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Seeking Equilibrium: In What Ways Are Teachers Implementing A Balanced Literacy Approach Amidst the Push for Accountability?

Angeli Marie Willson and Lori Ann Falcon

Abstract

This article examines how elementary public school teachers in South Texas are implementing a balanced literacy approach in light of the expectations of accountability for student performance. For more than three decades, Texas schools have felt, and continue to feel, the pressure of accountability. Therefore, it becomes essential to investigate the ways in which teachers have responded to this expectation while implementing a balanced literacy approach in English Language Arts and Reading (ELAR) classes. This research study reveals the results of more than 500 teacher responses to a survey concerning the implementation of this approach and the instructional practices that the teachers use to address accountability. The findings show that most teachers did read-aloud and independent reading components every day, and that shared and interactive writing components were implemented the least. On a related note, teachers expressed the need for more training in writing instruction. This paper also examines the test-taking instructional practices implemented in the classroom.

“I am not seeing quality teaching like y’all taught us in our reading methods courses,” ...[but instead], my cooperating teacher only does practice test passages and test-taking skills during the English Language Arts/Reading (ELAR) allotted time,” exclaimed a disenchanted student teacher during a college class. She knew that sacrificing quality instruction to prepare for standardized tests is a warning cited by Green and Melton (2007). Another student teacher commented that her cooperating teacher had not taught a single writing lesson during the first month of her clinical teaching. Rather, the cooperating teacher simply, “did not have time to teach writing” due to the administration’s pressure to “pass the reading test.” Still another student teacher stated that her cooperating teacher “got rid of all the classroom picture books and replaced them with practice test passages.” This is a concern of Shanahan, (2014) who asserts that many teachers are having students take more practice tests while engaging in less creative writing projects due to pressures of data-driven schools. Finally, one student teacher said her cooperating teacher often interrupted her teaching to review practice test passages and/or cut her (the student teacher’s) teaching time short to fit in test-taking practice drills at the end of each lesson.
This particular class was unusual in some ways, but familiar in other ways. These student teachers' frustrations were being voiced all too often—that was the familiar thing about this class. However, the class became unusual in the discussion that ensued as a result of the student teachers' internal conflicts between what they knew quality teaching included and what they were actually witnessing in the very classrooms in which they were student teaching. They had been taught in their Reading Methods courses that according to Tompkins (2017), students learn best through authentic and relevant lessons which included both teacher-centered and student-centered activities with a balanced pedagogical approach to reading and writing. Yet that was not what they were seeing in their school placements.

A Balanced Literacy Approach

A balanced literacy approach (BLA) has been described in a multitude of ways. However, for this paper, we use the following definition: a balanced literacy approach is a way of teaching or pedagogy that includes a “philosophical orientation which assumes that reading and writing achievement are developed through instruction and support through multiple environments in which teachers use various approaches that differ by level of teacher support and student control” (Frey, Lee, Tollefson, Pass, & Massengill, 2005, p.272). It is where literacy is taught using a balance of teacher- and student-initiated activities (Speigel, 1994), as well as equal attention to phonics skills and whole-language approaches (Goodman, 1992). Finally, a balanced literacy approach is described as using explicit instruction while engaging students in authentic learning experiences, making sure to incorporate equally both reading and writing activities (Tompkins, 2017).

The components that comprise a balanced literacy approach also vary. For this research study, we include the read-aloud, shared reading, independent reading, modeled writing, shared writing, and independent writing (Mermelstein, 2006). In the read-aloud and modeled writing, the teacher is driving the instruction. In shared reading and writing, both the teacher and students take turns in doing the reading and writing activities. In independent reading and writing, the students read and write on their own while the teacher monitors student activity. Recognizing that other literacy researchers consider the readers’ and writers’ workshops as vehicles for implementing a balanced literacy philosophy (Au, Carroll, & Scheu, 1997) and that many teachers automatically think of these workshops when asked about implementing a balanced literacy approach, we add these two terms to the components that comprise a BLA, albeit under a different category. In these daily workshops, the following literacy activities happen: a mini-lesson, guided and independent practice, and closure. The brief mini-lesson mirrors the teacher-directed balanced literacy components mentioned above: the read-aloud and modeled writing. During guided reading or writing, the teacher meets with small groups of students to work on certain skills, while the rest of the class work on independent reading/writing. Finally, the teacher provides closure to the lesson by recapping the day’s lesson focus and encouraging students to share their accomplishments for the day.

Standardized Testing in Texas

Since 1980, Texas public schools have been required by law to test students in certain grades on basic academic skills. Starting with the Texas Assessment of Basic Skills (TABS), this compendium
of tests has evolved into what is presently called the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR) (https://tea.texas.gov/student.assessment/staar/). These annual tests measure students’ academic achievements against the state standards, the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) (https://tea.texas.gov/curriculum/teks/).

**REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

Ample research has been conducted on the effects of state-mandated tests on classroom instruction. This section presents previous research on the impact of such tests on classroom instruction in general, and literacy instruction specifically. First, research has shown that the testing has resulted in the narrowing of the curriculum for those teachers who have made it a practice to limit their lessons to just those standards that are assessed in these tests (IRA, 1999). Hoffman et al. (2001) conducted a survey on the impact of an earlier version of the Texas state-mandated test, the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS), on classroom instruction. They found that respondents planned the year’s curriculum around the standards that were going to be assessed on the TAAS.

Second, these state-mandated tests have resulted in teachers spending too much time on test “prep,” resulting in their not having adequate time to do ‘actual’ teaching. In the study above, Hoffman et al. (2001) also found that nearly all of the survey respondents indicated concentrating on test preparation at least a month before testing. Test preparation was required by principals, and it occurred an average of eight to 10 hours a week. Aside from using instructional time for this school-wide initiative, time was also spent administering benchmark tests. This was a finding of Davis and Willson (2015) in their study of the “test-centric” literacy instructional practices that 12 literacy professionals used during the transition from the penultimate Texas state-mandated test, the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS), to the current statewide assessment, the STAAR. Participants described an elaborate system of tests that mirrored the past STAAR tests and were administered at regular intervals, such as every six weeks or every two months. Teachers were required to mimic official STAAR-testing conditions when administering these “mock” tests, which meant at least a day’s loss of instruction every testing period. Kontovourki (2012) coined the term “assessment-saturated” to describe the aforementioned classrooms where frequent benchmark testing occurred.

Another impact of state-mandated tests has been the commonplace use of test-formatted passages in classroom instruction. Instead of using authentic reading materials, such as notable children’s literature or authentic models of writing, teachers were expected to use reading passages or writing prompts that were modeled after the items in the released state tests. Anagnostopolous (2005) found that participant English teachers, during discussions of novels, tended to ask questions that were patterned after the ones that were on previous state tests. In addition to the use of test-formatted passages, these teachers were using explicit instruction and highly regimented procedures for reading these passages. One participant in Davis and Willson’s (2015) study talked about the acronym TOPCAT, which was a prescribed formulaic approach that all teachers at the school were required to use when reading and teaching poetry. Students were required to write the letters of the acronym, which stood for “title, organization, paraphrase, clues, attitude, and theme,” vertically on the margin of the text and to use it as a guide when reading poems.
A fourth effect of state-mandated tests was the systematization of a “complex data economy” (Davis & Willson 2015, p. 365). The participants in the study above stated how they had periodic meetings with school administrators and curriculum specialists to disaggregate the data gathered from the benchmark tests and to plan for intervention. Additionally, in each of the districts, schools across the districts were compared based on student performance on district benchmarks.

A fifth effect of state-mandated tests, and an offshoot of all the benchmark testing, was the implementation of interventions. In a case study of how one school responded to the Texas accountability system, Booher-Jennings (2005) found that teachers and administrators participated in an “educational triage” (p. 240), where students were put into three groups based on their performance on the benchmark tests: the safe group (students who are not in danger of failing the state exam), the group of “bubble” students (students on the threshold of passing the exam), and the hopeless group (students who had little chance of passing the exam). School resources were then allocated to the group “bubble” students, thus showing the school’s buy-in into what she refers to as a “rationalized myth of data-driven instruction (p. 238).”

Not every effect of state-mandated tests was a negative one. In 2007, Au conducted a synthesis of qualitative studies examining the impact of high-stakes testing on curricular and instructional practices and found that both positive and negative effects existed, and these effects were connected to the tests themselves. Among the positive effects found were an increase in student-centered pedagogy, content integration, and content expansion (Wolf & Wolf 2002; Wollman-Bonilla, 2004). It is noteworthy that these positive effects were found only in a small number of studies that were analyzed by Au (2007), and most of them occurred in a social studies class. The theory behind these occurrences is that the teachers in these classes intentionally integrated instruction involving higher-order thinking skills, such as analyzing the causes and effects of a certain historical event rather than merely memorizing dates.

Positive effects notwithstanding, we, the authors and researchers, were interested in finding out how teachers were teaching literacy while addressing the demands of state accountability. As current literacy instructors in universities, we were curious to see how teachers were implementing the instructional strategies they had learned in educator preparation programs. As former elementary school teachers, we were particularly interested in examining how teachers were implementing a balanced literacy approach in light of the annual accountability requirements. Our guiding and overarching question was, “in what ways are elementary public school teachers in South Texas implementing a balanced literacy approach while also assisting their students to be successful on the state-mandated assessments?”

**Methodology**

We created a survey comprised of ten questions; six of them were Likert-scale questions and four were open-ended questions (see Appendix A). The Likert-scale questions included the frequency of and the time spent each day for the implementation of each of the components of a balanced literacy in their classrooms. Additionally, the survey asked the teachers to rate the adequacy of the professional development and the quantity and quality of the instructional materials that the school
administration afforded them. The open-ended questions addressed which component of a balanced literacy approach they regarded as the most difficult to implement and what they had done to address state accountability.

Using available school district directories, the survey was emailed to 5,243 elementary-school (kindergarten through fifth grade) teachers employed in public school districts across a large metropolitan city in South Texas. We then performed statistical analysis on the Likert-scale questions and categorized the open-ended responses by topics and analyzed them for emerging themes using the constant-comparison process (Corbin & Strauss, 2007; Creswell, 2009). We first implemented the qualitative process separately and then met to compare the themes that we found from our individual analyses. We then discussed and came to a consensus as to the major themes found in the open-ended responses. This paper is limited to the responses to only one open-ended question, question 10: “What is one thing that you have done to address state and district accountability expectations while implementing a balanced literacy approach?”

**Findings**

There was a total of 503 respondents to the survey. The respondents included elementary teachers evenly distributed across all grade levels from kindergarten to fifth grade according to the self-reported surveys. These teachers possessed, on average, 11 years of teaching experience. The majority of the respondents (84.60%) stated that they had experience implementing a balanced literacy approach, with 65.2% specifying that they had been implementing this approach from one to 10 years. Only 7.49% stated they had been implementing the approach for more than 20 years.

**Teacher Responses to the Likert-Scale Questions**

When asked about their confidence in implementing the different components of a balanced approach, teachers ranked all the reading components higher than the writing ones. The majority of the teachers indicated that they were most confident in implementing read-alouds (88%) and independent reading (81%), but only a small number of teachers (35%) indicated confidence in undertaking interactive writing. They also indicated the importance of using these components on a regular basis. Teachers reported doing independent reading on a daily basis and additionally said that they implemented read-alouds, shared reading, and reading workshops three or four times a week. The survey responses also reflected the teachers’ self-reporting that they felt the need for professional development focusing on teaching writing and writing components, such as shared and interactive writing.

Regarding teachers’ responses to instructional support that was afforded by the school administration in implementing a balanced literacy approach in their classrooms, teachers deemed it adequate. Additionally, a majority of the teachers indicated that they had adequate (77%) and quality (79%) instructional materials. However, in the open-ended section of the survey, there were some responses that expressed that it was often challenging for some teachers to acquire the appropriate materials for their students. In addition, some teachers stated they had problems
getting resources for bilingual students and others found it challenging to “step away from a specified resource” (i.e., a textbook) and to utilize mentor texts in their instruction.

When it came to the greatest challenge in implementing a balanced literacy approach, an overwhelming 74% of the respondents answered a “lack of time.” Most of the teacher respondents reported that finding time in their day to implement all of the components of a balanced literacy approach was the most difficult thing to achieve. Teachers stated this in a variety of ways, including lacking time management skills, not having enough time to plan, or having difficulty in finding time to meet with all students every day.

**Teacher Responses to the Open-Ended Question**

The following section presents the teacher responses to the open-ended question regarding the one thing that they had done to address state accountability expectations. Our analysis of the responses yielded two broad categories: those practices where the respondents referred to a BLA framework and those practices where the respondents did not. Additionally, the second category is further subdivided into two subcategories: those practices that have been traditionally used in classrooms and those “test-centric” practices (Davis & Willson, 2015) which seem to be a result of the accountability era.

**The Teacher Practices Where the Respondents Referred to a BLA Framework**

The teacher respondents wrote about a variety of ways that they were implementing the different components of a balanced literacy approach while addressing accountability. One primary instructional strategy that teachers were intentionally including while implementing BLA and addressing accountability was the implementation of higher-order thinking. Another instructional strategy teacher respondents included most often was the use of question stems.

**Implementing higher-order thinking.** One instructional strategy that was reported was the systematic and intentional incorporation of comprehension strategies that developed higher-order thinking skills (HOTS) in the daily class schedule. One teacher stated, “In order to address the state accountability, we incorporate higher-order thinking strategies that adhere with the comprehension rigor expected in STAAR. These higher thinking strategies are modeled and practiced during group discussion through Read Aloud, Shared Reading, Shared Writing, and Guided Reading activities.” Teachers spoke about modeling, as one respondent stated, “[I show students] ...reading/writing strategies to help the students be successful in the STAAR.”

**Utilizing question stems.** A common theme that ran through many responses was the use of question stems during BLA components such as read-alouds and shared reading. These stems are question starters that are meant to provide scaffolding for student learning and cover all levels of Bloom’s taxonomy. These quotes are typical of the survey responses that talked about this instructional practice: “We ask STAAR-stem questions during read-alouds” and “We use question stems during shared reading.”
Implementing BLA with fidelity. The rest of the responses that mentioned BLA discussed their efforts to implement the different BLA components with fidelity: “I do Guided Reading on a daily basis” and “I have implemented as much of balanced literacy as I can.” This echoes a sentiment stated by several responses that “if implemented correctly, a balanced literacy program will address state accountability expectations.” The two instructional practices that were identified in the responses in terms of implementing BLA with fidelity were the use of authentic literacy activities and doing explicit instruction on reading strategies. Several of the teachers wrote about incorporating reading for real-life connections and writing for real-world applications in classroom instruction. For example, one teacher stated, “I provide students with authentic opportunities to engage with and learn from real texts as well as provide opportunities to write for meaningful purposes.” Additionally, many respondents mentioned doing explicit instruction on reading strategies. “I teach reading strategies (before, during and after).” They also said they used the Five Pillars of Reading (National Reading Panel, 2000) as a framework for instruction. Teachers talked about teaching students to “use context clues to determine the meaning of an unknown word” or “make text-to-text, text-to-life-, and text-to-world connections.” Finally, with regard to the implementation of skills instruction itself, some teachers stated that they do a “daily practice of academic vocabulary” and a “daily language recursive review.”

The teacher practices where the respondents did not refer to a BLA framework.

In addition to specifically mentioning the utilization of a BLA to address accountability, teachers also reported what they did to address the expectations of state accountability in general. These responses did not indicate the context in which they practiced these instructional strategies, whether it was during ELAR or other subjects. Therefore, we decided to devote a section on these responses. Our analyses resulted in the identification of two overarching themes: the continued implementation of research-based instructional practices and the entrenched implementation of “test-centric” practices (Davis & Willson, 2015, p. 357).

Employing traditional classroom practices. Forty-one percent of the responses were categorized as those instructional practices that teachers did, in general, and that research has shown to be effective in increasing student achievement. The instructional practices teachers mentioned were using standards in planning lessons, learner-centered instruction, empowering students, and implementing literacy instruction across the disciplines. This section will discuss these practices.

Using standards in planning lessons. An instructional practice mentioned by 4% of the respondents was the use of state standards to guide their lesson planning. Many of the respondents reported “using the supporting and readiness TEKS”—the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills, which are the state standards—to drive their instruction. Many of the teachers, including those from the lower grades (the ones that do not have to take the state assessment, the STAAR, indicated that they followed the TEKS when planning their lessons. Most of these responses referred to their grade level as the foundation for the upper grades: “We unpack the TEKS for first grade and follow (the) strands to second” and “Being a first-grade teacher, we make sure that our curriculum is aligned with 3rd-5th, to create a solid foundation for our students’ learning.” Congruent with this
deconstruction of the TEKS, there were responses that mentioned the intentional inclusion of the “KUDs,” the learning targets that clearly state what students are supposed to know, understand, and be able to do after the lesson (Tomlinson & Imbeau, 2010). Finally, several respondents mentioned planning lessons in “PLCs,” which stands for “Professional Learning Communities” (Dufour, Dufour, Eaker, Many, & Mattos, 2016). According to DuFour (2004), this term has been used ubiquitously to mean any group of educators—a grade-level team, a high school department, a committee, etc.—who meet to address any issue in education. There were respondents who mentioned PLCs this way: “We do ‘PLCs’ with my team to break down the TEKS and to know exactly what to address.” There were others, though, who merely stated that they did “PLC-planning.” We question whether the idea of PLCs is the same among all the respondents.

**Doing learner-centered instruction.** Many teachers mentioned doing data-driven, differentiated instruction, which can be defined as providing, “specific ways for students to learn as deeply as possible and as quickly as possible without assuming one student’s road map for learning is identical to anyone else’s” (Tomlinson, 2001, p.2). Several responses were similar to these quotes, including one teacher who said, “A close examination of data helps pinpoint my students’ strengths and weaknesses.” While another teacher respondent stated that he/she, “monitors... students’ progress throughout the grading period and tailors lessons to their needs.” Still another teacher responded, “I provide small-group instruction and one-on-one instruction for the students who need it.”

Some teachers were specific with their use of formative assessment results and used them in their instruction. One respondent did “constant monitoring of individual reading and writing progress with running records and writing samples.” Others were specific with how they have addressed student needs, starting with their current skill level. One teacher said, “[f]or example, during writer’s workshop, the student may be a pre-emergent writer, so I expect him to draw a picture and dictate his story to me. However, I will work with him in learning how to build words using manipulatives such as letter blocks.” The analysis of assessment data resulted in teacher-driven or school-wide interventions. One respondent stated that his/her school had an “intervention Block to work with students who are struggling with concepts being taught and/or literacy skills in general.” Another respondent wrote, “My campus has a set-aside intervention time that is used to make sure that all students are getting what they need based on data.” Many of them explicitly stated doing interventions as part of the school’s schedule. Responses also indicated that, in addition to classroom teachers, other campus personnel were also expected to participate in these school-wide interventions. One teacher specified, “Interventions through other campus personnel when I see a need in a particular student that I am not equipped to deal with as well as I would like.” Then went on to say, “Our school splits students up by reading levels and, for 30 minutes each morning, students are sent to a room to receive instruction based on their level.”

**Empowering students.** One pedagogical philosophy reflected in some of the teacher comments included empowering students. For example, one teacher stated, “We are really looking at student data, helping students understand where their reading levels are at, and helping them plot their progress.” Another teacher wrote about having “students do their own tracking of progress.”
**Integrating literacy instruction across disciplines.** Several responses referenced integrating the teaching of reading with writing instruction, especially across disciplines. One teacher remarked, “I actually make more time for reading by reading in a content area, like science or social studies.” Another teacher stated, “We incorporate ‘Literacy Circles’ with TEKS-based reading and writing objectives.”

**Implementing test-centric instructional practices.** Survey responses indicated a notable number of instructional practices centered around test preparation. These instructional practices seem to be a result of the pressures for accountability and are described as strategies focused on standardized testing preparation which have become a part of the daily class routine. These “test-centric instructional practices” (Davis & Willson, 2015), are discussed below.

**Mandating systemic assessments.** The first test-centric practice that 12% of the respondents identified was the use of assessments that were required campus- or district-wide. Teachers were required to administer “standard diagnostic and benchmark assessments implemented by the district” and to “monitor comprehension more closely through the use of common assessments.” Many respondents mentioned the use of Curriculum-Based Assessments (CBAs). These assessments were supposed to mirror the STAAR. They also reported how they were required to give these tests periodically, usually once every six to nine weeks.

**Doing schoolwide data analysis.** After these benchmark assessments were administered, most schools followed a protocol for analyzing the students’ test scores. This meant completing a spreadsheet showing the test scores of all students, submitting the spreadsheet to and meeting with school administration to disaggregate the test scores, and using the tests data to plan for instruction: “As a campus, we look at data/trends that our campus struggles with and target those areas with more specific lessons/activities.” And “We are also looking into data collection from our common assessments to address the gaps in skills.” In some schools, teachers and administrators spent at least one day in the summer to do a more in-depth analysis of student performance based on the state assessments. “I am part of the Leadership Team at my school and I attend Data Day every summer. There we talk all about STAAR and our Progress Measure and do comparisons from years past. We also make goals and have projections. We then make a plan to present to our school when we come back to school.”

**Practicing schoolwide intervention.** Another test-centric practice that was prevalent in the survey responses was the “institutionalization” of the interventions discussed in the previous section. In this situation, all teachers, including those of grade levels that do not take the STAAR and of special subjects such as art and music, were required to offer interventions in the subjects covered in the state exam. Some schools had interventions before or after school while other schools had it embedded in the daily schedule. Some schools had interventions throughout the school year while some had them right before the scheduled STAAR administration: “My school does small group pull-outs for intensive focus on STAAR passages prior to the test. It is done as well with students who did not pass the STAAR. I cannot say that I agree that this works, but it’s something additional that this school does.”
Implementing test preparation practices. Some of the instructional practices mentioned in the previous section have evolved to focus around the STAAR and have become entrenched in some schools' culture. First, in addition to teaching students learning strategies, some teachers also mentioned teaching students test-taking strategies: “We practice test-taking strategies and how to find evidence when reading so they know how to do that when we have passages” and “(We have) accountable talk—critical discussions based on STAAR-type questions to familiarize students with the structure of the test questions and possible answer choices.” Regarding the materials used during these test-taking practice sessions, teachers used “STAAR-released tests and similar passages.” Teachers had students complete practice passages with multiple-choice questions similar to items and practice writing essays using writing prompts from released STAAR tests. One teacher stated, “Our grade level team has not started this yet, but as the year goes on we will look at reading passages formatted like the STAAR. Students will practice reading and answering questions about these passages using strategies we have applied to other types of texts. Students do need familiarity with this format.” Some respondents spoke about doing “daily recursive review and practice unpacking STAAR texts to “build up their stamina and ability to focus for longer periods of time.” One teacher reported “doing class-wide reviews by using released STAAR questions that are frequently missed and analyzing why they are so missed and how to attack questions like this when found.” Finally, many of the respondents spoke about using computer programs to get their students ready for the STAAR: “I am trying to incorporate more use of technology to peak student interest.” Another teacher stated that he/she, “Implemented Google Classroom novel conversation groups.” And yet another said he/she uses, Istation computer programs. "Rather than use colorful, fully-illustrated trade books, I use STAAR-length excerpts from trade books or authentic text. As an old coach once said, ‘we practice like we wanna play the big game.’”

Instituting curriculum change. A test-centric practice that has increasingly become more prevalent in schools is the inclusion of test preparation into the school’s curriculum, treating it as yet another unit of study. Several teachers talked about “teaching STAAR as a genre so students will be familiar with the questioning and format of the test” and “teaching STAAR-reading/passages as their own genre.” For instance, one teacher responded, “Once we get into the Spring Semester I will introduce test-taking as its own genre so that students will be familiar with format and strategies such as eliminating answer choices, etc.” Another teacher’s response reveals how entrenched this practice has become in school districts: “My school district has gone to a genre-based study. In April, our genre is "STAAR" so we implement reading strategies that are specific to testing.”

Expecting the lower grades to also do test preparation. The last test-centric practice that we saw from the survey responses involved teachers who do not teach a “testing” grade or their students' grade level does not mandate standardized testing, yet they felt it was their duty to prepare students for future success on the standardized assessments. Some comments expressed the idea that these teachers felt a professional/ethical obligation to make sure they were preparing students to “pass the test” in future grade-levels. One teacher commented that she/he prepares his/her, “second graders with reading and comprehension at an early stage in second grade.” Another
teacher expressed that students needed exposure to testing questions: “[y]es, starting in kinder, we continuously use the academic [testing] language so that children are exposed to the [testing] language and what it means long before they are taking a STAAR test. Another response was, “We also, assess our students weekly for letter/sounds, sight word fluency, and number sense. This helps children cope with anxiety because it becomes the norm to be assessed.” Still another asserted: “[e]verything I do builds on the skills they need to take the STAAR. Kindergarten sets the foundation.” These responses provide evidence that many teachers in non-testing grades are also preparing students for standardized testing success.

**DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS**

The survey responses reveal that teachers have a range of experience in implementing a balanced literacy approach. Congruent with this finding is the fact that there are varied definitions of a BLA and its components, as evident in the introduction of this paper. This lack of uniformity in construct definition has resulted in a range of implementation approaches. Many teachers have managed to use the reading and writing workshops as the main frameworks for literacy instruction. However, there are some who are still reluctant to relinquish teacher-control during BLA components such as independent reading or writing. Our suggestion is for schools and school districts to offer more professional development on BLA, especially during in-service, so that the whole faculty has a clear understanding of the BLA framework and how it is applied in the classroom. In planning ELAR lessons, we suggest teachers use a variety of materials, including authentic reading materials and writing models and some test-formatted passages. Hollinsworth (2017), suggests five ways to prepare students for standardized tests without sacrificing the instructional program and that includes engaging students in authentic literacy activities. Also, time management must be a high priority in the genuine implementation of a BLA. Teachers must be willing and committed to create and carry out a schedule with unwavering dedication to the time required to implement a BLA. Usually, it is also implemented within the allotted ELAR time. Below is a sample breakdown of a 90-minute elementary ELAR (Figure 1).

9:00 - 9:10 Read-aloud and book talk
9:10 - 9:25 Mini-lesson - modeled and shared reading
9:25 - 9:50 Guided Reading and Independent Reading
9:50 - 10:00 Mini-lesson - modeled and shared writing
10:00 - 10:25 Guided Writing and Independent Writing
10:25 - 10:30 Lesson Closure/ Sharing/Celebration

*Figure 1.* Sample ELAR schedule.
Another vital aspect of implementing a BLA is the creation of small groups and utilization of these groups during Guided Reading and Writing. “No single instructional program best represents the balanced approach to literacy; instead, teachers organize for instruction by creating their own program that fits their students’ needs and their school’s standards and curricular guidelines” (Tompkins, 2017, p. 24), which most often includes guided reading. Teachers must set up a schedule wherein they meet with these groups to work on specific skills while the rest of the class is engaged in independent reading or writing. These groups are ever-changing because they are formed based on pre-assessment data. It is important to note that a teacher does not need to meet with every student every day. Figure 2 shows an example of a week-long rotation of four small groups, where groups A and D need more guided instruction than groups B and C.

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<th>Tuesday</th>
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<td>9:32</td>
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<td>9:33 -</td>
<td>B</td>
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<td>B</td>
<td>C</td>
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<td>9:40</td>
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<td>9:41 -</td>
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<td>9:48</td>
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*Figure 2. Sample group rotation schedule.*

This survey also revealed that our teachers are implementing a multiplicity of effective teaching methods that are supported by research. Teachers are doing learner-centered instruction and are using assessments not just to inform their planning but to continually monitor and analyze student progress which is aligned with Hollingworth’s (2007) suggestions in preparing students for high-stakes testing without losing quality instruction. She recommends ways to prepare students for standardized assessments that don’t compromise the statewide curriculum. For example, teachers should adhere to a balanced approach that combines both authentic literacy activities and explicit instruction. Additionally, teachers should explain the purpose of tests and describe how the results will be used without resulting in student anxiety. Also, teachers should set goals with their students as they regularly monitor the students’ progress using informal assessments (Hollingsworth, 2007).

Although many teachers are actively engaging students in effective and meaningful learning activities in their classrooms, they are also implementing “test-centric practices” that are of particular concern (Davis & Willson, 2015). The first concern is the time spent on assessment rather than on instruction. If benchmarks are administered once every six weeks, this would mean teachers would be using at least six weeks out of the school year to administer the tests and to meet with administrators to disaggregate the data and plan for interventions. According to Hoffman, Assaf, and Paris (2001), this would be detrimental to students and an unproductive use of class time. A second concern is the possibility of the overuse of test-formatted passages, instead of
authentic literature, in literacy instruction. This practice goes against the standards of quality teaching which Hollingworth (2007), Green & Melton (2007), and Davis & Vehabovic (2017) caution educators against doing.

Regarding the use of STAAR question stems that many of the teacher respondents mentioned, it is particularly concerning as it often includes the implementation of the drill of skills and the practice of becoming familiar with test stem questions in place of authentic, relevant, and/or meaningful literacy activities. Interestingly, a cursory search on the Internet reveals countless lists of such stems. With the STAAR, many school districts and regional education service centers (ESCs) have spent the time and money to analyze the test and assemble a list of questions stems that are present in it. For example, ESC-13, which covers public schools in the Austin area, has a list of STAAR stem questions on their resources page: http://www4.esc13.net/staar/resources/ela-staar-resources, while ESC-10, which covers the Kilgore area, - https://olc.region10.org/pd/mod/folder/view.php?id=6580 has multiple lists, not only for ELAR but for Math and Science, as well. A third concern is the effect of making changes to curriculum to include STAAR as a genre. This practice has become more prevalent, so much so that ESCs have specific links to ways of teaching STAAR as a genre. For example, ESC-13 has resources for doing this at: http://www4.esc13.net/staar/resources/ela-staar-resources. More research studies have to be conducted on this topic to determine the effects of doing such a curricular change.

Finally, one of the biggest concerns is when test-centric practices begin to replace research-based instructional practices. Davis & Vehabovic, (2017) warn about five specific test-centric practices. Those include, “when the tested content is privileged, when the test becomes the text, when annotation requirements replace strategic thinking, when test items frame how students think, and when item level data are overinterpreted” (Davis & Vehabovic, p. 579), all of which were examples identified by teacher respondents in our study. Consequently, it is important to be vigilant about allowing the pressures of high-stakes testing result in the replacement of quality teaching with test-centric practices that, in the end, will only rob students of learning.

**CONCLUSION**

To conclude, this study clearly shows that teachers in South Texas public elementary schools do a multitude of instructional strategies to teach the state standards, as well as to address accountability requirements. When implementing a balanced literacy approach, teachers did so in varied ways. What is vital is that they need to implement a BLA with fidelity. Teachers also employ a repertoire of test-centric practices either while implementing or in addition to the use of a BLA. More research needs to be conducted to examine the effects of these practices, such as the use of test-formatted passages and the changing of the curriculum to include test taking as a unit of study. Additionally, case studies on teachers who are able to successfully implement BLA with fidelity while addressing accountability could also yield more innovative and effective instructional strategies. One strong recommendation is for the state of Texas to seriously consider alternative forms of assessing students’ academic performances besides the selected and written response assessments. We end this paper with a reminder for equilibrium: strive to implement, with fidelity, a balanced literacy approach while appropriately integrating test preparation. As Tompkins (2017)
reminds us, “[i]t’s essential that teachers prepare students to take high-stakes tests without abandoning a balanced approach to instruction that is aligned to state standards” (p.93).

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reading and its implications for reading instruction.


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APPENDIX A

Balanced Literacy Implementation: Classroom Teacher Survey

Balanced literacy has been described in a multitude of ways. However, for this research study and survey we are using the following definition: a balanced literacy approach is a “philosophical orientation that assumes that reading and writing achievement are developed through instruction and support through multiple environments in which teachers use various approaches that differ by level of teacher support and student control” (Frey, Lee, Tollfeson, Pass, & Massengill, 2005, p.272). This approach also espouses a balance in teacher-initiated activities and student-initiated activities (Spegiel, 1994), as well as equal attention to phonics and whole-language instruction. There are varied views of what comprises a balanced literacy approach; this study will focus on the following components: Read-Alouds, Shared Reading, Reading Workshop, Shared Writing, Interactive Writing, Modeled Writing, and Writing Workshop (Mermelstein, 2006).

Part I

What grade level are you currently teaching?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>0</th>
<th>0</th>
<th>0</th>
<th>0</th>
<th>0</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>K</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
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</table>

How long have you been teaching?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Experience</th>
<th>0</th>
<th>0</th>
<th>0</th>
<th>0</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less than 1 year</td>
<td>1-10 yrs.</td>
<td>11-20 yrs.</td>
<td>More than 20 yrs.</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Have you implemented a balanced literacy approach before?  

Yes  No

If yes, how long have you been implementing a balanced literacy approach?

Less than 1 year  1-10 yrs.  11-20 yrs.  More than 20 yrs.

Part II

1. How confident are you about your knowledge of the following components of a Balanced Literacy Approach?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Not Confident</th>
<th>Somewhat Confident</th>
<th>Very Confident</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Read-alouds</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shared Reading</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent Reading</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading Workshop</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
2. In the current school year, how many times per week do you spend implementing the following components of a Balanced Literacy Approach?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>0 to 2 times a week</th>
<th>3 to 4 times a week</th>
<th>5 or more times a week</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Read-alouds</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shared Reading</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent Reading</td>
<td>o</td>
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<td>o</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading Workshop</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
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<tr>
<td>Modeled Writing</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shared Writing</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent Writing</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing Workshop</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
3. In a typical day, how much time do you spend implementing each of the following components of a Balanced Literacy Approach?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>0 to 45 minutes</th>
<th>46 to 90 minutes</th>
<th>More than 90 minutes</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Read-alouds</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shared Reading</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent Reading</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading Workshop</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modeled Writing</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shared Writing</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent Writing</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing Workshop</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
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</table>

4. With regards to professional development, how much instructional support do you receive from administration in implementing a Balanced Literacy Approach?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Support Level</th>
<th>Not adequate</th>
<th>Adequate</th>
<th>More than Adequate</th>
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5. With regards to instructional materials available to implement a Balanced Literacy Approach rate the materials according to:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quantity</th>
<th>Not adequate</th>
<th>Adequate</th>
<th>More than Adequate</th>
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<td></td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quality</th>
<th>Not adequate</th>
<th>Adequate</th>
<th>More than Adequate</th>
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</table>

6. Overall, to what extent do you feel a balanced literacy Approach has been implemented effectively in your classroom?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Not Effectively</th>
<th>Somewhat Effectively</th>
<th>Very Effectively</th>
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Part III

7. Which of the components of a Balanced Literacy Approach is the most difficult to implement and why?

_______________________________________________________________________________

8. What do you see is the single greatest strength associated with the implementation of a balanced literacy approach?

_______________________________________________________________________________
9. What do you think is the single greatest challenge to implementing a balanced literacy approach?
______________________________________________________________________________

10. What is one thing that you have done to address state and district accountability expectations while implementing a balanced literacy approach?
______________________________________________________________________________
LITERACY MEMORIES OF HISPANIC PARENTS: HOW THE PAST INFLUENCES THE PRESENT

Larkin Page

ABSTRACT

Educators continue to advocate for increased family involvement in the education system, so there is value in understanding the reading and literacy histories, beliefs, and actions of parents. It is important for educators to recognize these dynamics because parents not only bring their children to school but they also “bring” the prior memories and experiences of their own schooling. An appreciation of the educational histories of parents, especially in the context of their literacy experiences, can contribute to understanding the perspectives of families, their motives, and actions with schools and teachers in the present.

Dufr, Parcel, and Troutman (2013), Egalite (2016), and Hornby and LaFaele (2011) describe the value in analyzing the histories, beliefs, and actions of parents in the framework of education. This is important for educators to understand because parents not only bring their children to school but also their own histories, including early memories, prior experiences, and beliefs based on their experiences with their own schooling, including interactions with parents and teachers. According to the Center on Education Policy (2012), Hornby and LaFaele (2011), and Moll (2001), the educational histories of parents contributes to educators’ understanding of families, their motives, and actions with schools and teachers in present day. These histories, beliefs, and actions are the foundation of the present study.

RESEARCH QUESTION

This study provides insight into the past educational practices, including home-based and school-based literacy experiences, in the childhood of a pair of Hispanic adults who are now parents. Data gathered from the research documents the historical literacy perceptions, systems, and incidents of the parents as they grew up. The broad research question that guided the data collection asked, What are the past home-based and school-based family literacy practices within the homes of each of the Hispanic parents? Gathering data based on this question can contribute to a greater understanding of how the childhood educational experiences of Hispanic parents influenced the way they view and interact with their children's educators.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Sociocultural theory embraces the social and individual learning and development of individuals, centered within a cultural context (Dehqan & Samar, 2014; John-Steiner & Mahn, 2011).
Contemporary researchers support a sociocultural approach in the acquisition of language, and thus literacy, as the basis for literacy learning (Perry, 2012). A major part of education includes literacy acquisition; educators understand that this acquisition begins in the home and is dependent upon and reflective of the literacy experiences provided through familial interactions (Gutiérrez, Morales, & Martinez, 2009; Moll, 1992). Home-based literacy practices are broad in scope and are viable and valuable forms of literacy (Compton-Lilly, 2003; Page, 2008). However, there is a concern that many times the home literacy practices of non-majority cultures are often marginalized and regarded as non-existent, unimportant, and/or unrelated to school literacy expectations and learning by educators (Compton-Lilly, 2017; Paratore, 2001). In response to this perceived mismatch, many schools approach home-based literacy from a deficit perspective. This viewpoint often causes educators to approach families with the idea of changing family systems (including literacy acquisition and activities) so they are more equivalent to those of the mainstream (Auerbach, 1989; Compton-Lilly, 2003; Taylor, 1997; Valdez, 1996). Learners from non-majority cultures and their families often feel devalued because of the messages this deficit orientation sends. That is, what they do is different from school-based literacy and, therefore, inferior. Many educators regard home-based family literacy practices as non-academic or not contributing to school literacy goals, which can position individuals and families as lesser or inferior within the powerful social hierarchy of the school and community (Compton-Lilly, 2003; Compton-Lilly, 2017; Gee, 1992). This view can be problematic as populations within school are constantly becoming more diverse.

Public school influence often supports the broader power structures of those in the mainstream dominant society, which frames marginalized families as deficit in literacy skills and knowledge, as well as uninvolved and uncaring in assisting their children with literacy acquisition (Bhattacharya, 2010; Compton-Lilly, 2003; Gee, 1992). As this devaluing is predominant in non-majority cultures, the effects can resonate across generations and affect not only home-school relations but also intra-familial relationships, such as parent-child. School-based literacy expectations interfacing with home-based literacy activities frequently create frustrations for minority parents as parents are unsure of what is expected exactly or what dynamics are involved (Burbano & Page 2012; Valdes, 1996).

As educators denigrate home-based literacy, the opportunity to understand and capitalize on the rich and genuine and relevant home-based literacy available from the child and family is lost (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992; Page, 2008). The present study documents the public school memories of two Hispanic parents, their memories of their own parents in the context of school, their memories of past home-based literacy practices, and their memories of school-based literacy practices. It is anticipated that this documentation can bring attention to an issue occurring daily in a multitude of classrooms.

This study contributes to the limited Hispanic home-based and school-based literacy research by documenting data involving these issues. Present day educators can become aware of and understand these issues to the benefit of every child in their classroom and every parent that accompanies the child to the school.

**Methodology**

This study investigated the sociocultural perspectives of a Hispanic husband and wife, who are also parents of school aged children, in terms of their own school and home-based family literacy
practices and experiences and documented how these experiences interfaced with school-based literacy expectations from public school educators and administrators. The study employed an ethnographic case study approach.

The study documents certain implicit and explicit messages the husband and wife received from teachers and schools during their time as students and now as parents. The study detailed the messages and their consequences and also substantiated the literacy practices occurring in the home. The research employed an ethnographic case study approach to gather data based on guiding questions and providing an open framework for examination and thick description of the subjects’ culture, experiences, and beliefs. According to Glesne (1999), ethnography evolves from anthropological practices of revealing patterns of culture through immersion in the field, collecting data primarily by participant observation, interviewing, and field notes: “The analysis of data focuses on description and interpretation of what people say and do” (p. 9). Ethnography allows the researcher to represent the shared beliefs, practices, and behaviors of the culture to be studied, often in the context of case studies. Spindler and Spindler (1987) validate the use of ethnography as a research discipline by stressing that the goal is to discover the cultural knowledge persons have and how it is used in social situations. They also stress the social and cultural dynamics involved in context of literacy and propose ethnography case studies as a means to document these dynamics. For this study, a qualitative approach using interviews, observations, and field notes was used.

SETTING AND PARTICIPANTS

The setting for the research was the home of the Hispanic husband and wife who were participants in this study. The home was located in a large city in the state of Texas. Michael and Veronica Ramirez (pseudonyms) have been married for nine years and have three children: Anthony (age 15), Michael Jr. (age 10) and Anita (age 8). Michael is 40 and Veronica is 35. Michael is the adoptive father of Anthony and the biological father of Michael Jr. and Anita. Veronica and Michael met when Michael was twenty-five and Veronica was twenty-one, but they did not marry until several years later. Michael is an inside sales representative for an equipment company and, presently, Veronica is a receptionist at a building materials company. Veronica has alternated between staying at home as a full-time mother and working various jobs. Each parent is Hispanic and descendant from families in Mexico. Veronica and Michael are both third-generation citizens of the United States. Both have full time jobs and consider their family middle class. Each grew up in a lower class home, learned English as a second language, spoke mostly Spanish and limited English in the home, were forced to speak only English in school, had parents with limited formal education, and attended public schools in Texas.

Veronica grew up in the city in which her own family now resides, except for a period of one year when she was six years old and her family moved to a much smaller town in central Texas. Veronica’s family moved to the smaller town for her father’s construction job. Veronica attended 1st grade in the public school district of this town. She did not pass this grade. Veronica’s father had a heart attack and survived during this time, and the family returned to the urban city after one year. Veronica entered 1st grade again in the present city’s public school district. She attended elementary, junior high, and high school until tenth grade when she dropped out. Veronica became pregnant at age nineteen. She gave birth to Anthony at age twenty. Anthony’s biological father is no longer involved with Anthony or Veronica. She worked various minimum wage jobs and eventually dated and married Michael in 1996, two years after Michael Jr. was born. Veronica is bilingual but considers English her primary language although she grew up speaking Spanish with her family. Veronica’s father, with whom she was very close, continued to work in construction until a stroke
caused his retirement in 1976. Veronica’s mother worked various jobs, including as a janitor for a local school district until her retirement. Veronica’s parent’s first language was Spanish. Each also spoke some English. Both were 2\textsuperscript{nd} generation, born in the United States.

During the first two visits to the Ramirez home, I realized Michael was shy. While Michael was present during the interviews, he did not contribute much to the conversation. Upon follow-up visits, he did warm up to my presence, offering very thought-provoking insights on various issues. Michael cares deeply about the success of his children. The majority of his life he grew up in the urban city where his family now resides. According to Michael, until age six he lived with his mother in San Antonio, Texas until she “dropped him off” in Hondo, Texas to live with his aunt and grandmother. When Michael was seven, his father came for him and he went to live with his father and stepmother in the large, urban city where he now resides.

Michael’s father and stepmother always stressed success for Michael. This success included attending school for an education. Michael graduated from a local high school at age eighteen at the urging of his stepmother. He had decided to drop out, but with the encouragement of his stepmother, he stayed in school until graduation. By this time in Michael’s life, his father and stepmother had divorced and he chose to stay and live with his stepmother instead of joining his father and new stepmother and her five children. Michael had various jobs until he became employed in his present position. Michael has been with the same company for twenty-two years. Michael is bilingual but considers English his first language. Spanish was the prevailing language spoken at all his homes while growing up. Michael, like Veronica, was also forced to only speak English while in school.

\textbf{DATA SOURCES}

Using multiple methods to collect data about a case study phenomenon enhances the interpretative validity of the findings through a process called triangulation (Gall, Gall & Borg, 2003). For this case study, the use of interviews, observations, and field notes contributed to the triangulation process. After two visits, I became a “part of the family” as the mother claimed, and a feeling of ease with my presence became apparent. This assisted in my role as a participant-observer. Data collection occurred weekly over an eight-month period.

An underlying premise of this research is that the information acquired will assist teachers and administrators reevaluate negative assumptions about Hispanic families and their homes in a literacy context; understand the literacy dynamics taking place within these homes, families, and communities; and use these dynamics to enhance the school-based literacy education process of Hispanic students and the relationships with Hispanic families.

\textbf{FINDINGS}

Relevant data were collected based on the memories of Veronica and Michael Ramirez while growing up. This information assisted in answering a research question within this study: \textit{What are the past, home-based family and school-based literacy practices within the homes of each of the Hispanic parents?} These memories offer valuable insight into the early lives of two Hispanic children, now parents, and (1) their home-based family literacy practices, (2) the actions and beliefs of each of their parents, (3) the school-based activities and practices each were involved with, and (4) their experiences attending public school. The four aspects of memories of this
question came to be as I realized each currently influences Veronica and Michael greatly as they intersect with public school educators and a principal where their children attend public school. Intersections are at times negative and impact relationships and success on multiple levels.

VERONICA AND MICHAEL’S MEMORIES OF THEIR PUBLIC SCHOOL EXPERIENCES
The perceptions of Veronica and Michael about their public school experiences were revealing. Beginning with elementary school, Veronica remembered some very explicit negative school experiences. In 1st grade, Veronica moved with her family to a town in central Texas and attended public school. She was one of only a very few Hispanic children in a school dominated by Anglo children and with no Hispanic teachers. According to Veronica, she was in a 1st grade classroom with a teacher who was “mean.” Veronica perceived herself as unwelcome by the attitudes and verbal comments she repeatedly received from teachers. According to Veronica, she grew so uncomfortable that she would uncontrollably urinate on herself at school on more than one occasion. Veronica reflected on these negative and humiliating experiences and feels they were based on racism because she was in a school with a predominately Anglo student and teacher population.

Veronica also relates her experiences attending another elementary school in the late 1970s within the same urban school district where she now lives and her children attend. Veronica was bused to the nearby elementary school from her home. She recalls how students were mandated by personnel to enter the school each morning; entrance was based on skin color, “Whites entered first, Hispanics second, and blacks third.” She stated students were also many times separated within the school based on race. Some classes and recess, according to Veronica, were segregated. Veronica states, “…I remember when we were in class I saw the white people playing outside but I never thought anything twice about it. The blacks and Mexicans went out and played later.”

Reflecting on her junior high education experiences, Veronica specifically discussed her perception of an older Anglo teacher as racist. Veronica states the female teacher “didn’t like Mexicans and everyone (in the school) was Mexican.” Veronica’s experiences led her to feel that the school and teachers “did not care” about her and that school “wasn’t real life” or relevant to her future success. Veronica states she received no other educational encouragement about school from other teachers beyond third grade: “No other teacher beyond Mrs. Black in 3rd grade encouraged me.” Veronica admits this perception continued through her educational experiences until she quit high school. Veronica also admits this feeling influences her today with the school and her own children. During one interview, Veronica offered this view, “What do you really use that you learned in high school? Computers do it for you now.” Yet in the same conversation Veronica acknowledges the beginning years of school are important. She feels these years lay the foundation in reading, but as you get older and progress through school and other subjects, she questions the relevancy of what is taught, especially in high school. According to Veronica, her father constantly urged her to graduate from high school. When asked why she felt he wanted her to graduate, Veronica reflected, ‘The only thing my dad said…’Go to school and graduate, go to school and graduate, go to school and graduate.’ He never said anything else but to graduate. That’s all he wanted.” Veronica did not graduate high school, dropping out in 10th grade.

Michael’s perception of school was not different from Veronica’s. Michael stated he also wanted to quit high school many times, but with the constant encouragement of his stepmother, he graduated with a high school diploma. Both admit the lure of money from full-time employment and the
perception that the homework and class activities in high school as perpetually irrelevant contributed to the desire to abandon school.

Veronica and Michael acknowledge their memories of school experiences influence the present as their own children progress through school. Veronica is especially focused on teacher interactions with her children. According to Veronica, she is very mindful of teachers who are “mean to her children;” Examples of “mean” to Veronica include teachers that are impatient with children, have a negative tone in speaking to children, use a constantly raised voice with children, make comments to children that are harmful and humiliating, and are not encouraging to students. According to Veronica, Michael Jr. presently has a teacher who does these things. Veronica has had several conversations with the teacher about these issues and once the conversation got heated. Veronica admits she is very sensitive to these issues based on her own experiences growing up.

**Memories of Veronica’s and Michael’s Parents in the Context of School**

Luis Moll (2001), who has done extensive research with Hispanic communities, states another example of sociocultural dynamics within families and cultures includes parenting and childbearing beliefs, motivations, and actions. Many times these tenets differ from mainstream Anglo culture for many other cultures. Valdes (1996) agrees that Hispanic families often have parenting styles that differ from those of a more traditional American family “model” that is characteristic of Anglo European families. Sometimes educators negatively misconstrue these differing styles and actions of parenting. Teachers and principals sometimes view parents as not taking the “right approach” toward school-based education and are not adequately involved in their children’s education. For example, many times, Hispanic parents, based on their cultural respect for teachers, will not question the educator. Some teachers view this as uncaring and uninvolved. Also, many Hispanics feel education is the job of the teacher. Parents feel their involvement in the education processes is a sign of disrespect to teachers and the school. Yet, many teachers and administrators regard this action as parents who are unconcerned and uninvolved.

Delgado-Gaitan (1998) reinforces the same idea, indicating that she found that Mexican-American parents instinctively want a better life for their children, but often support their children in ways that do not match the mainstream culture in the United States. Subsequent research on marginalized students by Larson (2010) indicates the same. These viewpoints were reinforced in this study by comments from Veronica and Michael about their parents.

Michael and Veronica verified both sets of their parents adopted the parenting style perspective that, “If you don’t hear anything from the school, everything must be fine. They trusted the school and our teachers.” Both indicated their parents never asked to see report cards, see or assist with homework, or inquired about school. When asked why they thought their parents were not more involved, Veronica said she believes Hispanics are a “passive culture” and this passivity is often based in trust and non-questioning attitudes toward others, especially those in respected positions of power, such as educators.

Veronica said Hispanics trust the school and teachers to do what they are supposed to do to educate their children. During several interviews, Veronica and Michael stressed the sentiment of trust by their Hispanic parents, the sentiment that teachers and schools know what’s best for children and should not be questioned. This cycle continues today as Veronica indicated she will not challenge a teacher because she believes the teacher “knows best” and she trusts them. The Ramirez parents’ parenting style perspective is grounded in trust and belief that educators understand the dynamics
of teaching much more than parents and to interfere or question would be disrespectful to educators. Ultimately, Veronica’s perception is that teachers are smarter than she. This cyclical action seems to affirm the findings by Delgado-Gaitan (1998).

Many times educators mistakenly dismiss these parents as uncaring and uninvolved. Many times what may be viewed by the educator as uninterested parents could be a matter of uncontrollable circumstances leading to the inability to be involved, such as job restraints. Dweck, Walton and Cohen (2014) and The Wallace Foundation (2017) suggest the method in which schools are structured may often negatively influence marginalized persons with children in public school. This structure can keep parents from participating in the various activities of the school community. Parents with limited English language speaking skills, who do not work traditional schedules, who are economically challenged, and/or who are uncomfortable in the school setting are viewed as uninterested, when in fact they are interested, but unable to participate.

The perceptions of Veronica and Michael led them to believe that the structure of the schools they attended could have kept their parents at a distance, limiting their comfort level in the school environment. Veronica believes her parents’ limited English speaking skills, coupled with not knowing what to ask the teachers about their children’s learning, could have contributed to their seeming lack of involvement. Veronica remembers that no one in the school office spoke Spanish, and her parents worked during the day. Veronica felt, “they were too old, too tired, and didn’t have much schooling of their own.” These aspects could have influenced her parent’s lack of involvement. Veronica also states she did not like her parents involved in her schooling. She stated “I didn’t tell my parents anything about school. It’s the way we were raised. You don’t talk about anything. You don’t say anything.”

When asked if he felt outside influences limited his parents’ involvement with him in school, Michael indicated his father and stepmother both worked and that may have limited their involvement in his education. Michael also verified the only time his parents would go to the school was when he was in trouble in high school or was included in school programs. Michael stated his father viewed all learning in school as important, especially learning to speak the English language. Michael’s father equated learning and speaking English with success in the larger society in which they lived. In interviews, Michael highlighted that his parents trusted school personnel to help him succeed. He also believes, as does Veronica, that Hispanics trust that schools will do what is appropriate for their children’s education and, thus, success. Michael’s stepmother, whom he came to respect and value as his actual mother, also displayed her belief in the importance of an education. Michael’s father and stepmother divorced when Michael was in high school, and instead of leaving with his father, Michael choose to stay and live with his stepmother. Through her constant educational encouragement, especially when Michael wanted to quit high school in 1985, he succeeded in graduating high school. He stated, “She told me not to quit, that I would regret it.” As young parents, Veronica and Michael found themselves repeating the cycles of trust and respect of educators and less parental involvement that were prevalent with their own parents. Veronica stated, “Michael and I both worked. We couldn’t always get off work and get up to the school for conferences, meetings, and parties.” But Veronica stated, “with each child I became more and more involved because I felt some teachers where not treating them right and I wanted my kids to get the best.” Veronica said she still did not feel comfortable because of her education memories, but began to “know what to ask and what to look for to know if the kid’s teacher was good” and would “just go up there, even if I didn’t want to because they scared me.”
Memories of Veronica and Michael’s Home-Based Literacy Practices While Growing Up

My interest in the memories of Veronica and Michael about their home-based family literacy practices while growing up unfolded during the data collection process of this study. I wondered (1) what home-based family literacy practices occurred, (2) how frequently these practices occurred, and (3) who was involved. These memories of occurrences and practices many times evolved from the familial funds of knowledge in each parent’s household and included what has been referred to as the six elements of literacy: reading, writing, listening, speaking, viewing, and creating visual representations.

Contrary to what she initially indicated, Veronica participated in many home-based literacy practices while growing up. At first, Veronica was convinced she and her family did not create an environment for literacy acquisition. Veronica maintained her family did “nothing” involving literacy activities in her home while she was young. As interviews proceeded and we discussed various components of literacy, Veronica began viewing literacy through a broader lens, beyond only school-based activities. She began to understand that literacy was not just reading a book, doing homework, or going to the library. This revelation caused Veronica’s view of literacy in her childhood home to change. As our time together progressed, I noted a change in her perspective on her home-based literacy practices and experiences. Veronica then began to discuss the many literacy activities.

Interviews with Veronica indicated the six elements of literacy (reading, writing, listening, speaking, viewing, and visual representation) were used in her home. In our second interview, Veronica stated her parents could not read or write. Veronica revealed she read all the family bills and wrote out all checks each month. Her parents would sign their name to the checks, but she would complete the rest. Veronica also indicated she counted out money and ran errands for her father. Veronica was adamant her parents could not read or write in Spanish or English. As the interviews progressed, I revisited this topic. Through our interviews, Veronica began to recall instances of reading and writing with her parents within their home. She remembered her father reading “little Mexican books” and had stacks of them all around the house. Veronica’s mother wrote and spoke Spanish prayers. Veronica verified both her parents spoke Spanish as their native language. Both also spoke English, though not very well. Veronica remembered her father telling her stories of her family history and his life. She also remembered singing, drawing pictures and hanging them up in their home. Veronica’s parents occasionally used their children as translators. These interactions included daily activities such as ordering fast food, reading household bills, and translating school information. While Veronica previously viewed literacy in school-based terms, it became evident with the data collected that literacy was used as a functional component in the lives of her family.

Michael grew up with parents, especially his father, who encouraged assimilation into the dominant, mainstream society in the United States to become, “as successful as possible.” Banks (2009) states assimilation is the manner in which a minority person or group gradually adopts the mores and posture of the dominant culture. The foundation behind this adoption is power of the dominant society. In most societies, it is expected that the less dominant group will accept the language, principles, and culture of the dominant group.
Michael said his father felt that to be more successful in the society in which they lived, the English language, including reading, writing, and speaking, must be learned. Michael’s father spoke Spanish and limited English. With a directive from his father, Michael spoke primarily English growing up. According to Michael, as he learned to read, write, and speak English in school, his father became content.

Veronica and Michael both recall watching a great deal of television growing up. Michael indicates his family watched English language television shows but viewed Spanish language movies. Michael revealed his father encouraged English language television to accelerate English language learning. Each family also had a set of encyclopedias. Michael’s parents purchased their set at the State Fair of Texas and Veronica’s mother got their set at her work after it had been thrown in the trash when she was a janitor with another school district in the area. Michael admitted never using their set and Veronica indicated she used their set only once. Michael stated his reading interests were elsewhere. He loved to read comic books as a child and young adult. He indicated he collected many of them through the years and got rid of them only in the past few years.

With a fuller understanding of literacy, including home-based literacy activities, Veronica and Michael realized they accomplished these actions growing up with their parents and are achieving them now in various ways their own children. Although Veronica and Michael are bilingual, they indicate that for their own children, speaking, reading, and writing in English is the key to their success in our society. Both indicate all their children speak only English and know no attributes of Spanish.

**Veronica and Michael’s Memories of School-Based Literacy Practices**

During interviews with Michael and Veronica, the topic of school-based literacy was discussed many times. Included were topics each parent perceived as school-based literacy, including going to the library, doing homework, learning to read, and reading books. Each area included information valuable in understanding Michael and Veronica’s perceptions and beliefs of what constitutes literacy attainment and how their school experiences influenced their contemporary beliefs and perceptions.

Veronica’s memories of school-based experiences, including literacy experiences, were often negative. These negative experiences began in her 1st grade year in public school in central Texas. Speaking in a resentful tone during an interview, Veronica stated, “That school did not teach me how to read.” During that school year, Veronica reached a point of being so scared and intimidated each day at school that she began to urinate uncontrollably on herself in her bed and at school, had bad dreams and played sick, begging her mother to let her stay home.

While Veronica would not divulge extensive information about her school-based literacy learning in the public school, it was apparent from comments and body language during our interviews she continues to have negative recollections about her school learning and experiences. At the conclusion of the school year, Veronica’s report card indicated she failed 1st grade. She stated “I did not learn to read so I failed.” Veronica acknowledged she was very happy when her family moved back to the city, where she and her family currently live. In September of 1976, Veronica entered the local public elementary school and began 1st grade again. The new school year in a different city and with a different teacher offered Veronica positive encounters with school-based literacy. Veronica vividly remembered her 1st grade literacy experiences in the city school. Veronica fondly recalled learning to read high frequency words with flash cards in a round robin style with Mrs.
West, her 1st grade teacher. Veronica also remembered studying spelling words each week. This was a positive memory of her school-based literacy practices. Veronica stated she felt safe in this classroom as the teacher took time to help her learn.

The experiences seemed to create positive, school-based literacy learning for Veronica. During several interviews Veronica talked about Mrs. West being a “little white lady” from whom she learned to read. Veronica remembered the first word she learned, nine. The school-based literacy experiences with Mrs. West were in sharp contrast to the previous year of education. Veronica indicated she was supported and understood by Mrs. West in her struggles to read.

Similar to Veronica’s experiences, Michael failed 2nd grade. Veronica first told me of Michael’s failing. As I broached this subject with Michael in a later interview, he acknowledged his failure of the grade but did not feel comfortable discussing the issue in depth. He did offer, when asked why he failed, “I don’t know really. I know I had trouble with reading.” In an effort to ease the uncomfortable situation in the interview, I switched to a different subject with Michael. Michael and Veronica indicate their school-based literacy practices were not of great importance to them while growing up and included in these practices was school-based homework. They both stressed they felt a lack of relevancy in what homework activities they were asked to complete by various teachers. They both also acknowledged they did very little of the homework. Veronica admitted when she did do the homework assignments, she “copied off someone the day it was due.” Michael does not remember having homework until high school. Associated with the feeling of non-relevant homework, Michael’s perception of school as a whole was the same. He stated the school did not teach information and promote experiences relevant to his life. He stated, “I didn’t see them teaching me anything I needed to know. School wasn’t real life.” He asserts school was not important to him. Veronica acknowledges the same feelings of non-relevancy of homework she received and school as a whole. She admits this non-relevancy contributed to her quitting school in 10th grade.

Veronica and Michael both view literacy as “reading a book.” Associating reading a book with library use, Veronica offered insight into her viewpoint of literacy attainment. When I held a joint interview with both parents, Veronica commented about her library use while attending school. She declared she minimally used the libraries of each school she attended to check out books to read. Veronica remembered only one time utilizing the school library and this was only because the librarian gave her a book and said, “Read it.” She acknowledges reading the book and liking it, but did not get another. Michael said, while in elementary school, he “was made to check out books,” but he never really liked any of them except the Cat in the Hat books.

Through our conversations, Veronica and Michael expanded their perceptions and beliefs of what constitutes literacy, including the difference between home-based literacy and school-based literacy. Veronica especially realized school-based learning is more than just homework, going to the library, learning to read, and reading school-based books. But this knowledge also frustrated her as she asked, “Why haven’t my kid’s teachers said this to me before because this would have helped me help my kids learn to read? It would have also helped my kids not have the bad experiences they had with reading like I did.” Veronica discussed some of the reading experiences of her children and acknowledged they have had more positive experiences, but she is also concerned if her children’s teachers are creating classrooms that are safe and encouraging. She stated she always likes to determine “if the teachers are taking their time to help her kids understand and learn to read like Mrs. West did for me.” In the context of relevancy, “I want my kids to learn to read stuff that they will need to help them be good grown-ups and have success.”
IMPLICATIONS FOR EDUCATORS

This study values the analysis of the histories, beliefs, and actions of Hispanic parents within the framework of education, including literacy. The underlying assumption is the data has the potential to assist educators refute negative assumptions about Hispanic families and their homes in a context of education and, specifically, literacy, by understanding the literacy dynamics taking place within homes, family, and community. Educators can then use these dynamics to enhance the education of Hispanic students and enrich the relationships with Hispanic families. The data also offers a broader insight for future research involving familial histories and literacy to move education forward.

Specifically, you may think, “How do the experiences of Veronica and Michael impact me as an educator?” You perhaps ask, “Veronica and Michael suffered negatively from certain educational situations in their lives. What can I do to prevent this from occurring again?” The following implications will provide insight for educators.

1. Educators must realize each parent they are in contact with has an educational history. Many times this may be forgotten by educators. It is important for educators to understand this history. These parents not only bring their children to school but also bring their own prior memories and experiences of their schooling, including interactions with teachers. The educational history of Veronica and Michael is remembered negatively and, at times, influences Veronica’s interactions at the schools of their children. Educators should remember the underpinning of parental interactions can be based on educational prior memories that are sometimes negative, positive, or a combination of both.

2. By understanding the educational histories of parents, educators have the ability to gain a deeper value of families, their beliefs, and actions with schools and teachers in the present. Teachers should develop an effective rapport with parents to gain a greater perception of what they value and believe in education, realizing it is these that can influence parental actions with their children and educators.

3. Veronica perceived racism and segregation during her schooling. Educators like to believe these negative personal and societal aspects no longer exist, but some in education, perhaps, have subtle biases that could influence interactions with students and parents. During my literature review for this study my own understanding of racism and segregation increased. I gained a more detailed grasp of several significant, but lesser known, Supreme Court cases including Méndez v. Westminster and Hernández v. Texas, as well as familiar cases as Brown v. Board of Education and the Civil Rights Act of 1964. I suggest educators perform their own review of information that has influenced our society and education system to learn about challenging circumstances and laws that could influence multi-generational lives and improve educational relationships with empathy.

4. As educators we can get tired and impatient, have an off-putting tone, and use a raised voice with our students. These moments in our school days are regretful, but do happen. Yet teachers should be mindful these instances can be regarded by students and parents as uncaring, unprofessional, and uncomfortable. This was evident with the data from Veronica. Teachers need to be mindful of these situations and especially the reasons why these are occurring.
5. Educators are trained to establish classrooms that inspire. To create these settings, educators need to ensure they consistently create an encouraging, safe environment with positive encounters with students as well as parents. Memories from Veronica and Michael indicate this rarely happened with them and should motivate educators to inspire students in multiple ways.

6. Associated with offering encouragement and a safe environment, teachers have the power to create student situations that build assurance and motivate continued learning. Veronica stressed only one teacher in her education gave her the reading confidence and a desire to maintain learning. Teachers must never forget that we hold the power to shape reading and learning for students for the rest of their lives.

7. Trust and respect are fundamental human qualities. Veronica and Michael indicated these did not always occur in their educational history. Educators should constantly work to create an environment of trust and respect with parents and students. In an unobtrusive manner, teachers can ask about parent and student lives, their families, and challenges to build a sense of respect.

8. Some educators approach parents’ involvement with their children and the school environment from a deficit perspective. On numerous occasions I have heard fellow teachers and administrators proclaim a variation of the following statement, “The parents of my students are not involved with their children. They don’t help with homework, come to Parent-Teacher Conferences, and don’t read the notes that are sent home.” Many of us may have thought or even said the same. It is important to realize parents do care and are involved as much as they can be. We should remember that parents can come from different backgrounds and cultures than our own and approach involvement with school based on cultural norms; these norms could be different from the mainstream norms involving education. It is also critical to remember parents could have differing work schedules that prevent expected school or classroom involvement and should not be negatively judged if this is the case.

9. Numerous times during data collection Veronica and Michael addressed the lack of relevant classroom topics and activities, even to the point to question why exactly they were in school. Teachers should constantly be focused on incorporating the latest applicable information, concepts, and activities within lessons, effectively contributing to student achievement in career and life.

10. I was touched by Veronica’s statement, “Why haven’t my kid’s teachers said this to me before because this would have helped me help my kids learn to read?” This assertion is in reference to understanding the dynamics of school-based literacy and home-based literacy. To share this knowledge with parents, teachers must first fully understand the difference between the two. School-based literacy is reading, writing, listening, speaking, viewing, and visual representation activities centered in academics, and home-based literacy is reading, writing, listening, speaking, viewing, and visual representation focused within the family, home, and community. Each is a valuable form of literacy and should be understood and utilized by teachers to help students and parents realize both are used within their lives.

CONCLUSIONS
Analyzing the histories, beliefs, and actions of parents in the context of education offers important insight for educators. Educators must remember parents not only bring their children to school but also their own educational histories, including early memories, prior experiences, and beliefs. It is these educational histories of parents, including home-based and school-based literacy practices and experiences, that can contribute to better understandings of families, their motives, and actions.
with schools and teachers in present day, creating stronger relationships and achievement for all involved.

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The need for fluency instruction does not end when students leave elementary school. Although many people equate fluency instruction with younger students (Nageldinger, 2014; Rasinski et al., 2016), educators who work with older students know the real difficulties many of these students face in this area. To make matters worse, “the clock is ticking” with older readers and the consequences of poor reading skills are steep. These can include disengagement, failure, dropout, and worse (Biancarosa & Snow, 2004; Kamil, 2008; Paige, 2008; Stover, O’Rear, & Morris, 2015).

Also problematic is the fact that most secondary teachers do not possess the knowledge and skills needed to assist these students (Goering & Baker, 2010; Kamil, 2008; Rasinski et al., 2005, Snow, 2010) because secondary teacher education programs tend to place a priority on content knowledge rather than the importance of literacy in the content areas (Snow, 2010).

Fortunately some of the very same methods used successfully with younger readers can be easily adapted for use with older readers to result in interventions that are both engaging and effective. Choral reading and repeated reading are two examples. Repeated reading is just that: reading a text repeatedly until goals are met. It is one of the best known interventions designed to support fluency development (Kuhn & Stahl, 2003). It was also endorsed by the National Reading Panel (2000) as a viable tool for fluency instruction.

Choral reading is reading in unison, like a chorus, with the teacher taking the lead (Rasinski, 1989). It is highly efficient because all students practice at the same time (Paige & Magpuri-Lavell, 2014). It is also effective with struggling readers and English Learners because of the "tent of anonymity" it provides when readers read together rather than on their own (Paige, Rasinski, & Magpuri-Lavell, 2012). This is an especially inviting approach to use with readers who have a long history of reading failure (Paige, 2011).
Kuhn (2003) expressed the need for practical interventions that are “classroom-friendly and that can be easily integrated” (p. 339). Both choral reading and repeated reading meet those criteria. In addition, they are methods that can be easily used by secondary teachers who aren’t necessarily equipped to teach reading.

The choral reading routine described below was designed to be a practical tool to develop fluency in older, struggling readers. The intervention consists primarily of instructional strategies commonly used by elementary teachers: choral reading, repeated reading, echo reading, and antiphonal reading.

Performance and choice are incorporated to engage students and create an authentic learning situation. These strategies are put together into a weekly routine that can easily be incorporated into classrooms of all kinds.

The routine is efficient in terms of both time and cost. It was designed to be brief, taking anywhere from 5-10 minutes of class time daily and requires minimal time for preparation, which consists mainly of selecting appropriate texts. Texts should be on grade level or slightly above since a great deal of scaffolding will be provided for the students. They should be short texts or excerpts, and can be any genre. In fact, teachers should make an effort to incorporate a wide variety of genres into their selections. Effort should also be made to find engaging texts that students will enjoy reading aloud multiple times.

The routine is the same each week and can be incorporated into any part of the class period. The routine is as follows: On Monday, the teacher presents two texts and reads them aloud to students, modeling fluent oral reading. The class then selects the text they want to focus on for the week.

Tuesday typically takes the longest amount of time. The teacher begins by giving each student a copy of the selected text. The teacher guides students as they divide the text into parts and label the parts (A and B). Together, the teacher and students discuss the text and make notes, ensuring the students understand the meaning and any unfamiliar words. The teacher might also focus on how to read difficult parts or on an interesting feature of the text. Finally, the teacher leads the class in an echo/choral reading in which the teacher reads a part, then the students echo the same part back, reading chorally. This continues through the entire text. Since many older readers will be unfamiliar with choral reading, it might be helpful for the teacher to do a simple 3, 2, 1 countdown to begin.

Wednesday, students are divided into two groups, and each group is assigned either part A or part B of the text. The teacher leads the students in an antiphonal/choral reading in which group A reads their part chorally, and group B reads their part chorally. The teacher reads with both groups, leading the “chorus”.

Thursday is a repeat of Wednesday’s antiphonal/choral reading followed by the teacher providing specific feedback, either to the class as a whole or to individual students. The class then reads a second time, applying the feedback given by the teacher. Providing feedback should not be limited to Thursday since providing regular feedback and encouragement is critical to the success of this choral reading routine.
Friday is performance day! The teacher plans some type of mini-performance which might be as simple as asking someone (the principal, another class, parents) to visit the class and listen to the students read or as involved as taking the class on a field trip to perform their reading. Performance is key to building confidence in struggling readers since many of these students have not had previous opportunities to read aloud successfully. Performance also lends authenticity to the choral reading routine because students know they are preparing to read before a real audience.

Depending on how many weeks a teacher decides to implement the intervention, it may be adapted slightly to hold students interest. There are many ways to do this as long as the key strategies of repeated reading and choral reading remain. For example, students might be allowed to practice in small groups rather than as a whole group. Another option is to have students switch parts for a day or to have them record themselves, listen to the recordings, and evaluate themselves or each other. The teacher might also record herself reading then have students read along to the recording on a laptop or their phone.

Throughout the intervention, the focus is always on developing fluency to gain comprehension, and this must be communicated explicitly to students. With older students, providing a rationale in real-life terms at the beginning is important so that they will buy-in to the intervention. Many of these students are reluctant to read aloud initially, but once they get into the routine, they typically enjoy it. The reward is in seeing students’ confidence grow as their fluency improves and they begin to see themselves as readers!

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From the Editors

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

BETHANIE PLETCHER

CONSULTING EDITORS: CHASE YOUNG AND Sherrye Garrett

ABSTRACT

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.

The 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
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

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

*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 21st 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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**Children’s Literature Cited**

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