurred about once a month from June of 2020 to May of 2021. Included in the series were the following presenters and presentations: Kay Wijekumar of Texas A&M University presenting on reading comprehension using text structure, Benita Brooks of Sam Houston State University presenting about equity in literacy, Elsa Cardenas-Hagan presenting on literacy for English language learners, Chase Young of Sam

Houston State University presenting on fluency, Bethanie Pletcher of Texas A&M Corpus Christi presenting on virtual literacy coaching, Karen Harris and Steve Graham of Arizona State University presenting on writing, and Emily Dean of Hardin-Simmons University presenting on dyslexia. Though there was not a conference, the 2021 *Jack Cassidy Distinguished Service Award* was awarded to Bethanie Pletcher.

TALE's 2020-2021 leadership team included the following individuals:

- Executive Committee: Kamshia Childs (Chair Elect), Jacqueline Ingram (Vice Chair), Shelly Landreth (Treasurer), Rebekah Piper (Secretary)
- At-Large Directors: Amy Barrios, Charity Embley, Fernando Hernandez, Codi Fowler-Freeman, Pearl Garden, and Tara Wilson.
- Committee Directors: Jacqueline Ingram (Membership Development Director), Brandy Alexander (Community Involvement Director), Kristi Morale (Educator Empowerment Director), and Sara Ranzau (Advocacy Development Director).
- ILA State Coordinator: Liza LaRue

Leadership Contribution

Advocacy Development Committee. The Advocacy Development Committee, led by Sara Ranzau, offered members insight into the tensions the country was feeling regarding the pandemic. The committee also provided additional guidance on how to navigate those rough times. During that time, the committee added podcasts to the committee's page of the website (see Texas Association for Literacy Education, 2022b). The podcasts featured Kaylan Dixon-Smith (Regional Director of Raise Your Hand Texas), who shared details regarding policies being supported during the 2020 legislative session and education during the pandemic. Though it was a tough year for education, the importance for advocacy was never greater. Along with all the committee's

efforts, the 2021 *ILA Advocacy Award* was once again awarded to TALE.

Community Involvement Committee and Educator Empowerment Committee. This was a year of re-inventing what community meant since the pandemic required society to implement social distancing. As such, the Community Involvement and Educator Empowerment committees joined forces to support Texas teachers navigating the digital classroom. Together the two committees organized the member-led TALE's Educator Empowerment Virtual Book Study Series. Various texts on digital learning in the classroom were offered as choices, and members selected the virtual groups in which they wanted to participate. Additionally, a summer virtual book study was hosted by Amy Sharp on the book *Read the World: Rethinking Literacy for Empathy and Action in a Digital Age* (Ziemke & Muhtar, 2019).

Communications/Publications Committee. Charity Embley became the new director of the Communications/Publications Committee, and in that position she performed as the liaison between the Board of Directors and those working with TALE's publications and social media platforms. Newsletters edited by Melissa Walker included sections from members in the classroom spotlighting digital teaching strategies.

The 2021 yearbook was reflective of the vast and urgent need of online learning. The theme of the publication was *Views from the Virtual Classroom*, and it was edited by Heather Pule, Katina Thomas, Shelly Landreth, and Amy Cummins. Submissions for that issue included digital/virtual literacy instruction that has been successful (K-12 and higher education), reflections on the facilitation of literacy webinars and online professional development, virtual literacy accommodations and modifications for diverse learners, and other literacy ideas/methods that emerged due to teaching and learning during the pandemic.

Articles from *TJLE* were still being selected for deeper discussions through social media

platforms, and that year's selected article was "I Can't Find No Black Books: Helping African American Males Find Books They Want to Read," written by University of West Georgia Professor Bethany Scullin (2020). In the article, Scullin explored the many factors contributing to the historical lack of reading gains of Black male students due to the absence of texts accurately representing African American characters in today's schools. Members engaged with this article through the #TALEAuthorChat on Twitter.

The Social Media Subcommittee collaborated with the Virtual PD series to organize #TALETalks prior to and after each PD session. One of the #TALETalks was "Enhancing your Digital Toolkit." Additional resources were produced by TALE with the goal of assisting families and students with literacy learning during the pandemic. One such resource was a handout created by Alida Hudson. The handout aimed to help parents maintain literacy development with their children at home.

TAIR Committee. After merging with TALE in 2019, TAIR is now represented as a committee within the organization led by Carol Revelle, Kamshia Childs, and Malene Golding. As a result of the merger, in 2021 the *TAIR Emergent Literacy Leaders Grant* was created:

to develop leaders in the field of literacy by offering a grant to two potential emerging literacy leaders. The funds from the grant will pay \$500 for each of the two potential literacy leaders to attend the annual TALE conference and work with an assigned mentor with the hope that they will emerge from the experience as a future literacy leader in the State of Texas. (Texas Association for Literacy Education, 2022a)

Local Councils and Special Interest Committees: HoustonTALE and R.E.A.D.@TALE

The local council in Houston and R.E.A.D.@TALE were both very active during Hudson's presidency. Houston's local council

supported virtual classrooms and teachers with a virtual read aloud during May in partnership with *Every Child a Reader*. Additionally, the R.E.A.D.@TALE special interest committee held a virtual social in April for informal engagement during a stressful time.

In Honor of Literacy Legacy and Future Literacy Leaders

In May of 2021, TALE membership was notified of the passing of Dr. Jack Cassidy. Soon after, the Cassidy family established the *Jack Cassidy Memorial Scholarship*, to acknowledge the life work of Cassidy. The scholarship will continue to award two \$500 scholarships each year—one to a doctoral student, the other to a master-level student. Both awardees need to be enrolled in a graduate program in literacy or a related field. The scholarship assists with tuition, textbooks, or costs associated with completing a thesis or dissertation. As stated on the TALE website,

Dr. Cassidy's fingerprint can be found everywhere in the literacy field. He was a Professor Emeritus at Millersville University in Pennsylvania and Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi. He was known for his annual publication, "What's Hot, What's Not in Literacy," which he oversaw for 25 years. He was also a former President of the International Reading Association and the College Reading Association, as well as a member of the Reading Hall of Fame. In 2013, TALE established an award in his honor, the *Jack Cassidy Distinguished Service Award*, which recognizes educators, like him, who demonstrate exemplary service in the field of literacy. (Texas Association for Literacy Education, 2022c)

There is no doubt that Jack Cassidy shaped TALE's history, and with the addition of the *Jack Cassidy Memorial Scholarship*, his legacy will continue to promote literacy well into the future.

Kamshia Childs (2021-2022) *Onward Momentum*

Despite hard times and under the leadership of Kamshia Childs, TALE continued to see growth in membership and continued to strengthen the reach of the organization. Onward momentum to recapture lost learning during the pandemic as well as continuing the new digital learning and teaching opportunities that grew from the experience was needed across the state. Providing support to Texans and literacy educators for this onward momentum would be the focus of Childs' leadership. Supporting the mission was TALE's leadership team, which included the following individuals:

- Executive Committee: Pearl Garden (Chair Elect), Jacqueline Ingram (Vice Chair), Amy Burke (Treasurer), Rebekah Piper (Secretary)
- At-Large Directors: Amy Barrios, Charity Embley, Fernando Hernandez, Christina Hammon, Susan Ranzau, and Roberta Raymond who filled an empty position until elections could be held
- ILA State Coordinator: Liza LaRue
- Committee Chairs: Charity Embley (Communications/Publications director), Jacqueline Ingram (Membership Development director), and Sara Ranzau (Advocacy Development director).

With the return to a face-to-face conference meeting, the 2022 TALE conference was a celebration of TALE's first 10 years. The conference theme was *TALE Turns Ten: A Decade of Literacy, Service, and Advocacy*. The event was organized by Liza LaRue, Elizabeth Kaye, and TALE President Kamshia Childs. The event took place in Plano, Texas on March 4 and 5. Highlights of the conference were tagged using #TALE2022. Stephanie Grote-Garcia kicked off the conference with a welcoming and brief overview of TALE's startup. Additionally, the first recipients of the *Jack Cassidy Memorial Scholarship* were announced. These recipients included Sara Villanueva, doctoral student at Texas Tech University, and Heather Libick,

Masters of Education student at Sul Ross State University. Jack Cassidy's contributions to TALE and his legacy in the field of reading were celebrated with a tribute video. In the video, Evan Ortlieb, Tim Rasinski, Vicki Risko, Rona Flippo, Stephanie Grote-Garcia, and Tim Shanahan remembered their friend. Cassidy's legacy will be celebrated each year through the awarding of the *Jack Cassidy Memorial Scholarship* and the *Jack Cassidy Distinguished Service Award*. Additionally, the first *TAIR Emerging Leaders Grant* was awarded to Shannon Treadville and Leslie Hancock.

During the first half of Child's term, committees worked together to move forward TALE's mission of enhancing the lives of all Texas citizens personally, socially and economically, leading TALE to be honored with the ILA Advocacy Award for the seventh year in a row. Though conditions of the pandemic were improving, society and schools were still affected by the pandemic, and the need for professional support was still vital. The Advocacy Committee posted a podcast about HB 4545 which required supplemental accelerated instruction for students who reached the level of "Approaching" on the state assessments the previous year. Additional virtual professional development opportunities offered by the Educator Empowerment Committee included the following: (a) *Creating a Swirling Classroom*, presented by Past President Malene Golding, (b) *Holding Up a Mirror to the ELA Comprehension TEKS: P. David Pearson's Effective Practices for Developing Reading Comprehension*, presented by Carol Revelle, and (c) *Write Now and Write On*, presented by Rebecca Harper.

Themes, Trends/Takeaways, and Onward Momentum

When educational organizations look within their history, those connected to the present and future gain an understanding of the dynamics that have influenced change. Historical research of educational organizations brings forth the evolution of values, motives, and trends that have shifted over time (Albulescu, 2018; Henry, 2006; Rury, 2006; Schrag, 2021). This historical

inquiry focused on uncovering the narrative of TALE through the following guiding questions: (a) between the years 2011 and 2021, what contributions gave value to the mission of *promoting* literacy and *enhancing* the lives of all Texas citizens *personally, socially and economically?*, and (b) who have been the characters of this narrative, who specifically has been influenced, and where have these contributions been made?

From this historical narrative, we were introduced to eleven leading characters and their leadership teams who helped to evolve the mission of TALE. While the narrative presented in this analysis highlights answers to the guiding research questions of *who* and *what* contributions gave value to the mission of promoting literacy and enhancing lives, the emerging themes below help to answer *how* those efforts were made over the past decade. Leadership contribution themes include the following:

- *Building Legacy by Building Community*
- *Forming Procedures and Partnerships*
- *Building Momentum and Voice*
- *Strategically Designing Infrastructure*
- *Building Capacity for Strategic Growth*
- *Impactful Advocacy and Engagement*
- *Empowerment through Community Adversity*
- *Leveraging the Power of Social Media*
- *Leading Outside the Box*
- *Building Virtual Community in Uncharted Territory*

A final part of the guiding research questions was *where* these contributions have been made. Overwhelmingly, TALE has found ways to impact the lives of Texans in a virtual space. From the start of the organization, virtual space was critical. Meeting the literacy needs of *all* Texans required innovation in ways to meet that

goal. Within the virtual space, TALE utilized this platform, essentially erasing the hindrance of travel, to form community as well as to be a support for this community during times of societal need. While there are many virtual TALE literacy footprints left over the last decade, there are also physical ones too. Through the annual conferences, TALE has personally, socially, and economically impacted lives in all regions of Texas which included San Antonio, Round Rock, The Woodlands/Huntsville, Corpus Christi, Canyon, Waco, Odessa/Midland, and Plano. With the creation of the special interest communities, TALE can be found in the areas of Houston, Dallas, San Marcos, San Antonio, the Panhandle, and the Rio Grande Valley. Finally, TALE footprints can be found spread out over the state in the many books that have been collected and distributed to families, refugee centers, outreach programs, and classrooms.

In the early years of TALE, “building momentum” was a common theme. That momentum led to many opportunities to enhance the lives of Texas citizens—a handful being providing funding to rebuild literacy resources after Hurricane Harvey, producing parent resources during the pandemic, and maintaining Free Little Libraries across the State of Texas. Also included are the many publications that TALE produced; the scholarships, grants, and awards given; and the professional development opportunities offered (e.g., virtual sessions, annual conference).

Finally, viewing this story of TALE as a whole, several trends and takeaways can be stated. TALE was created while partnering with SLP and UIW for the first conference. Throughout TALE's history the organization has continued to partner with other organizations and even merged with TAIR. Perhaps this has influenced TALE's success. Another possible influencer of TALE's success is the strategic planning that has taken place throughout the organization's history. Starting with no budget, Cassidy initiated TALE by strategically planning opportunities to gain start-up funds. Later, Durham would use strategic planning to restructure TALE to include the multiple

committees that are presently thriving as the organization celebrates its 10-year anniversary. A third takeaway is that TALE is mission driven—as evidenced in the organization’s narrative which placed in the forefront the promotion of literacy to enhance the lives of Texans personally, socially, and economically.

mission statement and building a sustainable infrastructure—both of which guided the organization in spreading its roots across the Lone Star state for years to come. Now in 2022, the theme could be read as “onward momentum” as we wait to see how the next decade of literacy leadership will shape the narrative of TALE.

Throughout the years, TALE has promoted literacy to enhance the lives of all Texas citizens personally, socially and economically—just as Dr. Cassidy had planned when he invited that small group of educators to his San Antonio home on August 27, 2011. The first 10 years established TALE’s roots by developing a

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Honoring Multiple Identities Using Multicultural Literature

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Abstract

Multicultural texts are essential classroom tools because they create opportunities for all students to feel visible, included, and valued. In this summary paper, the authors begin with an overview of why multicultural literature and multiple identities have a place inside elementary and secondary classrooms. The authors then describe three literacy practices embedded with hands-on teaching activities to support the use of multicultural literature in the classroom. The authors argue that given the current sociopolitical realities of injustice, discrimination, and violence, multicultural literature is an essential classroom tool to honor children and youth's humanity and safeguard their well-being.

Keywords: *multicultural text, multicultural literature, diverse learners, culturally diverse teaching, literacy*

Rudine Sims Bishop (1990) argued that multicultural books are beneficial to all students because they have the capacity to serve as mirrors, windows, and sliding glass doors. Books can be mirrors when they reflect readers' own identities and illuminate narratives with familiar faces, friends, and families. They can also be windows when providing glimpses into relationships, cultures, and communities that are unlike our own. Texts can also serve as sliding glass doors, inviting students to interact, exchange, and establish personal connections to new and unfamiliar experiences.

Multicultural texts create opportunities for students to feel visible, included, and valued, yet literacy educators are often challenged with using these texts in ways that honor students multiple identities and address the intersections of identity and (in)justice (Crenshaw, 1990; McNair, 2016; Muhammad, 2020). Literacy teachers in states like Texas face additional challenges of deciding how to use multicultural literature while simultaneously navigating a political climate that has become increasingly hostile to reading and discussing books about diversity and race (Zou & Kao, 2021).

In this summary paper, we describe how literacy educators can use multicultural literature to create learning environments that honor the multiple identities students bring to the classroom. We begin with an overview of why multicultural literature and multiple identities have a place inside our elementary and secondary classrooms.

Why Multicultural Literature in the Classroom?

Multicultural literature has the capacity to foreground stories and experiences of individuals and communities who have been silenced and have experienced injustice. Voices captured in stories, tales, and poetry can validate and empower students of color, multilingual students, and other students whose identities and experiences are marginalized by the dominant culture (Thomas, 2016). Multicultural literature can also teach children and youth who have privilege to recognize ways they benefit from their race, class, and gender identities and use their power to end discrimination and oppression (Rogers & Mosley, 2006).

Research has found that elementary and secondary educators who seek to empower students as change makers and critical, compassionate community members through their literacy instruction can do so through the shared pages of a story or information text (i.e., Vlach, 2022). Multicultural literature is often most impactful to students' learning when teachers use texts as a tool to facilitate conversations about identity, power, and equity.

What are Multiple Identities?

Every person develops a sense of who they are through the relationships they hold with family, friends, and society. Muhammad (2020) defines identity as “composed of notions of who we are, who others say we are (in both positive and negative ways), and whom we desire to be” (p. 67). Identity markers include categories such as race, gender, class, religion, language practices, sexual orientation, physical abilities, and citizenship.

Multiple identities are normal and make each of us unique. Yet across U.S. society, ideologies such as white supremacy and patriarchy position some identities (white, male, heterosexual, Christian, able-bodied) as the norm, creating a dangerous pretext for dehumanizing and excluding people of color, women, members of the LGBTQ+ community, differently-abled persons, and other marginalized identities (Souto-Manning & Martell, 2016). Multicultural literature that humanizes people who hold multiple identities is a tool literacy educators can use to interrogate harmful ideologies and equip children and youth with knowledge and skills to make society more inclusive.

Using Multicultural Literacy in the Classroom

Schools are a microcosm of society (Hollins-Alexander & Law, 2022), and research shows that when we begin to truly value and understand the students in our classrooms, we can begin to engage with them academically (Ahiyya, 2022). In this section, we offer three literacy practices embedded with hands-on teaching activities to support the use of multicultural literature in the classroom.

Practice #1: Normalize Discussions about Multiple Identities in your Classroom

In order for students to be fully seen and heard at school, their multiple identities must be recognized and honored (Muhammad, 2018). Normalizing discussion about identity is one way to help students learn about who they are and how identities and experiences differ.

Individual Identity Webs. One way to begin discussions about identity is to use books to introduce new identity-based vocabulary to students. Invite students to notice and name how characters define themselves or are defined by others. Generate a list of identity markers (race, gender, language practices), and discuss if these descriptions are claimed or ascribed to the character. Invite students to use this list to name their identities. Ahmed (2018) suggests creating a social identity web with a student's name in

the center and branches of identity markers extending from their name (see also Kleinrock, 2021). Teachers and students can add, change, and revisit their identity web throughout the year.

For young students, teachers can support emergent literacy practices by creating a whole-class web. Engage students in collaborative discussions while reading multicultural literature and scribe students' observations of identity into a shared, written text, such as an anchor chart. See Figure 1 for an example of a whole-class identity web from a pre-kindergarten classroom created after the teacher and students read and discussed *The Colors of Us* (Katz, 1999), *Brown: The Many Shades of Love* (James, 2020), and *Our Skin: A First Conversation about Race* (Madison & Ralli, 2021).

Practice #2: Sustain Students' Access to Multicultural Literature

Teachers should ensure students have access to various types of multicultural literature throughout the classroom at multiple points of the school day. This can include having access to books in print and on multiple digital platforms (including e-readers, cellphones, and iPads) during independent and guided reading. A place to anchor acceptance and a commitment to all members of our nested, local, and global community is the classroom library. Housed on the shelves of classroom libraries should be stories, songs, struggles, and symphonies of the hardened journey and the harnessed joy found within humanity. Books, texts, narrations, diaries, autobiographies, and detailed renderings of maps and drawings should serve as a catalyst to propel our students to explore, engage, and participate in transformative conversations.

Read Alouds and Class Discussion. Ongoing access to multicultural literature requires that teachers make time to read and discuss these texts in their curriculum (Ahiyya, 2022). During instructional time, make sure to model listening and as the instructor to share the microphone to make room for student voice. Encourage

shoulder partner dialogue (e.g., turn and talks) so students can develop independence and a deeper understanding and connection with the text.

We also suggest using a common set of questions during read aloud discussions that focus students' attention on mirrors, windows, and/or sliding glass doors (Bishop, 1990). By returning to the same question set across multiple read alouds, students can begin to develop language and literacy practices for analyzing and discussing identity as well as complex social and political topics (see Table 1).

Practice #3: Integrate Effective Instruction with Inclusive Teaching

Too often, multicultural literature and discussions about identity are viewed as deviations from the official, academic curriculum (Dyson, 2013). Yet research shows that teachers align their use of multicultural literature with state standards to create inclusive curriculum (Vlach, 2022) and integrate literacy instruction (i.e. phonemic awareness, vocabulary development) into read alouds and discussions about identity and race (Daly, 2021). Below are instructional strategies designed to capture the attention of students across grade levels and ensure their thoughtful participation in literacy learning with multicultural texts.

Oral Sharing and Literacy Development. For emergent readers, oral language experiences can support the development of phonological awareness or the ability to detect and manipulate syllables and phonemes, as well as increase students' vocabulary (Cassano & Rohde, 2020). For emergent readers, oral language experiences can support the development of phonological awareness or the ability to detect and manipulate syllables and phonemes, as well as increase students' vocabulary (Cassano & Rohde, 2020). Sharing personal, familial and community connections immediately following the reading or exploration of a multicultural text can offer students ongoing, authentic opportunities to develop oral proficiency and increase their exposure to new sounds and rhythms of

language. This instructional strategy will also create meaningful space and provide a platform for the exploration and discussion of students' lived experiences.

Discussion Norms. Collaboratively create guidelines and expectations to establish consensus for the collaborative voices. After class discussions, return to the discussion norms and reflect with students about the discussion. Teachers can ask students: What went well in our conversation today? What can be improved for next time?

Personal Reflection and Student Surveys. Utilize a student lesson reflection journal or an Exit Ticket to harness the power of personal pondering. Throughout the school year, conduct a student poll or survey to ascertain the books and authors they want to read and hear from. Incorporating student feedback and commentary into the lesson cycle will ensure that students' perspectives and experiences are prioritized in the selection and use of multicultural texts in the classroom.

Recommendation Posts and Class Blogs. Provide students with a self-adhesive note and let them write a brief endorsement or recommendation for the book. The students can use peer recommendations to guide and inform their next book selection from the classroom library. In addition, create a Class Blog to allow students the opportunity to share their thoughts and opinions of a recently read text in a digital, online platform. Class blogs can be shared with students in other classrooms, grade levels, or even schools. This way, students' reflections and candid commentary of featured stories, authors, and classroom titles are prioritized in the

development of a literacy curriculum that uses multicultural literature.

Ongoing Inquiry and Digital Literacy. Authors and illustrators are people, too, and create stories that reflect their identities and experiences. Empower your students with digital literacy tools to inquire, explore, and research further into the lives of the authors and illustrators of multicultural literature. Students can use the Internet to examine informational texts, organize ideas across multiple sources, and evaluate texts for accuracy and the inclusion of diverse perspectives (Price-Dennis & Sealey-Ruiz, 2021). This practice will allow students to actively engage with the content shared in class and discover more about the authors and illustrators of the stories, narratives, and biographies they read and enjoy.

Where Do We Go From Here?

Students are the voices of the next generation and deserve access to multicultural literature. Students need to experience inclusive and affirming literacy learning by seeing reflections of themselves in classroom texts. Students also deserve opportunities to encounter diversity with appreciation and learn from Black, Indigenous, and other people of color whose voices and experiences are oftentimes silenced by the dominant, white culture. Finally, students must be given the opportunity to step into a more just and inclusive future by applying new knowledge from literature into their own lives and communities. In the wake of an ongoing pandemic, senseless violence, and persistent social inequities, we implore educators to prioritize multicultural literature in the literacy classroom.

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Figure 1: Whole-Class Identity Web from a Pre-Kindergarten Classroom



Table 1: Guiding Discussions Questions about Books as Windows, Mirrors, and/or Sliding Glass Doors (Questions are inspired by this concept from Rudine Sims Bishop.)

Books as a Mirror	Books as a Window	Books as a Sliding Glass Door
<p>In what ways do you see yourself in this text? Are there places where you feel a connection to the character's experience? What are places where you do not see yourself in the text?</p> <p>What are you learning about yourself through reading this book?</p> <p>How are you thinking about your life, friends, family or community now?</p>	<p>What are you learning about others' experiences in this world through this book?</p> <p>Does the author and/or illustrator have a connection to this experience? If not, how might we read this text differently?</p> <p>Are there stereotypes or forms of discrimination that we need to be aware of while reading this book?</p>	<p>What kinds of problems or challenges do you notice occurring in this text? Are they individual or societal or both?</p> <p>Who has power in this text? Is the distribution of power fair or just? If not, what could be done differently?</p> <p>How do people make change? What are the skills they have? What is the knowledge they use?</p>
General Questions to Honor Multiple Identities with Multicultural Literature		
What are you thinking about as you read this book?		

What do you want to learn more about? Where do you want to go next in your learning?

Are there people in our families, friend groups, and communities who can teach us more?

Making Words Count: Writing Across the Curriculum and Beyond

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Abstract

The teaching of literacy/language arts and mathematics is not a pairing traditionally found in classrooms. However, there are ways to link the two vital core subjects. This article will explore using writing as a tool for students to work through mathematical processes by integrating writing and literacy curriculum as a subject to complement, not complicate. The application of knowledge and adapting prompts and scenarios to personalized settings in mathematics and literacy classrooms will be highlighted. What is shared will be relevant to students' lives through the application of practical strategies and approaches for planning and instruction as an individual educator or on grade level teams in a variety of grade levels. The perspectives, thoughts, and activities shared in this article result from presentations and research shared with literacy and mathematics educators and the need to work beyond content area teams to support students in their literacy journeys.

Keywords: *writing, literacy, mathematics, cross-curricular connections, engagement*

Writing is a form of expression that is prevalent in all areas of daily life and society, but in educational settings, too often the writing related assignments are left solely to the literacy educators and literacy specialists.

Literacy/English Language Arts (ELAR) and mathematics are often characterized as difficult subjects (Castles, Rastle & Nation, 2018; Elleman & Oslund, 2019; Langoban, 2020). A student may get labeled as a “reading/writing person” or a “math person” based upon performance and preference for either subject. This narrative needs to change, and it would be beneficial for educators to help effect this change since both core subjects are foundational and necessary for students to succeed. In

reference to the communication process standards in math, the National Council for Teachers of Mathematics (2000) states, “When students are challenged to communicate the results of their thinking to others orally or in writing, they learn to be clear, convincing, and precise in their use of mathematical language” (p. 4). Good teaching and effective literacy (and math) lessons should span across subject areas. This should not be limited to a single classroom experience or one content area educator.

Those in education in the past few years have been faced with the strains of a pandemic, school safety, access and equity, and many other issues. Writing might not solve all of the problems in education, but the teaching and

learning of writing can allow for innovation and creativity within and across curriculum. Evolving curriculum involves taking some risks and facing challenges and fears.

Addressing Fears and Frustrations with Writing

Writing is often taught to students as a necessary skill to communicate, but students sometimes do not understand the purpose of writing assignments and skills that are presented within their classrooms. Traditionally, the purposes of writing shared with students are that writing is used to inform, persuade, for literary work, or as a form of expression. Writing for students in the primary grades involves teaching skills to build symbols, scribbles, and drawings into letters and words, and then transforming words into meaning and phrases. In this process, students gain the tools needed to be confident in expressing, creating, or writing informatively. Due to how students are nurtured and taught, their confidence can become shaken, and writing becomes a sore spot in their educational journey.

Fears and frustrations that students run into with writing instruction can be improved by educators and their ability to facilitate and foster an environment of collaboration and love for the process and end products that writing brings about. It is a mistake to leave the responsibility of writing instruction solely to the ELAR educator. Golden (2007) states, “By designing lessons that ask students to listen, read, and write in math class, teachers can teach and practice ELA skills that will benefit students in both math and ELA classes” (p. 47). Just as it takes practice and multiple interactions with skills learned in other core subjects such as math), writing is not a subject that should be cultivated every once in a while; writing should be seamlessly integrated across subject areas.

Making Words C.O.U.N.T.

In mathematics, one of the foundational principles is knowing how to count or knowing that numbers hold value, and in writing instruction, students begin learning about words and word meaning, then learn sentences/phrases, and then later learn the styles and purposes for writing.

Making words “count” involves the educators teaching the skills and knowledge of other content areas through integration (Cunnington et. al, 2014). There are other ways to make connections with math and literacy beyond completing word problems. Math and reading and writing are often not paired together, but when they are, the correlation between word and vocabulary knowledge and solving word problems is usually the only link that is explored. The two core subjects that are normally unrelated have more in common, and the ability to integrate is easier than once thought. The focus should be on finding ways to continue writing beyond the designated ELAR class times and implementing writing and literacy skills in moments that normally only focus on computation and multistep processes. Writing *can* take place in the mathematics setting. Below is the “C.O.U.N.T.” acronym, as created and shared by Childs at the TALE 2022 Annual Conference, which discusses how math and writing can be used simultaneously in a classroom setting:

- **“C” Cultural Responsiveness and Engagement with Writing Tasks in Mathematics-** *Take items from popular culture that students are familiar with (social media, music, sports) and create general writing prompts that tie culture to mathematics, to which the students can respond on a weekly or daily basis. For example, students could write on the statistics of their favorite sports team or music artist.*

- **“O” Opportunities to Write Should Be Authentic and Relevant-** Create a space for students digitally or in a physical classroom to write about the value of math in everyday life. Showcase the ideas and observations around the learning environment.

- **“U” Unpack Problems Using Writing-** Charts, graphs, and graphic organizers are forms of writing that organize and break down data.

1) Provide flash cards, charts, or graphs to students, and have them write word problems related to the equation on the card.

2) Within the word problems, use key math vocabulary, and incorporate everyday problems that might occur.

3) Have students include themselves or people that they know in their math problems.

- **“N” Narrative Writing Crosses Curricula-** Many ELA terms correlate with the problem and solution processes used in mathematics. “Point of view” and “chronological order” are terms that come to mind. Using various solutions/notes, try using the following prompts to help students correlate math and narrative writing:

- o I think they were thinking...

- o This problem tells the story of...
- o Problems can be solved in more than one way. My point of view on this problem is...

“T” Track Thought Processes Through Writing- In the literacy world, we are asked to “cite our sources.” In mathematics, students are asked to “show their work” or “give proof” of their responses. Have students look at notes and examples of student work or finished problems and then critique the notes or problems in writing.

The suggested activities and strategies mentioned will look different at various grade levels, but the point in sharing these activities is to show that there are ways to make relevant and engaging (Francois, 2021; Schnitzler, Holzberger, & Seidel, 2021; Taylor & Parsons, 2011) connections in two foundational areas that are rarely linked. Table 1 depicts the parallels and similarities of vocabulary across math and ELAR. It is important to note that many of these terms end up in the curriculum in Texas ELAR and Math classrooms, as this is vocabulary used in Texas’ process and content standards found in the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS).

Table 1

Making Words Count Vocabulary

ELAR	Mathematics
Narrate/Narrative	Explain/Justify/Prove
Compare	Compare/Comparison/Similar

Point of View	Frame of Reference
Sequence of Events, Chronological Order	Order, Order of Operations, Time, Date
Summary/Summarize	Algorithm
Inference	Estimating
Predictions	Predictions (sequence and patterns)
Critique, Analyze, Critical Thinking	Analyze, Critical Thinking
Fluency	Automaticity
Syntax (sentence composition)	Equation (a mathematical statement)
Characteristics (of characters, authors, plots, genres)	Characteristics (of shapes, dimensions, angles)
Visuals/Graphics	Pictographs, Picture Graphs
Text Set	Set (Collection of Objects)

At times, literacy and mathematics might seem like polar opposites; however, there are many ways in which their content and vocabulary can be connected within the same grade level. Examine the vocabulary in Table 1. The terms “narrative” (p. 6), “summarize”(p. 4), “inference” (p. 3), and “characteristics” (p. 3-4) are written in Grade 5 ELAR TEKS (Texas Education Agency [TEA], 2020). Terms such as “estimate” (p. 8), “justify” (p. 7), “explain” (p. 8), and “algorithm” (p. 7) are included in Grade 5 Mathematics TEKS (Texas Education Agency [TEA], 2020). These terms were paired in Table 1 due to their similarities. Students could be encountering lessons with these terms on the same days in different classrooms, yet not realize the relation. Estimation and making inferences require similar skills and thought processes, and they both require background knowledge. How can teachers make this connection across subjects? How can these

terms be used to strengthen writing or create prompts in mathematics or ELAR?

Effective Writing Instruction and Integration Across Subjects

Effective writing instruction should consist of “constructivist, active learning methods” in which students are “expected to be active in the learning process” with teachers using “diverse approaches” (Toquero, Talidong & Liu, 2021, p. 4). Writing instruction should be developed to build confidence and build essential literacy and communication skills.

According to Graham and Harris (2013), students understand the material better when they can write it. It is also beneficial for students to write about concepts presented in classes such as science and other subjects, in which the students can record data, analyze, personalize, or grasp and connect key ideas from text (Graham

& Harris, 2013). Such practices can make learning memorable and more meaningful for students, by getting them to engage with material in various formats and levels of thought and allowing them to connect with content.

Writing instruction in school classrooms has evolved, and teachers in literacy settings seemingly have exposure to many resources that can help them share exemplary writing instruction practices. But the reality is “the overall picture that emerged from the 28 studies reviewed was that writing instruction in most classrooms is not sufficient” (Graham, 2019, p. 280). One thing that supports this finding was that “a majority of teachers did not devote enough time to teaching writing” (Graham, 2019, p. 280). Time is often not devoted to writing instruction because even though it is a foundational skill, writing is not usually classified as a core subject like math, science, and social studies. In most of our nation’s classrooms, core subjects are evaluated yearly using standardized tests, and in many states (such as Texas STAAR exams), promotion requirements are met through these tests. Writing is occasionally evaluated using these types of tests, but most are given every few years.

Attention to teaching writing skills and instruction is needed, and with classrooms becoming more diverse, the opportunity exists to bridge gaps and collaborate as professionals (as educators), and refresh students with new ways to reach and teach them. A start would be showing them how core subject content overlaps and that the skills that they learn and develop seemingly don’t exist without the other.

Mathematics and Writing

There is little research (Rutherford-Becker & Vanderwood, 2009) available on the impacts and relation of literacy (specifically writing) and mathematics in the classroom. According to Schmoker (2018), writing and practice in using writing skills “can be easily integrated into the

content areas by having students respond to simple, versatile questions, sentence stems, and prompts” (p. 2). Math and writing can be integrated to vertically align content areas; for example, students can express vocabulary and their thought processes while working on math equations or word problems. The expressiveness, (i.e. the ability to give open ended responses) in writing could also serve as “an opposing force to math anxiety because it increases self-efficacy” (Ruark, 2021, p. 6). Expressiveness is key, and it relates to self-efficacy—also an important aspect of literacy learning (Bandura, 1977; McCarthy, Meier, & Rinderer, 1985; Scott, 1996; Walker 2003; Grenner, et. al, 2021). Students have to build self-efficacy to believe in their abilities to achieve in math as well as writing. Students also need to know the purpose for writing and to believe that their instruction in core subject areas “count” in all areas of their academic journey.

Conclusion

Mathematics and writing are not traditionally paired in the classroom, but there are opportunities for educators to collaborate and integrate skills across both subjects. Vertical planning with other grade level teams across core subjects is crucial. Providing students with an integrated cross-curriculum approach moves classrooms toward being more relevant and equitable. Teaching approaches that are equitable should center on giving students options that are accessible, personal, and current. Giving students a voice, whether in math or literacy, works towards creating more innovative and critical thinkers—which ultimately helps all stakeholders—educators, students, and their communities (Baumert, et. al, 2010).

Good quality teaching is good teaching, no matter the subject. Making words “count” and writing across the curriculum in mathematics can move teaching and learning into a new realm of collaboration amongst educators, and provide students with more confidence in not one, but two potentially difficult subjects. Math

and writing are foundational skills that need more interaction within curriculum. Educators need to have more conversations on teaching skills and content across subject areas, and to work as a team to tackle the issue of providing high-quality writing instruction (Graham, 2019; Graham & Harris, 2013; Zumbunn & Krause,

2012) that is not limited or taught in isolation. Literacy is a “house” that is full of complexities, and it holds a foundation that should not be built in just one class or content area.

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More Than Just Glitter: Using Text-Dependent Questions as Part of Foundational Literacy Practice

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Abstract

New strategies come along all the time, but these strategies matter little if educators are not sure why they are using them or what the desired outcome is. Quality literacy instruction should be rooted in effective foundational practices. Text-dependent questions offer a foundation for literacy practices that support students' comprehension, understanding, and discussion of complex texts. These questions can be asked at different cognitive levels – literal, structural, and inferential. Strategic use of these text-dependent questions can also be used to scaffold student deeper reading and inference making. The questions can also be integrated into a variety of literacy activities and help ensure that the text remains central to the after-reading literacy activities. These activities can be used throughout a literacy curriculum.

Keywords: *text-dependent questions, anticipation guides, opinion stations, curriculum*

It seems like there is always a new product, an app, a new fancy strategy. Sometimes I feel like we want all the glitter but are missing the substance that makes for quality literacy instruction. We want a new strategy, a new gimmick, something flashy, but what we really need is good, foundational, literacy instruction. We need to go back to the basics and build up. We need to remember why we use certain practices or specific strategies. A practice or strategy is only meaningful if we know why we are using it and what we want to get out of it. If we want students to comprehend, understand, and engage deeply with complex texts, we need to use foundational practices that help our students do just that. One of the practices that can help create a solid foundation of literacy

instruction that engages students in both elementary and secondary classrooms is the use of text-dependent questions. Text-dependent questions can be used across different literacy assignments, but in every instance they serve to focus student attention on the text and allow for active discussion of complex texts. Educators can build on text-dependent questions to enhance student understanding, incorporate more student talk, and support student question generation.

A Primer on Text-Dependent Questions

Text-dependent questions at the basic level are questions that require students to cite text evidence with their answer. The focus on the

centrality of text is not new, but it has evolved since the pre-1965 “text-centric era” (Pearson & Cervetti, 2015). The creation of the Common Core standards helped lead to this re-emergence but with reader and context playing a more important role than in the early 1900s version.

Text-dependent questions differ from more reader-centric questions often posed by teachers that ask students to rely almost solely on background knowledge or personal feelings for connection. For example, a teacher may ask students “What would you do if this happened to you?” or something similar. While it has its own merits, this question does not require the student to wrestle with the text or refer to it. Beyond relying on the text, text-dependent questions are created at different levels. While there are a number of different ways to look at these levels, I use the hierarchy developed by Frey and Fisher (2013). These levels, described in Table 1, are literal, structural, inferential, and action-oriented (or after reading) questions.

Literal level questions deal with key details and general understandings. Despite the fact that information can clearly be found in the text, the questions still require text evidence. For example, a teacher may pose the question: where are the characters located in the beginning of the story? This is a skill that teachers should model for students and use gradual release of responsibility to support students’ effective identification of text evidence. Structural level questions deal with vocabulary and text structure. For example, why did the author use dialogue during the initial scene? These questions focus the students on the author’s craft and heighten their “reading like a writer” awareness.

The next level is inferential questions – the level at which students most often struggle. These

questions deal with more than just what we think of as inferential questions. They also deal with author’s purpose questions (another common struggle spot), and intertextual connections (where students make connections between two or more texts). For example, what do this story and the article we read last week say about the value (or not) of human life?

The final level of questioning, action-oriented, is what I might describe as the after-reading activity. This could be a writing prompt, debate, presentation, etc. The key is that the students must refer back to the text to support their work. For example, what does this story say about people’s treatment of other people? How can you relate this to today’s society? Initially, teachers can model how to approach answering text-dependent questions by using annotation.

Teachers can do a read-aloud of a short piece of text and practice answering the questions. It is important here that teachers use “I” statements to make their thinking and process transparent to the class. Examples of “I” statements include: When I read this question about the use of the word “mad,” I first find it in the text. Then I re-read the paragraph and think about how the word relates to the context. When I am making an inference, I find the place in the text that relates to the question. Then I relate this to what I already know or what I have read before.

Instruction can start with the modeling of answering literal level questions and then moving up to both structural and inferential questions. This will help students understand both the purpose and the process of identifying relevant and accurate text evidence to support their answers to these types of questions.

Table 1***Types of Text-Dependent Questions***

Question Type	Description
Literal	What does the text say? Includes general understand and key details
Structural	How does the text work? Includes word choice and author's craft
Inferential	Includes author's purpose and intertextual connections
Action-oriented/after-reading	Include activities such as debates, investigations, writing, and Socratic seminars that tie back to the complex text

Strategic Use of Text-Dependent Questions

Text-dependent questions are more powerful when they are used together than in isolation. As Frey and Fisher (2013) assert in their book *Rigorous Reading*, “The types of questions students are asked influence how they read a text” (p. 51). Strategic use of these questions can be used to scaffold student thinking and support students’ answering of inferential questions. For example, teachers can purposefully create and ask literal and structural level questions that draw students’ attention to parts of the text that will assist them in answering inferential questions. This use of text-dependent questions could be in a close reading protocol, a strategy that has been around since the beginning of the last century (Frey & Fisher, 2013). A close

reading protocol consists of having students read a section of text together in small groups. The teacher starts with a broad, literal level question, and then sends the students back to the text using a structural and then inferential level question. Note: While the intent may be to have students re-read at least parts of the text three times, it is not recommended that you tell the students they will be reading the selection three times. Instead, just pose the questions. Students will need to strategically re-read to answer the questions.

Here is a concrete example using an excerpt from “The Most Dangerous Game” (Connell, 2017).

Figure 1

Excerpt from "The Most Dangerous Game" (1924) by Richard Connell

"OFF THERE to the right--somewhere--is a large island," said Whitney. "It's rather a mystery--" "What island is it?" Rainsford asked.

"The old charts call it 'Ship-Trap Island,'" Whitney replied. "A suggestive name, isn't it? Sailors have a curious dread of the place. I don't know why. Some superstition--"

"Can't see it," remarked Rainsford, trying to peer through the dank tropical night that was palpable as it pressed its thick warm blackness in upon the yacht.

"You've good eyes," said Whitney, with a laugh, "and I've seen you pick off a moose moving in the brown fall bush at four hundred yards, but even you can't see four miles or so through a moonless Caribbean night."

"Nor four yards," admitted Rainsford. "Ugh! It's like moist black velvet."

"It will be light enough in Rio," promised Whitney. "We should make it in a few days. I hope the jaguar guns have come from Purdey's. We should have some good hunting up the Amazon. Great sport, hunting."

"The best sport in the world," agreed Rainsford.

"For the hunter," amended Whitney. "Not for the jaguar."

"Don't talk rot, Whitney," said Rainsford. "You're a big-game hunter, not a philosopher. Who cares how a jaguar feels?"

"Perhaps the jaguar does," observed Whitney.

"Bah! They've no understanding."

"Even so, I rather think they understand one thing--fear. The fear of pain and the fear of death."

"Nonsense," laughed Rainsford. "This hot weather is making you soft, Whitney. Be a realist. The world is made up of two classes--the hunters and the huntees. Luckily, you and I are hunters. Do you think we've passed that island yet?"

Each question builds on the others and supports students' deeper understanding of the text. The very act of questioning is being used as a scaffold for student thinking.

Anticipation Guides

Close reading is not the only strategy that can be used to incorporate text-dependent thinking. Educators can also integrate text-dependent thinking into the use of anticipation guides (Fisher et al., 2017). Anticipation guides are a set of ideas, statements, or themes that, in addition to piquing student interest, help to activate students' prior knowledge about what they are reading. Teachers can identify themes that students track throughout their reading.

Students decide whether they agree or disagree with the teacher-provided statements and then find text evidence as they read with those in mind. Students revisit their opinions after they have finished the text. As part of this activity, educators can pose text-dependent questions throughout. In addition, they can have students develop their own text-dependent questions to show their understanding. These student-generated questions can focus on the text evidence they find to support the themes or statements provided by the teacher, or they can point to themes the students identify on their own. Educators can wrap up with inferential questions or text-dependent after-reading activities.

Table 2.

Example of an Anticipation Guide

Theme/Index	Agree/ Disagree	Why?	Evidence Collected	After Reading Agree/Disagree
The world is made up of two classes--the hunters and the huntees.				
It is never acceptable to take a human life.				
To be civilized is to rid the world of those you believe are bad people.				

The anticipation guide activates students' prior knowledge and provides students purpose in their reading. This also helps them focus on certain pieces of text evidence.

Literacy Assignment Analysis Framework

Using text-dependent questions can also help ensure that the activities we assign are quality

assignments. They can help ensure projects or essays meet the demands of the literacy assignment analysis framework. This framework, developed by the Education Trust (Dabrowski, 2016), was designed to help guide teachers in creating assignments to push students to higher levels of literacy learning. It outlines that quality literacy assignments contain the

following: alignment with the standards (they identify the standards as Common Core, but the framework can easily work with the TEKS or any set of rigorous standards), centrality of the text, cognitive challenge, and motivation and engagement. Using text-dependent questions can help ensure that the text is always central to an assignment. The level of questioning can ensure that the assignment is cognitively challenging.

The report also includes the use of discussion and teacher scaffolding. These additions make the use of text-dependent questions even more relevant. Text-dependent questions in protocols such as close reading or reciprocal teaching can aid student discussion. The strategic use of text-dependent questions can also be part of the scaffolding needed for quality literacy instruction.

Opinion Stations

One activity that can be used after reading is opinion stations. The teacher poses a question to the students that they write about for fifteen minutes. Students must decide if they agree, strongly agree, disagree, or strongly disagree.

An example of an opinion station prompt is to look at the following statement and decide whether you agree, disagree, strongly agree, or strongly disagree with this statement: *Rainsford is deeply changed and no longer believes hunting is a respectable pastime. Make sure to support your opinion with evidence from the text. You have 15 minutes.* This writing will serve as the basis for a paper students will later complete.

After the initial writing, students move into groups of like-minded peers to find evidence that will support their positions. For example, students who agree with the statement will find evidence to support that stance. After the small groups work to identify text evidence, they post the evidence on chart paper and share with the whole group. Students listen to the evidence and can change their mind about whether or not they agree, strongly agree, disagree, or strongly disagree. The students then return to their

original prompt. First, they write about whether or not they changed their mind and why they did or did not alter their opinion. After that, the students address the original prompt, identifying their opinion, and then supporting it with the evidence discussed during the activity.

Teaching Students to Write Their Own Questions

Once students have become familiar with text-dependent questions, they can begin writing their own questions. One way to incorporate student writing of text-dependent questions is through the practice of reciprocal teaching (Fisher et al., 2017). In reciprocal teaching, students read a text in groups of four. The educator will have chunked the selection with pre-designated places in the text to stop and discuss. For each section, one student makes predictions, one poses questions, one seeks areas that need clarification, and one summarizes the section. For the question section, the educator can suggest, encourage, or require students to pose text-dependent questions. Once students have a general handle on this, teachers can begin encouraging students to ask specific levels of text-dependent questions. For example, students may start writing literal level questions but may then be challenged and supported to write structural or inferential questions.

Conclusion

Text-dependent questions are a solid foundational practice – not just a glittery or passing fad. These can be integrated into many literacy activities. Teachers can pose the questions themselves or teach students to write them on their own. However these questions are used, they are a foundational literacy practice that promotes close reading and active interaction with a text. At the core, they help students dig deeper into the complex texts that students come across in classrooms and beyond. They also help students learn to generate a rich mix of questions every time they read. This method will lay a strong literacy foundation for future learning.

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Loaded Language and Slippery Slopes: Using the ELAR TEKS to Combat Faulty Reasoning

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Abstract

The Inquiry and Research strand of the 2017 ELAR TEKS for sixth through twelfth grade includes vertically aligned standards for teaching students critical media skills by questioning the reliability and credibility of sources, evaluating bias, and recognizing logical fallacies. This article describes how increased media saturation has led to citizenry being misled. Loaded language and fallacies are explained. Teachers are encouraged to support students' critical media literacy by teaching these skills and letting students practice recognizing the patterns of logical fallacies. Two strategies for teaching logical fallacies are provided, including a classroom Fallacy Board and a Slippery Slopes game, modified to specifically align with the TEKS and engage students in practice with patterns of faulty reasoning.

Keywords: *critical media skills, logical fallacies, ELAR TEKS*

“21st century students are part of the most media saturated society in human history” (Butler, 2020, p. 1).

The range of media information students consume has expanded to include more than print and television. Increasingly, many Americans keep up with current events and participate in marketing through social media. According to the Pew Research Center, 18% of U.S. adults get their news from social media

(2019). Forty-five percent of teens reported to a Pew research survey that they are online almost constantly (2018). In their surveys, participants who rely on social media were more likely to score low on political knowledge questions. These same participants demonstrated a higher rate of knowledge about false claims. This is very significant among teens because smartphone ownership for this group is nearly universal across all demographic groups (Pew, 2018).

Critical thinking has never been more important as students are immersed in media content that contains misinformation and persuasive techniques. Paired with a developing adolescent mind, our students are often the targets of social media influencers (Parasnis, 2022).

Today’s media, rich in commentary and biased viewpoints, offers an abundance of examples of logical fallacies. Though some of these real-world examples are polarizing, there are many potential models found in our shared experiences. Examples heard on school campuses include this *stereotype*: “Girls are good at writing” or this example of an *either-or* fallacy: “Sam, I see you are not writing. Would you like to write with a pencil or a pen?” where a student is made to believe there are only two choices.

Yet, students when given an opportunity to find their own examples will name the misleading content found in popular and political culture such as the supremacy of our country because we are the best country or the problem of fake news because the news isn’t true. Students and teachers share examples from school policies on dress codes and assigning grades, from environmental issues about the use of oil and deforestation, and from politics recalling slogans

and misleading arguments made in campaigns and debates. Students participate in spaces where faulty rhetoric goes largely unchallenged including social media platforms like YouTube, TikTok, and Facebook, engaging in out-of-class communities where bias and faulty reasoning parade as truth. As demonstrated in the Inquiry and Research strand of the ELAR TEKS, it is the responsibility of educators to equip students with the critical skills necessary to evaluate the credibility of these sources of information.

Logical Fallacies in the TEKS

Absent in previous versions of the ELAR TEKS, the 2017 English Language Arts TEKS guidance includes a series of standards focused on teaching students to examine texts for reliability and recognize faulty reasoning (19 TAC Chapter 110, 2017). These standards are present in the Inquiry and Research strand for grades six through twelve.

The state standards include logical fallacies in this strand, so we will teach students to “examine sources for reliability, credibility, and faulty reasoning” (19 TAC Chapter 110, 2017). Table 1 provides a view of the faulty reasoning TEKS in vertical alignment.

Table 1

Grade Level TEKS for Faulty Reasoning

Grade Level	Reliability and Credibility	Faulty Reasoning
Grades 6 & 7	reliability, credibility, and bias	<u>such as</u> hyperbole, emotional appeals, and stereotype
Grade 8	reliability, credibility, and bias, including omission	<u>such as</u> bandwagon appeals, repetition, and loaded language
English I	credibility and bias, including omission	<u>such as</u> ad hominem, loaded language, and slippery slope
English II		<u>such as</u> incorrect premise, hasty generalizations and either-or

English III	credibility and bias, and accuracy	<u>such as</u> post hoc-ad hoc, circular reasoning, red herring, and assumptions
English IV		<u>such as</u> straw man, false dilemma, faulty analogies, and non-sequitur

The logical fallacies in the standards follow “such as,” which means that you can use these as options for instruction. The fallacies are ordered for a clear and developmentally appropriate vertical alignment with an effort to balance the challenge of these patterns across grade levels with increasing difficulty. The intention of this wording was to prevent the state from requiring students to specifically identify and name types of logical fallacies. Instead, the

goal of their inclusion was to teach students to successfully recognize forms of logical fallacies in advertising, texts, and media.

This goal can be seen in the repetition of examining sources for “credibility and bias” occurring at all six grade levels. The additional faulty reasoning forms were organized to facilitate a vertical alignment. Table 2 includes these forms along with their descriptions.

Table 2

Examples of Faulty Reasoning

Faulty Reasoning	Example
Faulty Reasoning/ Logical Fallacies	Biased arguments
Omission	Leaving out part of an explanation that does not advance the chosen argument
Ad Hominem	Arguing against the person making the argument instead of against the argument
Loaded Language	Substituting facts with words that stir up emotions; a form of manipulation
Slippery Slope	The sequencing of events that lead to a more significant event though the connection is improbable
Incorrect Premise/Non Sequitur	The evidence or reason does not add or adds little support for the conclusion
Hasty Generalizations	Over generalizing – claim is based on evidence that is not strong enough to support the claim
Either-or / False Dilemma	Only two choices are presented when more exist
Post-hoc	Claim that since an event happened after an initial event that the first event caused the following event

Circular reasoning	The argument is supported by the evidence and the evidence is supported by the arguments
Red Herring	Deflecting the argument to a new argument in an effort to change the topic
Assumptions	Presumes evidence for an argument though it is not there
Straw Man	Misrepresenting a person's argument to defend against it
Faulty Analogies	Since A & B have X in common, they will have Y in common too
Hyperbole	A claim that is grossly exaggerated
Emotional Appeal (Pathos)	Attempting to win an argument by appealing to emotions in an argument
Stereotype	Oversimplified idea of a group
Bandwagon	An appeal to agree to the position because everyone else it is doing it
Repetition	Repeating an argument over and over instead of providing evidence

Students are given opportunities to practice identifying the common characteristics of logical fallacies in small and manageable chunks, so they can increasingly recognize and reject more sophisticated faulty reasoning in the information they consume.

Biased Arguments

Loaded Language

Recognizing the bias in language is increasingly important, so as citizens we can weigh the words of our leaders. Though some loaded language is unintentional like broad generalizations made in the rush to complete a lesson or the use of hyperbole to communicate stress, others use rhetoric to mislead an audience. This is especially true in social media where publishing rights are provided without editors. Our students must learn to question the credibility of arguments to participate in a society built on truth, and they must learn to create writing that is well supported with evidence instead of relying on bias and misleading rhetoric to persuade their audiences.

Fallacies or Bad Arguments

The key characteristics of logical fallacies are that they are illogical or do not make sense. They are structured in consistent ways that

students can learn to recognize quickly as they learn to evaluate sources of information. Often embedded in pathos (emotional appeals), logical fallacies tend to appeal to an audience by using omission, distraction, and group think. One example is the bandwagon fallacy that claims truth because of a shared belief. Another is the red herring that is used as a distraction, like when questioned about an uncomfortable topic the responder changes the topic to something unrelated but often inflammatory to deflect attention away from the issue.

These fallacies abound in the commentary-rich media found on contemporary airwaves and online. However, students with the tools to deconstruct arguments, recognize misleading patterns, and look for logical fallacies are able to use critical thinking in response to arguments made by those intending to mislead them.

Strategies for Teaching Students to Examine Reliability and Credibility

Fallacy Board: Live Examples from the World

The thought of bringing political examples of bias and logical fallacies from the media into our classrooms may seem risky in the current political environment. Increasingly, policies limit efforts to make our classrooms socially

just. Teaching students to be critical thinkers provides students the opportunity to evaluate sources for justice independently.

A classroom fallacy board offers students an opportunity to share their own investigations into media in search for patterns that misrepresent information. For example, in 8th grade a three-column board with the headings, *Bandwagons*, *Repetitions*, and *Slippery Slope* would be a space where students could share examples found in media with their classmates. This board can be accomplished either on the wall in the physical classroom or on an online forum.

Slippery Slopes: The Game

Students can learn to create logical fallacies in a game adapted from *The Fallacy Detective* (Bludorn & Bludorn, 2015). In the Slippery Slopes game, students create examples of faulty reasoning. It is recommended that students work on just the four identified logical fallacies listed in the TEKS for their grade level. For example, according to the TEKS, English II students could be working with *omission*, *incorrect premise*, *hasty generalizations*, and *either-or*. Each student is given a word bank with student friendly definitions and examples of each of the four types of fallacies and four blank note cards. During each round, the students create four fallacies, one of each per card with the type of fallacy written on the back.

The cards from the group are shuffled together, and the students take turns reading the cards. Each member of the group makes a guess of which fallacy the student created. If the student guesses correctly they get a point, and the student who wrote the example also gets a point for each student that guesses his example correctly. Several rounds are played, and students gather points.

At the end of each round, the group votes for their favorite fallacy for the round. The author of the fallacy is awarded a bonus point.

The final round is the slippery slope round and worth double points, so all students have a chance to catch up with their peers for a win. In the slippery slope round, the students choose just one of the four fallacies for the grade level to create an example. Then they write one example of a slippery slope. These final cards are shuffled and played as they were in the earlier round. The student with the most points wins.

To track the points, students can use a scorecard like the one provided in Table 3. Another way to keep score is to use poker chips. The student with the most poker chips at the end is the winner. Playing this game provides students practice with the patterns of logical fallacies in a fun-filled activity that can be altered to fit the specific grade level TEKS.

Table 3***Slippery Slopes Score Sheet***

Round/Points	Author of Correctly Identified Fallacy (1 point each)	Correctly Identified Fallacy as an Audience Member (1 point each)	Favorite Fallacy (1 bonus point per round)	Round Total
Round #1				
Round #2				
Round #3				
Round #4				
Round #5				
SLIPPERY SLOPES ROUND (Double Points)				TOTAL POINTS

Conclusion

The state added these TEKS in 2017 to ensure not only that students are savvy consumers of information, but also that they can develop sound arguments with supporting evidence. Examining samples of writing that includes faulty reasoning can prevent our students from being easily manipulated and support their efforts to monitor their own development of persuasion.

These strategies support students' awareness of bias and logical fallacies and provide students an opportunity to name the injustices they recognize in their world. Critical media literacy plays an outsized role in the growth of an informed citizenry (Butler, 2020), especially as social media outlets provide platforms for loud voices that go unchecked. With the right tools, students can learn to recognize patterns of deceit. When students become media literate, they take on the "cognitive shift of awareness" (Butler, 2020, p. 91) necessary for their future in a media flooded society.

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The Science of Reading: An Analysis of Texas Literacy Standards for Teacher Certification

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Abstract

The “Science of Reading” (SOR) has gained traction due to public media, resulting in a nationwide prioritization of teacher training and changes in the way reading is taught. The nationwide emphasis on the SOR led to new teacher certification requirements in Texas. Although teacher candidates already take a content exam to demonstrate proficiency in English Language Arts and Reading (ELAR) Standards, a new “Science of Teaching Reading” (STR) exam has been added to certification requirements. The purpose of this manuscript is to examine SOR’s impact on the Texas ELAR and STR standards and certification exams in order to determine how literacy skills have been categorized by the Texas Education Agency.

Keywords: STAAR, Science of teaching reading (STR), assessment

According to the Hechinger Report, 18 states and the District of Columbia have prioritized teaching training and have initiated changes in the way reading is taught (Samuels, 2021). These changes most likely came about as a result of nation-wide critiques of teachers’ knowledge of how to teach reading and the institutions that prepare them to teach reading (Hindman, et al., 2020; Hurford, 2020; Moats, 2020; Wexler, 2018). Over the past several years, the “Science of Reading” (SOR) has gained traction due to public media. Stakeholders have the attention of policy makers, who have initiated legislation geared toward literacy instruction for in-service and

preservice teachers. The nationwide emphasis on the SOR led to new teacher certification requirements in Texas. Although teacher candidates already take a content exam to demonstrate proficiency in English Language Arts and Reading (ELAR) Standards, a new “Science of Teaching Reading” (STR) exam has been added to certification requirements. The content of this manuscript was shared in a session of the 2022 TALE conference, which celebrated “A Decade of Literacy, Service, and Advocacy.” This TALE presentation continued the theme of advocacy with a critical examination of TEA’s focus on the Science of Teaching Reading. The purpose of this

manuscript is to examine SOR's impact on the Texas ELAR and STR standards and certification exams in order to determine how literacy skills have been categorized by the Texas Education Agency.

The Science of Reading

According to the annual "What's Hot" survey, the "Science of Teaching Reading" topic received a ranking of "extremely hot" for 2021, meaning 100% of survey participants agreed that the topic received substantial attention for the year. STR also ranked as the hottest topic in 2020 (Cassidy et al., 2020). Although the label for the topic has changed over the years, the SOR has appeared on the What's Hot list in the past. For example, "scientific reading research and practice" topped the hot list from 2003-2006 (Cassidy & Cassidy, 2002/2003; 2003/2004; 2004/2005; 2005/2006; Cassidy et al., 2020). According to Cassidy et al. (2020), this streak on the hot list evolved from the "Reading First" of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, which stressed "scientifically based reading research" (p. 5). Under the title "research-based practice," SOR topped the hot list from 2000-2002 (Cassidy & Cassidy, 1999/ 2000; 2000/2001; 2001/2002), further emphasizing literacy research and effective practices. Goodwin and Jimenez (2020) assert that mainstream media has contributed to how hot the topic is, as well as how polarizing it has become among parents, policymakers, and literacy experts. Shanahan (2020) maintains that the SOR has been used for over 200 years, "used most frequently to refer to the pronunciation and decoding of words on the basis of basic research" (p. S235).

Shanahan, a member of the National Reading Panel (NRP), is not new to the debate between two views, one which places readers' background knowledge and meanings of written words embedded in stories at the center of literacy instruction (Goodman, 2019; Hoover & Gough, 1990; Smith, 1994), and the other which places a high focus on skills-based instruction (Chall, 1967; Flesch, 1986; Moats, 2020; National Institute of Child Health and Human

Development, 2000). The NRP also prompted a nationwide focus on research-based practices. The panel, commissioned by Congress in 1997, was tasked with reviewing research on how reading develops, determining the most effective evidence-based methods for teaching children to read, and describing which methods of reading instruction are recommended for classroom use (National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, 2000). The NRP reported that the best approaches to reading include explicit phonemic awareness instruction, systematic phonics instruction, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension instruction (National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, 2000).

Currently, the SOR has the attention of policy makers, but the focus of policies has been predominantly skills-based instruction related to phonemic awareness and phonics instruction (Gabriel, 2020; Shanahan, 2020). This narrow focus has caused concern for literacy researchers and teachers. In 2020, the editors of *Reading Research Quarterly* issued a call for submissions examining research on the SOR. The response led to the publication of two special issues of the journal related to conceptualizations of the SOR (International Literacy Association, 2020). The editors of *RRQ* note the divisiveness of the stances on SOR (Goodwin & Jimenez, 2020). *RRQ* authors repeatedly noted an oversimplification of the SOR with models like the Simple View of Reading (SVR) (Cervetti et al., 2020; Compton-Lilly et al., 2020; Galloway et al., 2020; Shanahan, 2020;). Compton-Lilly et al. (2020) stated, "In recent years, we have witnessed the dissemination and public acceptance of misinformation related to reading" (p. S185).

The phrase "Science of Teaching Reading" has been used in Texas since January 2015, when the Texas Education Agency (TEA) released a revised version of the ELAR subject exam. The new exam was titled English Language Arts and Reading and the Science of Teaching Reading EC-6. The addition of STR was incorporated in standards for certifying teachers, and "in accordance with the STR" (TEA, 2019, p.

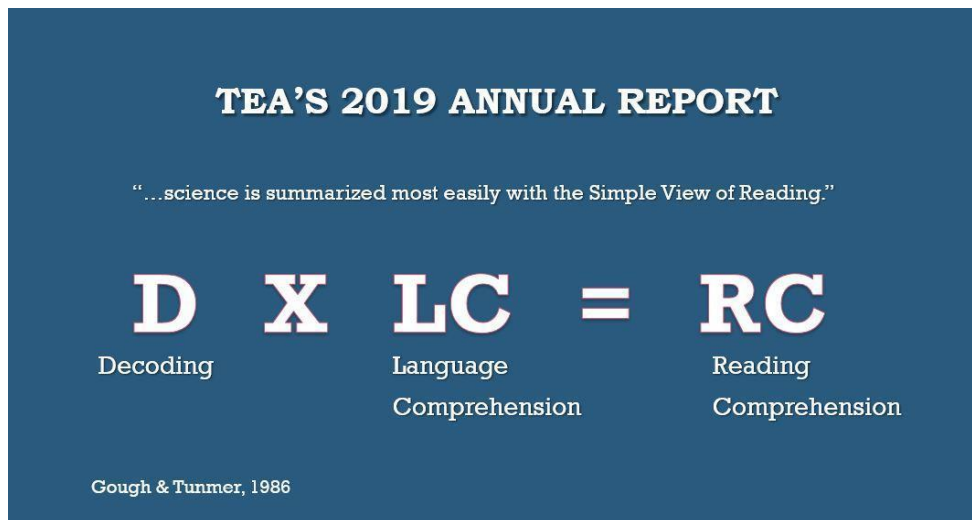
11-12) was stated at the end of each ELAR competency. In June 2019, the 86th Texas Legislature passed House Bill 3 (HB 3), which required a new, additional certification exam for five fields: EC-3, EC-6, Core Subjects 4-8, 4-8 ELAR, and 4-8 ELAR/Social Studies. In addition, HB 3 requires that all K-3 grade teachers and principals attend a “teacher literacy achievement academy” by the 2022-23 school year. Legislation in Texas mirrors nationwide trends focused on the SOR.

Texas and the Science of Teaching Reading

As Moje (NEPC, 2018) noted, “there will always be people who are going to focus on one portion of what it means to teach and learn to read” (p. 10). The focus in public policy is the “science,” but there are varying beliefs about what this means. Advocates of the SOR have invoked the Simple View of Reading (SVR) to prioritize decoding in early reading instruction. Decoding is essential, and TEA has followed

this trend, as their 2019 annual report (https://tea.texas.gov/sites/default/files/tea_annual_report_2019_sp2.pdf) states that “science is summarized most easily with the Simple View of Reading” (para. 2). The SVR model suggests that readers who have underdeveloped skills in decoding or language comprehension will struggle with reading comprehension. As seen in Figure 1, the SVR describes comprehension as the product of decoding and language comprehension (Gough & Tunmer, 1986). However, researchers caution against an oversimplification of reading. Cervetti et al. (2020) express concern that even though the original SVR model gave equal footing to decoding and language comprehension, it has been used to ignite public debate and to hyperfocus on decoding and word reading (Cervetti et al., 2020). Silverman et al. (2020) share similar concerns about the minimized emphasis of language comprehension development.

Figure 1. The Simple View of Reading



Another concern is that the SOR neglects the role writing plays in literacy instruction. The reading and writing connection is one of many reasons literacy researchers, theorists, and practitioners have adopted the term literacy to be used instead of reading (Compton-Lily, 2020;

Lisenbee, et al., 2020). Graham states that “It is not possible to speak about reading and writing as if they are unrelated. Reading and writing are connected at the most intimate level” (Graham, 2020, p. S37). Although reading and writing each require specific skills, it is theorized that

what “makes one possible makes the other possible, too” (Graham, 2020, p. S37).

Texas Teacher Certification Test

As previously noted, Texas teacher candidates now take both a content exam to demonstrate proficiency in English Language Arts and Reading (ELAR) Standards and a new, “Science

of Teaching Reading” (STR) exam. Developing two sets of standards to represent literacy skills is problematic, especially if the STR standards neglect the reading and writing connection. In order to understand the categorization of the new Texas ELAR and STR standards, it is important to acknowledge the previous set of standards. Table 1 presents an overview of the old and new standards for comparison.

Table 1
Old and New Standards

2019 EC-6 ELAR Standards	New ELAR Standards	New STR Standards
Oral Language	Oral Language	Foundations of the STR
Phonological Awareness	Word Analysis & ID skills	Foundations of Reading Assessment
Alphabetic Principle	Reading Fluency	Oral Language Foundations of Reading Development
Literacy Development	Reading Comprehension & Applications	Phonological and Phonemic Awareness
Word Analysis and ID skills	Vocabulary Development	Print Concepts and Alphabetic Knowledge
Fluency Reading	Reading, Research, & Inquiry	Phonics and Other Word ID Skills
Reading Comprehension & Applications	Writing Conventions	Syllabication and Morphemic Analysis Skills
Vocabulary Development	Written Communication	Reading Fluency
Reading, Research, & Inquiry	Viewing & Representing	Vocabulary Development
Writing Conventions	Assessment of Developing Literacy	Comprehension Development
Written Communication		Comprehension of Literary Texts
Viewing and Representing		Comprehension of Information Texts
Assessment of Developing Literacy		Analysis and Response

It is important to note that each standard (Table 1), includes a competency statement and a list of descriptive statements which provide in-depth details about the skills required for each competency. The 2019 ELAR Standards, which were retrieved from the Core Subjects Preparation Manual 291 (TEA, 2019a), included the 13 competency statements and 120 descriptive statements. Currently, the ELAR Standards, which were retrieved from the Core Subjects Preparation Manual 391 (TEA, 2020b), include 10 competency statements and 89 descriptive statements. The STR Standards, which were retrieved from the STR Preparation Manual 293 (TEA, 2020a), incorporate a total of 13 competence indicators and 147 descriptive statements. Therefore, the required skills for Texas teacher candidates (EC-6 and 4-8) have increased significantly from 120 to a total of 236 skills to understand.

A Comparison of Standards

A side by side comparison of the previous and current ELAR standards (Table 1) shows that two of the ELAR standards were removed and added to the STR exam. The standards removed included standards 2 and 3: Phonological Awareness and the Alphabetic Principle. When added to the STR standards, Phonological Awareness became Phonological Awareness and Phonemic Awareness, and the Alphabetic Principle became Print Concepts and Alphabetic Knowledge. It is not a surprise that phonological and phonemic awareness skills fall under the STR standards, as these skills are heavily emphasized as the “science.”

Table 2 presents changes in the categorization of literacy skills. One additional change included the omission of standard 4, Literacy Development, from the ELAR and STR standards. Competency 4 stated, “The teacher understands that literacy develops over time, progressing from emergent to proficient stages, and uses a variety of approaches to support the development of students' literacy” (TEA, 2019a, p. 12). The skills listed under this omitted

competency were extensive and included the following descriptive statements.

The beginning teacher:

- A. Understands and promotes students’ development of literary response and analysis, including teaching students the elements of literary analysis (e.g., story elements, features of different literary genres) and providing students with opportunities to apply comprehension skills to literature.
- B. Understands that the developing reader has a growing awareness of print in the environment, the sounds in spoken words and the uses of print, in accordance with the STR.
- C. Selects and uses instructional strategies, materials and activities to assist students in distinguishing letter forms from number forms and text from pictures.
- D. Understands the importance of students being able to differentiate words and spaces, first and last letters, left-right progression, and identification of basic punctuation, in accordance with the STR.
- E. Understands that literacy development occurs in multiple contexts through reading, writing and the use of oral language.
- F. Selects and uses instructional strategies, materials and activities that focus on functions of print and concepts about print, including concepts involving book handling, parts of a book, orientation, directionality and the relationships between written and spoken words, in accordance with the STR.
- G. Demonstrates familiarity with literature and provides multiple opportunities for students to listen to, respond to and independently read literature in various genres and to interact with others about literature.
- H. Selects and uses appropriate instructional strategies to inform students about authors, authors’

- purposes for writing and author's point of view in a variety of texts.
- I. Selects and uses appropriate technology to teach students strategies for selecting books for independent reading.

- J. Understands how to foster collaboration with families and with other professionals to promote all students' literacy. TEA, 2019a

Table 2
Categorization of Literacy Skills

Skills that Stayed ELAR competencies	Skills that became STR competencies	Skills Added to STR Standards
Oral Language	Phonological Awareness	Foundations of the STR
Word Analysis & ID skills	Alphabetic Principle (became Print Concepts and Alphabetic Knowledge)	Foundations of Reading Assessment
Fluency Reading (now Reading Fluency)		Oral Language Foundations of Reading Dev.
Reading Comprehension & Applications		Phonological and Phonemic Awareness
Vocabulary Development		Phonics and Other Word ID Skills
Reading, Research, & Inquiry		Syllabication and Morphemic Analysis Skills
Writing Conventions		Reading Fluency
Written Communication		Vocabulary Development
Viewing and Representing		Comprehension Development
Assessment of Developing Literacy		Comprehension of Literary Texts
		Comprehension of Information Texts
		Analysis and Response

Upon a closer analysis, Standard 4, literacy development was not omitted entirely from competencies D and F describe the concepts of print, which are skills added to the STR standards. Competencies G, H, and I were not added elsewhere, which caused initial concern. However, in both the previous and current

teacher standards but distributed among other skills in the STR competencies. For example, fluency standards, one can find similar descriptive statements:

- F. Knows how to teach students in grades 4–6 strategies for reading books independently, including the use of

technology to support grade-level content.

G. Provides students with opportunities to engage in silent reading and extended reading of a wide range of materials, including informational texts and texts from various literary genres, as outlined in the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) for grades 4–6.

H. Uses strategies to encourage reading for pleasure and lifelong learning.

It may seem that Literary Response and Analysis (A), formerly included under Literacy Development, became its own competency within the STR framework. However, the STR competency titled Analysis and Response (competency 13) differs significantly. Whereas Literary Response and Analysis involved an understanding and promotion of “students’ development of literary response and analysis, including teaching students the elements of literary analysis (e.g., story elements, features of different literary genres) and providing students with opportunities to apply comprehension skills to literature,” (TEA, 2019a, p. 12), STR competency 13 aligns to the constructed response question on the STR exam. The competency statement indicates that the teacher candidate can “analyze assessment data related to reading development in foundation reading skills and reading comprehension, and prepare an organized, developed written response based on the data and information presented” (TEA, 2020a, p. 18). There are seven competency descriptors that further define the desired teacher skills. The constructed response question, new to Texas teacher certification requirements, requires test-takers to examine data provided in several exhibits and to demonstrate knowledge of the subject area by providing an in-depth written response.

One difference between the former standards and the new standards relates to the inclusion of dyslexia. Knowledge about dyslexia was not

included in the 2019 ELAR Standards because the state provided a dyslexia module for all certifiers which was assessed on the Texas Pedagogy and Professional Responsibilities Exam, which is also required for EC-12 certification in Texas. TEA (2020a) added dyslexia to the standard titled Foundations of the STR. Competency descriptor O states that teachers should: “Recognize that decoding-related difficulties and disabilities represent the most common source of reading difficulty; demonstrate knowledge of distinguishing characteristics of dyslexia and dysgraphia, including early indicators of dyslexia and dysgraphia; and demonstrate familiarity with evidence-based instructional strategies and best practices that general education teachers in prekindergarten through grade-3 classrooms can use to help support the literacy development of students with identified delays in decoding and spelling” (p. 5).

Another difference found between the two new sets of standards and competencies is that ELAR standards include skills used for written composition, and STR does not. Written Communication and Writing Conventions are unique to the ELAR content exam, as are Reading, Research, and Inquiry and Viewing and Representing, which both include multimodal learning and technology skills required of learners. Where the ELAR includes comprehensive skills used by readers and writers, the STR standards reflect linguistic skills. Writing skills, other than spelling/encoding, are not included in the STR standards.

STR Data

The STR exam requirement took effect on January 1, 2021. TEA implemented an eight-month introductory period in which they established a cut score to be used as a minimum threshold of items correct in order to pass the exam during a transition period. The transition period ended September 5, 2021. TEA reported a 100% pass rate for the 2021 transition period

(<https://tea4avcastro.tea.state.tx.us/ELQ/educatorprepdashboard/indicator1b.html>). Since then, recommendations were made by a standard setting committee on the passing standard to be implemented. Data on STR results are not available to the general population at this time. However, educator preparation programs have the ability to monitor and examine their candidates' certification exam passing rates.

Implications and Recommendations

TEA's efforts to improve literacy education are commendable but have added pressure during a post-pandemic era in which a teacher shortage worsens. Adding a certification test for preservice teachers has caused increased costs and time commitments.

Table 3 presents an overview of testing details related to the current required certification exams discussed in this manuscript.

Table 3

Texas Teacher Assessment Details

Exam	Exam Code	Time	# of Questions (selected response)	Cost
Core Subjects ELAR (EC-6)	391	1 hr. 10 min.	45	\$58 (\$116 if taken with other subjects included)
STR	293	5 hours	90 *also includes 1 constructed response	\$136
PPR (EC-12)	160	5 hours	100	\$116

TEA committed to the SOR with added standards and assessment. However, one may argue that teacher educators were already addressing the “science” prior to Texas legislation within the ELAR standards. According to TEA's The Science of Teaching Reading (293) Questions and Answers manual, the 391 Core, Subjects: EC-6 TExES exam was developed to remove duplicative content now assessed on the 293 STR TExES exam (TEA, 2021). Yet, the standards present on both exams include Word Analysis, Word Identification Skills, Reading Fluency, Vocabulary Development, Comprehension (labels differ), and Assessment. In addition to the overlap observed in the standard titles, overlap occurs in the descriptive statements, which is briefly addressed in this analysis. For example, both the new ELAR and STR exam include competencies related to the needs of English Learners.

Recommendations for TEA and Policy Makers

According to Texas statute (Texas Education Code, § 61.0515), 120 hours is the maximum allowed for a baccalaureate-level degree program (THECB, 2009). In other words, higher education institutions prepare EC-6 teachers to be experts at teaching science, math, social studies, reading, and writing (not to mention technology, classroom management, and other skills) within a 120 hour degree program. Within most teacher preparation programs, this 120 hour limit includes 12 hours of student teaching as well as other field-based experiences. The continuous addition of certification requirements impacts these programs greatly as they work to ensure all standards are covered effectively. In order to better serve teacher candidates, it is recommended that the TEA return to a reasonable assessment of literacy standards. One literacy exam with one set of rigorous literacy standards based on the STR is appropriate. It is also recommended that exam costs be lowered in order to alleviate stress on teacher candidates.

Teacher candidates who pass the STR examinations are still required to complete the Reading Academies when they start a job as a teacher (TEA, 2021). The Reading Academy requirement of HB 3 is mandated for all in-service teachers and administrators who teach students in grades K-3. However, passing the STR certification exam should satisfy the STR requirement and would save money and time. STR legislation was passed prior to the pandemic and teacher shortage. Now, as teachers work to address learning loss caused by the pandemic, completing a 60-120 hour Reading Academy course has added to teacher frustrations (Lopez, 2022). The frustrations seem unnecessary for those who have already demonstrated knowledge of STR skills on a certification exam.

Recommendations for Teacher Educators

This analysis focuses primarily on standard headings and competency statements. Although some of the descriptive statements have been shared, it is essential that teacher educators become familiar with all of the skills described in these descriptive statements. In addition, educators should be familiar with TEA's Reading Academies and TExES Preparation Manuals. Even though the ELAR and STR have similar objectives, TEA advocates specific models and theories in their training. For example, TEA materials include the Simple View of Reading (Gough & Tunmer, 1986), Scarborough's Reading Rope (Scarborough, 2001), and Ehri's Four Phases of Word Reading.

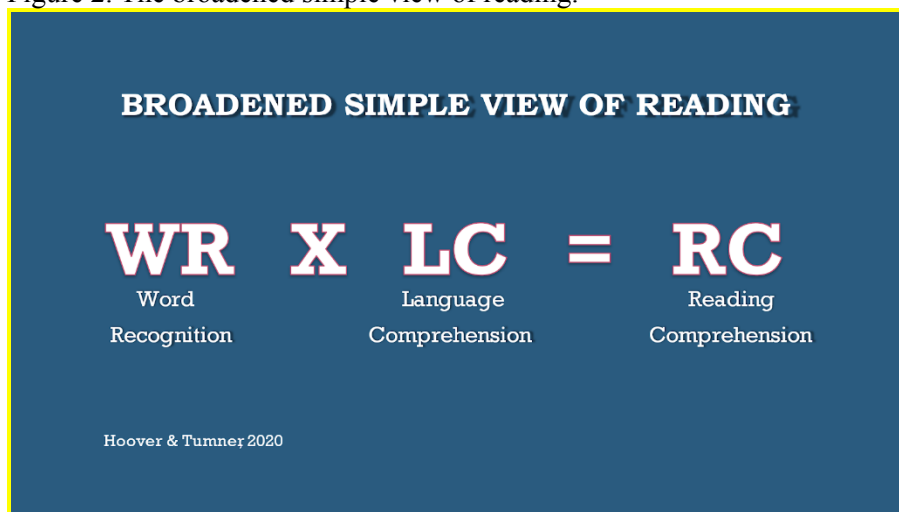
Teaching to the test is not the recommendation; however, it may be appropriate to provide STR study materials so teacher candidates may review the preferred theories, models and specific verbiage. One study source that may be useful to share with teacher candidates is a six video playlist hosted by the TExES Facebook Group in which Dr. Kristy Mulkey breaks down the STR standards and sample questions:

Video 1: https://youtu.be/55_Nv9CE_3Q
Video 2: <https://youtu.be/EtpFjw8EWqU>
Video 3: <https://youtu.be/MgWBIngzX4E>
Video 4: <https://youtu.be/gtR7PR9hVok>
Video 5: <https://youtu.be/HCQo2Nq4XJw>
Video 6: <https://youtu.be/Z88xUN84-R8>

Teacher educators should support their candidates' understanding of the constructed response questions as well. It would be helpful to assist candidates in understanding the scoring criteria for the constructed response question through the use of the scoring rubric, sample responses, and rationales shared in the preparation manual.

Finally, it is essential that teacher educators incorporate instruction that demonstrates ways science evolves. Researchers continue to study literacy acquisition. Theories and models evolve. For example, Hoover and Tunmer (2020) adapted the Simple View of Reading (Figure 2) by revising the D (decoding) to WR (word recognition). This adaptation reflected a broadened understanding of reading.

Figure 2. The broadened simple view of reading.



Duke and Cartwright (2021) argue that the Simple View of Reading (SVR) should be replaced with the more complex Active View of Reading (2021) in order to reflect an up-to-date representation of what reading requires and where instruction must be focused. In a recent article, they describe research in three areas of science that have occurred since the SVR model was introduced in 1986. They express concern that the causes of reading difficulties expand beyond that depicted in the SVR and maintain that “many practitioners have not yet been offered other models that can more productively guide their practice” (Duke and Cartwright, 2021, p. 15). Educators must understand the complexities of literacy and literacy instruction.

Concluding Thoughts about the STR

The noted overlap between ELAR and STR standards makes sense because both of these sets of standards describe skills related to literacy instruction. However, overlap across standards means preservice teachers are paying to take two literacy certification tests that cover similar content. Texas is one of many states with new policies related to the SOR. The policies, a result of assumptions that literacy educators were not teaching the “science” prior to the test, have impacted teacher candidates. The media

continually publishes claims that “a majority of teachers still haven’t been given the knowledge or instruction to effectively teach children to read” (Moats, n.d., para. 7) and that “most teachers nationwide are not being taught reading science in their teacher preparation programs because many deans and faculty in colleges of education either don’t know the science or dismiss it” (Hanford, 2018, para. 9). Texas educators express concerns about the current discourse related to the STR. University of Texas professors Wetzel et al. (2020) contributed to the 2020 *RRQ* issue to resist “positionings of struggle in the science of teaching reading discourse” and “the targeting of teachers and teacher educators by policymakers and popular media writers” (p. 319). Chase Young opened the 2022 TALE conference with concerns about the media’s representation of the SOR. In his presentation on “Artfully Teaching the Science of Reading,” Young bridged SOR with artful approaches to teaching reading, an intentional effort to increase students’ motivation and positive attitudes toward reading (Young et al., 2022). It is important that educators continue to explore science, pedagogy, and artful teaching. As literacy educators and researchers, it is essential to advocate for teachers and students.

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Vocabulary Instruction in the Early Grades

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Abstract

Some children come to school with a smaller vocabulary than their peers. If children do not have knowledge of the meaning of the words they read in texts, they will fail to comprehend those texts and struggle to keep up with their peers. This is critical because the link between vocabulary and comprehension is very clear (Sticht et al., 1974, as cited in Vadasy & Nelson, 2012). If teachers do not intervene when students are in the early grades, we see that those children who know more words learn additional words more quickly, and subsequently, other children could continue to struggle with reading (Stanovich, 1986). Consequently, some children struggle with reading even more when they enter the upper elementary grades where they can fall into what is referred to as the “fourth-grade slump” when children are beginning to encounter words and word meanings that are increasingly challenging (Chall et al., 1990, p. 1). The author discusses the importance of teaching vocabulary and what vocabulary instruction can look like in the early grades to combat this challenge.

Keywords: *vocabulary instruction, early grade teachers, vocabulary strategies*

It is important to understand how to effectively teach vocabulary, especially in the early grades because according to Hiebert, Goodwin, and Cervetti (2017), when children’s vocabularies are smaller when they start school, their prospects for reading successes may depend on the depth of those school experiences. These children depend on educators to help bridge the gaps in word knowledge. Educators face a daunting chore in providing rich vocabulary instruction to all students (Hiebert et al., 2017) and must consider that in the early grades (kindergarten through third grade), students have more to learn because they also must learn all basic literacy skills. The purpose of this paper is

to emphasize the importance of teaching vocabulary in the early grades by naming vocabulary as a foundational skill as well as by sharing practical information for early grade teachers to teach vocabulary.

Why Teach Vocabulary in the Early Grades?

Foundational Literacy Skills Include Vocabulary

By the end of third grade, students are supposed to have been exposed to all foundational literacy skills necessary to read grade-level text, and if they do not have those skills, they are at risk of

failure (Snow & Matthews, 2016). The Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills standards (2019, p.13), as specified by grade level, task students with practicing these foundational skills by second grade without adult assistance for the first time with texts that are grade level specific. Snow and Matthews found that teachers of students in kindergarten, first, second, and third grade focus on helping children learn the basic principles of mapping sound to print and mapping print to sound. Teachers spending time only on word recognition and phonics could cause a problem because research shows that even children who are fluent at decoding still struggle with comprehension if they do not know the meanings of the words in the text they are reading (Chall & Jacobs, 2003; Wright & Neuman, 2014). This section discussed vocabulary instruction as a foundational skill. The next section discusses the importance of vocabulary instruction.

The Importance of Vocabulary Instruction

Vocabulary instruction is important in the development of children's reading comprehension. Early vocabulary knowledge predicts children's reading achievement later in school (Silverman & Crandell, 2010). Rasinski (2019) notes that vocabulary knowledge is necessary; without it, we cannot truly know a text's meaning. Even though vocabulary and comprehension are closely related, there is evidence that school has a limited impact on children's vocabulary development (Christian et al., 2000; Wright & Cervetti, 2016). More recently, however, research documents and literacy standards have sought to change the limited impact of vocabulary instruction in classrooms by reinforcing the importance of vocabulary instruction and recommending explicit instruction of vocabulary words as well as vocabulary learning strategies for determining the meaning of unknown words students encounter in the texts they read. As Wright and Cervetti (2016) explain, "the goal of vocabulary instruction is not only knowledge of

a word's meaning but also easy access of the word's meaning in memory" (p. 204). It is also important to understand that an explanation of what vocabulary is should include a mention of student's level of understanding, more specifically breadth, or the size of their mental lexicon, depth, or the robustness of their word knowledge, and fluency, or the rate that they can gain access to word meanings (Hennessy, 2021). In fact, there is research to suggest that depth of vocabulary knowledge helps with reading comprehension starting in the early grades and grows more important as students encounter increasingly challenging texts (Vadasy & Nelson, 2012), further demonstrating the importance of vocabulary instruction.

Vocabulary Instruction in the Early Grades

Research shows that early grade teachers can support children's vocabulary learning in their classrooms to help prevent later reading difficulties (Sparapani et al., 2018). There is not much research conducted concerning how early childhood teachers learn to support their students' vocabulary learning, nor is there an adequate amount of research about vocabulary instruction in the early-grade classroom (Harriell et al., 2011). Astoundingly, there is clear evidence that when vocabulary is taught to young children, they learn vocabulary no matter their background (Marulis & Neuman, 2010, 2013). It is also clear that both exposure and word teaching are effective in vocabulary instruction (Wright & Neuman, 2014). Even though the effects of vocabulary instruction on reading comprehension are more direct in the upper grades, it is important to keep in mind that this relationship is evident in early reading development as well (Tabors et al., 2001; Vadasy & Nelson, 2012). There is research on language and vocabulary development in the early grades that implies literacy skill, including phonological awareness and vocabulary are connected and change roles over time in literacy skills development, making a case for early language experiences in vocabulary instruction

(Vadasy & Nelson, 2012 p. 2-3). The standard in the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills states that children should be able to:

- use print and digital resources,
- use context to determine the meanings of words,
- use and explain figurative language, and
- identify the meaning of affixes expressively by second grade (Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills, 2019, p.13).

Children also need opportunities for both direct and indirect instruction along a continuum because of the vast number of words they will possibly be exposed to each year (Graves, 2009; Hennessey, 2021, p. 62). Christ and Wang (2010) say that there are four ways that teachers can help with young children's vocabulary learning. Teachers can provide meaningful exposures, teach words intentionally, teach word learning strategies, and create opportunities to use new words. To continue the discussion of vocabulary, it is important to connect theory to vocabulary instruction and explain how children learn to read, thus giving educators another glimpse at how to teach vocabulary.

Connecting Theory to Vocabulary Instruction

Effective vocabulary instruction presents definitional and contextual information; it provides encounters with words in multiple ways and engages students in the active processing of word meaning (McKeown, 2019). We can more effectively teach vocabulary if we understand how children learn to read. Learning to read words and understand the meanings of those words is a major challenge for early readers, yet both are needed in comprehension (2019). It has been noted in this research that some early grade teachers focus more on foundational literacy skills with minimal attention for vocabulary instruction. It is important to restate the fact that vocabulary

knowledge is a foundational skill because it supports the development of critical reading skills like phonological awareness which is a precondition for decoding skills (Vadasy & Nelson, 2012). The first theory is Ehri's Phases of Word Learning.

Phases of Learning to Read

Ehri (2005) suggested that reading development is a progression towards automaticity in word reading, meaning that when words are known well enough readers can recognize their meaning and pronunciation automatically without attention or effort at sounding out letters. This automaticity ultimately frees a child's attention to focus on the meaning of the words in the texts they were reading. Studies conducted in the early 2000s show that alphabet knowledge enhances the learning of new vocabulary words. The four phases of development of sight word knowledge-are important because once the alphabetic mapping structure is known, a reader can build the meaning of sight words, or words children know with automaticity with repeated encounters (Ehri, 2005). Ehri made the concept of alphabetic processing pivotal to the definition of all four phases (Beech, 2005). These phases are:

- Pre-alphabetic Phase: Non-readers rely on environmental print.
- Partial Alphabetic: Children are learning letters and letter sounds.
- Full Alphabetic phase: Children are forming complete connections between those letters and sounds.
- Consolidated Alphabetic Phase: Students are increasing their sight word memory of words.

Models of Skilled Reading

Skilled reading as explained in the simple view of reading (Gough & Tunmer, 1986) is a formula made of two basic parts. Language comprehension is the ability to get meaning from spoken words when they are in sentences

or they are a part of oral communication, and word recognition is decoding to the fluent recall of words. Making use of the relationship between letters and sounds to identify unknown words is the basis for acquiring word specific knowledge, which includes the knowledge of irregular words (Ehri, 2005; Tunmer & Chapman, 2012; Tunmer & Nicholson, 2011). It is also important to mention that according to Tunmer and Chapman (2012), vocabulary knowledge contributes to the development of both decoding skills and word recognition.

Scarborough's Reading Rope explains that skilled reading is like strands of rope that are woven together during the course of a child becoming a skilled reader (Scarborough, 2001). The critical strands for language comprehension are background knowledge, vocabulary, language structures, verbal reasoning, and literacy knowledge. Each becomes increasingly strategic as a student's skill level increases. The other critical strand—word recognition—is made up of phonological awareness, decoding, and sight recognition of familiar words (Scarborough, 2001). These get increasingly fluent as a student's skill level increases as Ehri explained in her phases of word reading. The strands of both language comprehension and word recognition began as single strands that were woven together with the result of skilled reading. These skills, sharpened during instruction and experience, develop interactively and not independently (2001).

Using these theories, we can understand that vocabulary instruction in the early grade classroom begins with developing oral language; in fact, there is research to support the idea that oral vocabulary knowledge influences the development of word recognition skills (Tunmer & Chapman, 2012). It starts with phonological awareness, beginning with oral language. During this time, educators can build students' word knowledge through conversations both teacher to student and student to student, by reading aloud books with rich and new words the

children may not be familiar with and by modeling the use of language of the standards. For example, the word horizontal can be used instead of or interchanged with "hot dog" when referring to how to fold a paper in a kindergarten or first grade classroom. In truth, children are exposed to more unique and rich words when being read to than they are through the conversations we have with them (Dobbertin, 2015). Exposing children to a breadth of vocabulary knowledge during Ehri's (2005) full alphabetic phase of word learning can increase the possibility of closing gaps in word knowledge with which some of our children may come to school. There is research to support the idea that exposing second and fifth graders to the spellings of new vocabulary enhances their memory for pronunciations and meanings of those words (Ehri, 2007). As students are learning words, teachers can pronounce, and explain new words to students while showing them how the words are spelled to strengthen vocabulary instruction (2007). Teachers can model how students can use context to understand the meaning of new words as well as other word learning strategies. There is no single theory that has been identified that captures reading progress because the complex nature of learning to read is dependent on several components and there are very few learning or reading theories that explicitly address vocabulary development and instruction (Moody et al., 2018). The theories used in this paper were used to show the importance of vocabulary instruction and make the case for vocabulary development as a foundational literacy skill. Vocabulary instruction and vocabulary instructional strategies will be discussed next.

Vocabulary Instruction and Vocabulary Instructional Strategies

Children need a continuum of direct and indirect opportunities for learning because of the vast amount of new words they eventually will encounter each year. Graves (2009) as cited by Hennessy (2021, p.62) has created a four-part

structured approach that targets both acquisition and application of vocabulary knowledge as well as both direct and indirect opportunities for word learning. This approach includes:

- providing rich and varied language experiences
- teaching individual words
- teaching word learning strategies
- fostering word consciousness

This paper will continue with indirect vocabulary instruction, direct vocabulary instruction, and vocabulary instructional strategies.

Indirect Vocabulary Instruction

As students are reading, writing, listening, and speaking, they are learning words and building their vocabulary. Children come to school with varying amounts of words in their lexicon and in the primary grades, most words are learned incidentally, as children are reading, listening, engaging in conversations in the classroom and writing as mentioned above (Graves, 2006, p. 38). Students in the early grades do not learn many words from the reading they do in school because the books that are in classrooms are made up of words that were already in their oral vocabularies, which make good sense when in the learning to read stage (2006). Independent reading in an early grade classroom does more to reinforce early reading skills and words in their oral vocabularies. In fact, Solity and Vouden (2009) as cited by Castle et al. (2018) analyzed the vocabulary found in books in year 1 and 2 classrooms with students ages 5 to 7. The books in the classroom consisted of high frequency words, phonically regular words, and a set of story books typical for that age group. They found that the books could be decoded by students who knew about 64 grapheme-phoneme correspondences and about 75% of the words were one syllable words. The issue is that word choice in those books is likely to be restricted and inferior to real books.

Wide reading becomes a bigger source of vocabulary development once children can read independently (Hennessy, 2021). It is important to note that indirect vocabulary instruction happens in three ways: through daily oral language, independent reading, and by listening to reading. Effective read-aloud opportunities required intentional text selection and teacher moves that model literacy strategies with think-aloud and engaging student participation (Slay & Morton, 2020). For our young students, the read-aloud is a natural and developmentally suitable way to expand their vocabulary.

Students hear new words that are supported in context by illustrations and text that help carry meaning. The teacher is modeling how they use images and text to understand what the unfamiliar words might mean as they are reading. Trelease (2013) noted that one of the most important activities teachers do to build the knowledge necessary for success in reading is reading aloud to children. Reading with children and sharing the joy and love for reading helps children learn that joy and love of reading for themselves (Burkins & Yaris, 2016, p. 30).

Direct Vocabulary Instruction

Students cannot learn through indirect teaching all the words they need to know to access grade-level text and to comprehend enough to make meaning (Beck et al., 2013). It is important to teach some words directly. Direct vocabulary instruction is explicitly teaching word meaning and word learning strategies. Beck et al. (2013) estimate that students are taught about 400 words in an academic year for students in kindergarten through 9th grade. When thinking of direct instruction, then comes the thought of which words to teach. Remembering that some words are learned incidentally through informal everyday interactions, we consider words that students need to know to follow the meaning of stories read aloud or of subjects being learned. Beck et al., (1987) developed the concept of three “word tiers.” They are:

1. Tier One: basic, everyday words

2. Tier Two: words that were high use by mature language users
3. Tier Three: words that were academic and content specific: low frequency.

Next, teachers decide when and how to teach the words they choose. Some words are pre-taught, and others are taught after a lesson. To decide when, some researchers say that teachers should focus on which words need to be clarified for students so that understanding them does not get in the way of their comprehension of the text being read aloud or text they are reading independently. When teaching vocabulary after reading, the focus is on teaching words to add to students' vocabularies, then you teach them in context and/or after reading.

Vocabulary Instruction Strategies

Early grade students in Texas are charged to learn how to use print and digital resources, use context within and beyond a sentence, and identify affixes, synonyms, and antonyms to understand the meaning of unfamiliar words (Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills, 2019, p.13). Students also are expected to use newly acquired vocabulary expressively in their "reading, writing, listening, and speaking" (2019). As stated above, Graves (2009), as cited by Hennessy (2021), discussed a systematic approach for vocabulary acquisition and application. The final portion of this text will focus on teaching word learning strategies. We will focus on using the dictionary, using context clues, and using morphemic analysis, so we will address morphology, the study of word parts to focus on morphemic analysis.

Using Morphemic Analysis

When students grapple with an unknown word, they can use their knowledge of morphology or word parts. By second grade, students in Texas would learn the affixes -un, -re, -ly, -er, -est, -ion, -tion, and -sion (TEKS, 2019, p. 3). These are called morphemes or meaningful word parts

that are prefixes (coming before a root or base word) or suffixes (coming at the end of a root or base word). Teaching the meanings of these affixes helps students recognize these meaningful word parts in unfamiliar words they encountered in their reading of text. Nagy and Scott (2000) said that students who were struggling readers might benefit from explicit morphological awareness as early as second grade. It was recommended that affixes that were taught at a specific grade level be word parts and then added to a base or root word.

Using a Dictionary

In Texas, students are supposed to use "print and digital" resources to find the meaning and pronunciation of unknown words (TEKS, 2019, p. 3). Different types of dictionaries are most useful when children understand when and how to use them (Hennessy, 2021). Students must learn alphabetical order, use of guide words, symbols, abbreviations, and overall format structures if teachers are introducing them to traditional print books, but using dictionaries tailored to children will help at risk students make sense of dictionary definitions (2021).

Using Context Clues

Researchers believe that even a small improvement in children's ability to use context clues has the potential to produce long-term growth (Hennessy, 2021). It is important that students are taught why, when, and how to use context, what kinds of clues are helpful, and to look for clues (Blachowicz & Fisher, 2009; Hennessey, 2021). The types to consider are listed here:

- definition
- synonyms
- antonyms
- examples
- general

We understand teaching children word learning strategies is very important, and we as educators should tailor our instruction to help students use those strategies to understand word meanings independently (Graves, 2006).

Conclusion

Vocabulary is a foundational skill that is a necessary part of skilled reading. Teaching vocabulary should be a part of foundational

literacy instruction. Research shows that early grades are the best time to develop vocabulary because of brain growth during that time. Intentionally teaching vocabulary by focusing on academic vocabulary, using technology, directly teaching several words, repeating those words, and training teachers about the importance of teaching in the early grades will help ameliorate the gaps in word knowledge that some students may bring to school.

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Literacy Advocacy Is About More Than Just Literacy

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Abstract

The Advocacy Development Committee has a mission to “advocate about, advocate for, and support the importance of lifelong literacy learning in and through education.” Educators continue facing challenges. The committee explores ways that literacy educators can advocate, such as making self-care a priority, educating oneself, joining a professional organization, building relationships in the literacy community, and taking legislative action.

Keywords: *literacy advocacy; lifelong literacy learning; book challenges; government*

During the 2022 TALE Conference in Plano, the Advocacy Development Committee met to discuss the challenges facing teachers today. The mission of the Advocacy Development Committee is to “advocate about, advocate for, and support the importance of lifelong literacy learning in and through education.” The committee builds alliances with other organizations and creates a network among literacy educators and other stakeholders.

The committee led a variety of deep discussions on what literacy educators were facing in their school districts including challenges with banned books, book access for all students, and the general pressures educators are facing daily.

Members realized that, even though they are literacy advocates, they have a responsibility to encourage all educators to be advocates. As it is commonly said among educators: We are all literacy teachers. This means other content area teachers should be aware that they need to be literacy advocates as well. The conversation was also a reminder that teachers need to advocate for themselves now more than ever before.

Teachers don’t come into the profession for the money or the glamor. Educators come to the profession to make an impact. They may have been inspired by another teacher growing up. They may have dreams of changing the world. They may simply be called to work with

children. However, those reasons are no longer keeping them in the classroom. Literacy teachers who have been at the front lines have faced challenges with book banning (Connolly, 2022; Free Speech Under Attack, 2022; Letter from Matt Krause, 2021), accessibility to a diverse range of books, and the debate between print versus digital books (Engbrecht, 2018; Wolf, 2019). These teachers are harassed and often feel as if defeat is waiting for them as they navigate through these rough waters. Many feel left out of the decision-making process. Let us not forget the challenges of online learning, pandemic related issues, and school safety. Not only have teachers faced seemingly insurmountable mountains of fears and challenges over the past several years because of COVID, digital-learning, recognizing trauma in students, school safety, and the added level of distrust from parents, they also are expected to go against what they believe is best for students: learning to think on their own. Books are not only important for literacy teachers and their students, they are a vital component of how to help learners expand their understanding of the world in a safe way.

According to a national survey conducted by the RAND Corporation in 2021, the data showed that one in every four teachers had considered leaving the profession (Steiner & Woo, 2021). Texas, like many states across the country, is struggling with teacher shortages. The Texas State Teachers Association (TSTA) surveyed members and found that 70% of their members were seriously considering leaving the profession at the end of the 2021-2022 school year (Robinson, 2022). The pandemic added to what teachers were feeling: overworked, underpaid, stressed out, and undervalued. The uncertainty and pressure so many felt as a result of pandemic teaching only made them more likely to retire or leave the profession entirely (NEA, 2022).

In addition to the pandemic, Texas mandated the HB3 Reading Academies in 2019 to improve

literacy across the state. The mandate required K-3 teachers and principals to complete the HB3 Reading Academies by the end of the 2022-2023 school year outside of their typical teaching day. The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), a national measurement for student achievement in the United States, released state rankings based on each state's scores. Texas ranked 42nd in fourth-grade reading and 46th in eighth-grade reading nationwide (Texas Education Agency, 2019). There is no doubt that Texas must do better for students. However, the timing of implementation added more stress to classroom teachers. Now is a time more than ever that teachers need not only to advocate for their students but also to advocate for themselves as well. Yet teachers are busy, and advocating can be time-consuming. So what can teachers do?

As members of the TALE Advocacy Development Committee, we are working to find ways to help teachers across Texas understand how to advocate for the things they need in order to be successful educators as well as ways they can become more informed about the policies that affect them. As literacy educators and advocates, we often think learning how to advocate is similar to using Lev Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) (1978) with students: We can all reach the next level of understanding with a little help.

Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development is based on the idea that a person's actual developmental level is determined by their independent level. The person works at a level that is attainable through facilitation and working with others in a collaborative setting. This means that literacy educators can reach a higher level of accomplishment when they have support. With the proper scaffolds, they can accomplish more rigorous and challenging experiences (Vygotsky, 1978). Just like we help students learn to read or participate in deep analytical conversations relating to character and comprehension one step at a time until they are

ready to do it themselves, we believe we can all become better advocates for literacy education one comfort level at a time.

Make Self-Care a Priority

Being a successful literacy advocate can be challenging. Whether you are advocating for books that represent the diversity of your classroom or going to a school board meeting to advocate for a book that is being considered for banning, you have to make yourself a priority. Practicing self-care is important to advocacy work. It means being aware of what is needed for personal balance. For some, that means going to as many school events as possible, being extra creative with hands-on activities for their students, and fully immersing themselves in the literacy community around the school. For others, it means giving 100% of their time and focus to the students in their rooms during work hours and then putting that away to focus on home and self-care. An alarming 75% of teachers have reported job-related stress, compared to 40% of individuals in other working fields (Steiner & Woo, 2021). Teaching should not be one of the most stressful jobs in the country; yet, because of the current political climate and expectations thrust upon educators, it has become one of the most stressful careers in the country. Making time for self-care is the first priority when advocating.

There are things that a teacher can do to make self-care a priority. First, begin by setting boundaries for yourself and others. If those boundaries include not taking a text or call after a certain time of day, then you must do it. You need to have that mental break away from the job. Spend time reading a good book, enjoy time with your family, or sit down and have a quiet meal. It is important to set boundaries between work and home.

How is this advocating? You may have to speak up to your school administrator who may text late into the night or a teammate who calls to ask

a question about a lesson or share his or her panic about a parent challenging the novel students are going to begin soon. It is also important to set the expectation that parents will not hear from you after hours. These small changes are a form of advocating. If you are not at your best, you cannot be the best for your students and family. Make your work/home balance a priority.

Next, make mental health a part of your conversation with others. School administrators and district leaders can take the lead by making time during the school year to check in on the mental health of their teachers. Provide professional development on teacher mental health, create a staff meeting that addresses the stress teachers are facing, or invite guest speakers to talk with teachers about self-care in the teaching profession. The goal is to create a community of support. This includes teachers finding someone to talk to about the stresses they are facing.

Studies have shown that teachers with strong relationships with their peers on campus are more likely to be pleased with their job, which results in lower stress levels (Aldridge & Fraser, 2015; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2011). So, take time before a team meeting to catch up with each other. That time should not be one of negativity and complaining that will drain the balance you have worked hard to achieve. It is important to build relationships with each other. Sometimes knowing you have someone going through the same challenges relieves some stress. The Advocacy Committee suggests ending meetings with laughter. Share the small moments that all teachers crave.

If teachers are not taking care of their own needs, which historically has been a downfall in our profession, they will always find it hard to be at their best in the classroom. That also means they will be less likely to advocate, or even care about advocating, for their classroom and students. They will simply be too worn out

emotionally, mentally, and maybe even physically. As a result, they cannot be the best literacy leaders needed in today's educational climate. Balance, like advocating, is different for everyone and should be a work of heart.

Educate Yourself

Advocating is about more than being a voice in the room that is not afraid to speak up. It involves being brave enough to ask questions and challenge injustice. It involves reading widely and increasing your own literacy knowledge to be able to think critically, carefully, and deeply about the best ways to improve your ability to teach students using books and reading strategies. In an interview on the Oprah Winfrey show, Maya Angelou said, "Now that I know better, I do better" (Winfrey, 2011). As educators, we are constantly striving to do better, but we cannot do better unless we know better.

Fortunately, there is a plethora of professional publications available to us. The research that is available to educators on topics such as trauma-informed teaching, literacy, instructional practice, data-driven instruction, and even reports from the Texas Education Agency (TEA) and the Texas Association of School Boards (TASB) helps us all to be more informed. The world has also offered us an abundance of podcasts focusing on education, literacy, literacy legislation, and instructional practices. If you lack sustained time to focus on a professional book, find a podcast or two that speaks to you.

Additionally, following groups like the U. S. Department of Education, Texas Education Association (TEA), and other focus groups on social media is an easy way to dive into the world of educational information. Following those groups does not mean you have to engage, but it does mean that you will have access to the way different groups in Texas and across the country are responding to issues relating to education, literacy, and literature.

Finally, educating yourself also opens doors to networking opportunities. The best advocates interact with those who have different points of view and are from different areas than they are, whether that means different districts, cities, counties, states, countries, or professional organizations. We cannot be effective advocates if we do not understand the perspectives of those advocating against what teachers understand as better practices for quality literacy instruction and literature.

Join a Professional Organization

For those teachers who have found balance and are ready for their next level of advocacy development, the first step should be to find a professional literacy organization that speaks to them. The strength teachers get typically comes from other professionals in the field of literacy. More minds can develop wondrous ideas that can change literacy education for the better. Literacy professional organizations tend to offer a community in which the teacher can get information and protection about their rights, expand their knowledge, obtain professional resources, and relieve stress by connecting with other literacy educators. Each of us on the Advocacy Development Committee feels strongly that one of the ways we have grown into the educators we have become is because of the organizations we have been a part of, especially as members of TALE.

As literacy educators, attending ongoing professional development is a way for educators to reflect on and improve their practices. Literacy educators tend to feel empowered after attending professional development (Murray, 2010). This is why many professional literacy organizations offer professional development opportunities. It is not only a time for teachers to reflect on their practices, but attending these professional development opportunities also allows literacy educators to connect with others within the organization. Building relationships

within the literacy community is beneficial to educators.

The first step could be attending a literacy conference, like TALE's annual conference. Surrounding yourself with other literacy educators can be invigorating. Many literacy conferences offer social events where you can connect with others in the field of literacy. Attend one social event, even if it is out of your comfort zone. If attending a literacy conference is not in the budget or comfort level, join or start a book study with a group in your community. Book studies focused on a particular literacy topic open up great dialogue and allow reflection on literacy practices. Professional literacy organizations such as TALE often offer professional development opportunities through book study.

Not only does membership in a professional literacy organization help teachers to build their networks, but organizations also often have advocacy committees that are doing the work to help educate their members. Those committees are seeking out information that they believe their members need to know about literacy, whether it is legislative, local, or statewide. They work to listen to their membership and find literacy resources so that advocacy can be done. Additionally, professional organizations that focus on literacy understand the importance of literature and literacy education and will help members to focus on specific issues. The earlier you get involved in an organization, the quicker you will begin to grow your professional network and grow as an educator. Networking with other literacy professionals can help you find other educators, administrators, and legislators who are advocating for students' rights to read (International Literacy Association, 2018).

Take Legislative Action

Many literacy teachers do not know where to begin when it comes to legislative actions. They

could be overwhelmed simply caring for and guiding the hearts and minds that are in their classrooms daily. They may not feel they have the knowledge, time, or professional security to explore all the legal language that goes into legislating, nor do they know where to find reliable, user-friendly information.

To help literacy teachers build their legislative knowledge, we offer some suggestions below.

- Set a Google Alert for any literacy topic that is important to you: Texas legislative education, HB 4545, Texas book challenges, state book review requirements, etc.
- Follow groups like Raise Your Hand Texas, Association for Texas Professional Educators (ATPE), Texas for the Right to Read, Texas Educators Vote, The League of Women Voters TX, and TXLege.
- When information is shared about a public education hearing, take the time to watch the recast of the hearing.
- Write or phone your local legislators about your concerns.
- Make connections with those who legislate in your area.
- Learn about your State Board of Education members, and find out their positions on literacy and literature in classrooms.
- Read your district policies so that you are fully informed from a local standpoint about what is expected when choosing or challenging literature.
- Don't be afraid to ask questions.

Additionally, the TALE Advocacy Development Committee is working to build a digital library for members to use to continue to move up in their Zone of Proximal Development (Vygotsky, 1978) of advocacy understanding.

Understanding legislative actions does not mean that educators need to be at the state capitol with

signs in hand, although we encourage that if you are so inclined. Understanding legislative actions can be as simple as reading proposed bills and discussing those with friends and family. Help them to see your perspective as an educator. Encourage friends, family, and colleagues to read the books that are being challenged in order to have conversations about their merit. Invite those who are questioning the importance of how we teach students to read and write to visit your classroom and learn along with children to see the power of literacy education. Your knowledge and conversations regarding what is happening in the Texas legislature can help to spark a movement among those in your circle. Small movements that are

passionate, persistent, and strong create large ripples.

The primary goal of the Advocacy Development Committee is to help literacy educators discover their voices and find ways to feel comfortable working to improve the literacy lives of the students they serve. The committee welcomes new members to join and participate. The Advocacy Development Committee will continue working to help keep the members of TALE informed so you can all feel more prepared to speak out for quality literacy education, literature, and the rights of students to read and be seen in the books they read.

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