

*From the Editors*

# LOOKING BACK AND MOVING FORWARD: A CONTENT ANALYSIS OF THE FIRST FIVE VOLUMES OF THE TEXAS JOURNAL OF LITERACY EDUCATION

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## ABSTRACT

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*The purpose of this article is to share with readers the content published in the TALE journal, the Texas Journal of Literacy Education, during its five years of existence. Types of contributions, intended audiences, and major content of articles are presented. The themes that emerged after a close analysis of articles represent a wide variety of topics addressing the field of literacy education. In order of frequency, the topics for which the journal has published articles are: foundational literacy knowledge; children's and adolescents' literature; instructional technology and digital literacy; English Learners and grammar instruction; writing instruction; content area literacy and disciplinary literacy; and literacy coaching and professional development.*

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**T**he Texas Association of Literacy Education (TALE) is a relatively new state organization. In 2012, Dr. Jack Cassidy, a former president of the International Reading Association (IRA), created TALE at the Literacy Summit, hosted by the Specialized Literacy Professionals Special Interest Group (IRA) in San Antonio. Since its inception, TALE has grown to over 400 members. Each year, the organization hosts a conference in a Texas city and publishes a subsequent yearbook highlighting several of the conference sessions. The *Texas Journal of Literacy Education's* (TJLE) first issue was published in 2013. We, the current editorial team, decided that the five-year anniversary of the organization was a perfect time to present a brief content analysis of the journal's first five years.

The mission of TALE is to “promote literacy that will enhance the lives of all Texas citizens personally, socially, and economically.” Furthermore, the organization has as some of its core values the following:

- utilization of evidence-based teaching practices in designing and offering instruction;
- adapting instruction to individuals and contexts as needed;
- continued study of teaching through personal professional development;
- support of new professionals entering the field and inservice teachers working to improve practice; and
- advocating with parents, community, media, local councils, and policy makers.

The purpose of this article is to share with readers how the TALE journal, the *Texas Journal of Literacy Education*, has addressed each of these values during its five years of existence.

Two editorial teams have dedicated their professional service to the TJLE to produce a quality collection of practice-based and research articles for its readership by recruiting an incredible list of reviewers and editing and formatting manuscripts for publication. The first team to edit the journal consisted of Leslie Haas, Buena Vista University; Debra Lee, Texas A&M University – Commerce; Susan Szabo, Texas A&M University – Commerce; and Sheri Vasinda, Oklahoma State University. The current and outgoing editors are Chase Young, Sam Houston State University; Bethanie Pletcher, Texas A&M University – Corpus Christi; and Sherrye Garrett, Texas A&M University – Corpus Christi.

## TYPES OF CONTRIBUTIONS AND INTENDED AUDIENCES

The TJLE editors have strived to create journal issues that are not only representative of salient topics in the field of literacy education, but are also inclusive of different types of papers written for a variety of audiences.

The first ten issues of the journal encompass a total of 64 articles, written by 137 authors. While most (72%) of authors reside and work in the state of Texas, the journal has enjoyed contributions from professionals in 14 states other than Texas and four other countries. As TJLE accepts all manners of manuscripts, the contributions over the past five years represent a fairly even distribution of types of papers. Thirty-nine percent of articles are non-research descriptions and/or literature reviews; 38% are categorized as research or action research; and 23% are practical ideas presented for use in the classroom.

TJLE authors have contributed articles written for a variety of audiences. Articles written for teachers of primary- and elementary-aged children comprised the largest percentage (41%), with articles written for teachers at all levels of instruction accounting for 20% of submissions. Eleven percent addressed those teaching in the secondary grades and 9% addressed teachers of middle

school children. Articles for teacher educators and articles for early childhood teachers were the audiences for eight percent of articles each. The remaining articles were written for those working with adult learners at the post-secondary level.

### MAJOR CONTENT OF PUBLISHED ARTICLES

To determine the areas of literacy that articles published in Volumes 1 through 5 of the *Texas Journal of Literacy Education*, the title and abstract of each article was inserted into a table. For research articles, the major findings and conclusions were included. For those articles providing classroom application ideas and/or descriptions of concepts, the gist of these concepts was included.

The themes that emerged after a close analysis of articles represent a wide variety of topics addressing the field of literacy education, as the journal’s audience is, as noted above, quite varied. In order of frequency, the topics for which the journal has published articles are: foundational literacy knowledge; children’s and adolescents’ literature; instructional technology and digital literacy; English Learners and grammar instruction; writing instruction; content area literacy and disciplinary literacy; and literacy coaching and professional development (Table 1).

**Table 1.** Frequencies and percentages of Articles by Topic

Topic	n = 64, f (%)
Foundational Literacy Knowledge	21 (33%)
Children’s and Adolescents’ Literature	14 (22%)
Instructional Technology and Digital Literacy	11 (17%)
English Learners and Grammar Instruction	7 (11%)
Writing Instruction	7 (11%)
Content and Disciplinary Literacy	6 (9%)
Literacy Coaching and Professional Development	6 (9%)
Other Topics	4 (6%)

\*Note: 17% of articles covered two or more topics

### FOUNDATIONAL LITERACY KNOWLEDGE

The majority of articles (33%) published in the TJLE during its first five years relate to the foundational aspects of literacy, namely early literacy instruction, literacy intervention practices, and comprehension and fluency.

Jerry Johns and Kristine Wilke (2018) contributed to the previous issue an invited article, “High Frequency Words: Some Ways to Teach and Help Students Practice and Learn Them,” concerning the nature of high frequency words and teaching them to automaticity in order to increase reading accuracy. Other contributions related to word study include an informative look at how teachers might use research to critically examine their spelling curriculum and make informed decisions (Putman, 2017) and a practical piece on using “cap kits” (instructional materials made of recycled bottle caps) to enhance the learning of basic literacy skills (Sanderson, 2017). Three articles shared studies of early readers’ literacy lives and how teachers can build on young children’s perceptions

of themselves as readers, as well as their home literacy practices (Curry, Reeves, & McIntyre, 2016; Kinkead-Clark, 2017; Walker, 2015). Pertaining to intervention, two articles addressed the challenges inherent in secondary school tutorial settings (Stover, O’Rear, & Morris, 2015; Velten & Mokhtari, 2016), as well as ways to meet these challenges.

Most issues of the TJLE have featured at least one article related to comprehension instruction. Topics such as teaching close reading through think-alouds (Baker & McEnery, 2017) and building on metacognitive reading skills by using a strategy labeled “tagging” (Durham & Raymond, 2016) encouraged practitioners to expand possible teaching point horizons during the reading workshop. Using comprehension activities in workstations (Young, 2014) and inviting students to complete reader responses to enhance comprehension instruction (Delony, Smith Morgan, & Howell, 2013) were the subjects of two other articles. Each of these included discussions of research-based instructional design that support the use of engaging activities in the classroom. An invited article by Tim Rasinski, Faida Stokes, and Chase Young (2017) provided readers with the role of the teacher during readers’ theater instruction.

### CHILDREN’S AND ADOLESCENTS’ LITERATURE

Twenty-two percent of articles published in the TJLE have used children’s and/or adolescents’ literature as a central feature. Several included bibliotherapy as a tool for addressing authentic situations that occur in the lives of youngsters. One author examined how the use of bibliotherapy in a third-grade classroom helped students develop more mature social and emotional skills (Elley, 2014). Cummins (2014) used Meg Medina’s (2013) Pura Belpre award-winning book to invite adolescent students to talk openly about bullying. An approach to helping educators understand dyslexia through the eyes of Hank Zipzer, a character created by Henry Winkler (aka Fonzie from the popular 1970s television show, *Happy Days*), was presented in another article (Pilgrim, 2014). Using texts to promote “place conscious education” (Szabo & Golden, 2016) and helping adolescents connect deeply to literature using Bruner’s models of thought (McConn, 2014) were two topics concerning how teachers might build on students’ personal connections to text.

Using literature as a conduit for discussions of diversity was another focus of several articles, including a content analysis of children’s books containing refugee characters and how to use these in classrooms (Nath & Grote-Garcia, 2017) and the use of literature for children in a multicultural education course, where book discussion groups shared ideas about incorporating meaningful texts to understand diverse learners (Sennette, Pizzoli, & Morton, 2013). Montelongo, Hernandez, and Herter (2015) highlighted how teachers might use books on the Texas 2x2 picture book reading list to teach English-Spanish cognates.

Two sets of authors shared practical ways to use book formats that are typically found in early childhood and primary grade classrooms, namely alphabet books (Bradley & Bradley, 2014) and patterned books (Grote-Garcia & Durham, 2013), to teach comprehension in all grade levels.

### INSTRUCTIONAL TECHNOLOGY AND DIGITAL LITERACY

Articles addressing dimensions of instructional technology and digital literacy comprised 17% of the TJLE collection. Two articles early in the journal’s production provided readers with

foundational knowledge about the definition of literacy in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and reasons why educators should learn about and integrate the use of digital tools to enhance children's literacy development (McAdams, 2013; Pilgrim & Martinez, 2013). Authors also enlightened readers with practical application ideas related to the use of specific digital tools. Incorporating virtual reality tools such as Google Street View, Google Expedition, and 3D glasses were presented as methods for reading and language arts teachers to engage students with content (Pilgrim & Pilgrim, 2016). Young and Stover (2015) wrote about inviting second-grade students to blog in order to assist with the writing revision process and found that it indeed was beneficial, as writing scores increased significantly. Having teacher candidates use technology applications can also be helpful, as an article on using Pinterest for developing pedagogical content knowledge demonstrated (Grote-Garcia & Vasinda, 2014).

TJLE authors also educated readers on how to use digital storytelling to help students construct and publish their writing (Yearta, Helf, & Harris, 2018), as well as ways to use digital comics as resources in the classroom to foster critical reading (Kirchoff & Cook, 2017). Teacher professional development in this area was also addressed in Iyengar and Hood's (2016) article, in which they described the National Writing Project's use of a multimodal writing workshop and how this enhanced teacher collaboration and engagement during the writing process.

## ENGLISH LEARNERS AND GRAMMAR INSTRUCTION

Grammar teaching strategies and working with English learners (ELs) accounted for 11% of the articles in the first five volumes of TJLE. McCrocklin and Slater (2017) presented information on using systemic functional grammar as a tool for analyzing literature utilized in the middle school English Language Arts classroom. Ruiz (2017) educated readers about the differences between English and Spanish grammars and how this information can support instruction in one or both languages. Studies of ELs' attitudes toward reading and writing in English were presented in two articles. One focused on paying close attention to what, why, and how adolescent ELs want to read and write and how teachers can use this information in the classroom (Stewart, Walker, & Revelle, 2018). The other investigated the attitudes of linguistically diverse students toward writing in English in several domains (general, humanities, science, and electronic communication) and discussed the implication of teaching writing to communicate rather than to solely meet testing standards (Bustamonte & Eom, 2017).

## WRITING INSTRUCTION

Eleven percent of articles addressed writing instruction. Zoch, Adams-Budde, and Langston-Demott (2016) conducted a case study with a nine-year-old student and determined that using digital tools helped him collaborate with peers and envision himself as a writer. Handwriting instruction was the focus of two articles. One set of authors (Sinclair & Szabo, 2015) found that pencil size did not impact the legibility of pre-kindergarteners' and kindergarteners' writing. Another pair (Sharp & Brown, 2015) wrote about three elementary teachers' views of the current state of handwriting practices and discussed the need for more research in this area. Preservice teachers' writing was also addressed in a study of how writing in the content areas helps undergraduate students think critically and learn course material (Sanchez & Lewis, 2014).

## CONTENT AREA LITERACY AND DISCIPLINARY LITERACY

The first five volumes of the TJLE included articles (9%) about content area and interdisciplinary literacy. Most of these articles addressed the ways teachers might integrate reading, math, and science. For example, an article titled “Mathematics Preservice Teachers are Literacy Educators too: Learning How to Administer and Use Data from the Texas Middle School Fluency Assessment to Plan Instruction (Brooks, 2017) shared information about online training offered through the Texas Adolescent Literacy Academies website and the ways in which preservice math teachers can use this training to plan instruction as part of their literacy and math methods courses. Mahzoon, Hagheghi, Yebra, Johnson, and Sohn (2018) shared ideas and resources for teaching science concepts through children’s literature. Finally, Berry, Potter, and Hollas (2013) reported the results of their research study on using concept maps for informational read-alouds. They found that elementary-aged children who used concept maps scored significantly higher on a vocabulary test than did those who were solely taught to read informational text guided by teacher questioning.

Integrating the arts and literacy was the focus of two articles. Peterson and Greenberg (2017) reported how a teacher used a dramatic play center with young children in order to address social studies and health standards in the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS). They found that dramatic play supported and extended children’s use of language. Another article (Sharp, Coneway, Hindman, Garcia, & Bingham, 2016) presented three practices that teacher educators might use as models to encourage preservice teachers to infuse their future classrooms with arts-driven literacy instruction.

## LITERACY COACHING AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Nine percent of the contributions to TJLE addressed issues related to literacy coaching and professional development. In an article titled “Cultivating Healthy Coaching Relationships with Teachers,” Pletcher (2015) presented information about how coaches can grow and sustain ways of working effectively with teachers. In an invited article, Alida Hudson and Bethanie Pletcher (2016) shared tips with reading specialists on how to begin working with classroom teachers individually by initiating coaching conversations as one method of coaching. Two articles discussed the process of making major changes in instructional practices in a school, one after a visit from well-known consultant (Butler & Votteler, 2016) and one that described adjustments that were made in a school that suffered from an “ailing reading program” (Welsh, 2014). The Summer 2017 issue contained a poignant invited piece by Victoria Risko, written to remind educators about the power of professional learning. Here, she presented classroom challenges that are often not addressed due to many reasons. She referred to these as “missed opportunities” and provided several examples of ways to approach professional learning in a problem-solving manner.

## OTHER TOPICS

Six percent of the articles from the first five years of the TJLE covered topics not mentioned above, such as high-stakes testing (Huddleston & Rockwell, 2015) and ESSA (Every Student Succeeds Act) (Sharp, 2016). The journal also invited the authors of the What’s Hot Survey (Cassidy, Grote-Garcia, & Ortlieb, 2016) to write an article that set the International Literacy Association survey in the context of the journal’s home state of Texas and addressed several of the more salient topics

(English Learners; text complexity; and disciplinary literacy). Also important to note is that 17% of the articles included in the first five volumes of the TJLE thus far represent two or more of the topics listed above.

## THE FUTURE OF TJLE

As the TJLE evolves and grows with the organization it serves, it will continue to provide readers with the most pertinent topics for Texas teachers, as well as others around the country. We are certain that, because of the size of our state, this journal will become a leading publication among state journals.

With the latest revision of the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills English Language Arts and Reading standards to be implemented during the 2019-2020 school year, we predict that articles presenting research and classroom ideas related to these changes will appear. As TJLE is aligned with the International Literacy Association, the ILA annual “What’s Hot in Literacy Report” may drive many of the topics that are addressed in future articles. Some of the most salient topics from the 2018 report (ILA, 2018) were: early literacy; family engagement and community partnerships; teacher preparation; equity; and differentiated instruction.

We may also expect to see more articles written for teachers of secondary and adult learners, as articles addressing these audiences in the first five years of the journal were fewer in number than those addressing elementary school educators. Because TJLE is a state journal that caters to teachers and researchers alike per the organization it represents, it would be sensible that future issues include a mixture of research studies, ideas for practice, and literature reviews.

It is with absolute delight that we welcome TJLE’s new editorial team, all of whom are faculty members in the Department of Reading at Texas Woman’s University. The team is led by Dr. Amy Burke and her associate editors are Drs. Elizabeth Kaye, Mandy Stewart, and Connie Briggs. This team will undoubtedly bring a fresh perspective to the journal and continue to publish high-quality findings that contribute to the field of literacy education and are written in the service of children.

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many thanks for the opportunity to serve TALE as the co-editors of TJLE. It was an honor and a pleasure. –CY, BP, & SG