

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

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Abstract

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

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

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

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

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

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

Methodology

Historical Research

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

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

Research Purpose

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

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

Research Design

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

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

Specific Sets of Sources

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

Interpreting Sources (Data Analysis)

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

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

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

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

Pattern Recognition and Narrative

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

Characters in the TALE Historical Narrative

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Carolyn Denny (2012-2013) Forming Procedures and Partnerships

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Patricia Durham (2014-2015) Strategically Designing Infrastructure

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

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

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

Leadership Contribution

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Leadership Contribution

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Robin Johnson (2016-2017) Impactful Advocacy and Engagement

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

Leadership Contribution

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Conference Alive and Well!

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

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

Laurie Sharp (2017-2018) Empowerment through Community Adversity

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

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

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

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

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

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

Leadership Contribution

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Leadership Contribution

Becoming a Larger Literacy Community.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Malene Golding (2019-2020) Leading Outside the Box

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Leadership Contribution

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Leadership Contribution

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

In Honor of Literacy Legacy and Future Literacy Leaders

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

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

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

Kamshia Childs (2021-2022) *Onward Momentum*

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

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

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

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

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

Themes, Trends/Takeaways, and Onward Momentum

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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