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## The role of literature in science: How the science of teaching reading has changed children's literature in preservice teacher coursework

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# THE ROLE OF LITERATURE IN SCIENCE:

## How the Science of Teaching Reading Has Changed Children's Literature in Preservice Teacher Coursework

Emily Holtz, Ph.D. and Stephanie Moody, Ph.D.

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### Abstract

The Science of Teaching Reading (STR) has received increasing attention as states continue to pass educational policy initiatives grounded in STR research. One major change resulting from STR policies is the heavy focus on the systematic instruction of phonics. Texas in particular has seen sweeping changes to their preservice teacher (PST) certification requirements, resulting in teacher education programs (TEPs) having to adjust their literacy preparation coursework in response to these changes. This shift leaves questions surrounding the potential displacement of other literacy practices in TEPs, such as the use of children's literature. Standalone children's literature courses have been a staple in TEPs historically; however, these courses have been slowly eliminated in other states as STR policies are adopted. Therefore, the present study uses content analysis methodology to understand how children's literature is positioned alongside the newly adopted STR policies in Texas. Through the examination of course descriptions and syllabi of literacy coursework, this content analysis seeks to determine the number of TEPs maintaining a standalone children's literature course and the primary focus of these courses. Additionally, the current study investigates how children's literature is being positioned in other literacy coursework to teach STR principles. The implications can provide TEPs as well as teacher educators insight on the repositioning of children's literature within coursework, as children's literature can serve a valuable role in the teaching of reading.

*Keywords:* preservice teachers, children's literature, science of teaching reading, content analysis, teacher preparation

### Introduction

The field of literacy education has worked for decades to accumulate research on how children learn to read, write, and everything in between. The fruits of this labor have come to be known as the Science of Teaching Reading (STR), which relies on specific, empirically proven principles to bolster literacy outcomes for all students. STR-based reforms have swept the nation, with over half of the United States (US) passing educational policy initiatives grounded in STR (Schwartz, 2022). These policies have resulted in comprehensive changes to literacy preparation, training, and requirements for inservice teachers, preservice teachers, and teacher education programs (TEPs) (Schwartz, 2022; Seidenberg et al., 2020). One of the biggest changes resulting from STR is the heavy focus on the systematic instruction of phonics (Goodwin & Jiménez, 2020; Ortiz et al., 2021; Pearson et al., 2020). This shift has left many concerned about the displacement of other literacy practices, such as the use of children's literature in the classroom (Graff et al., 2022; Sharp et al., 2018). The effects of STR policies may be especially noticeable in preservice teacher (PST) coursework. Traditionally,

children’s literature classes have been an integral part of early childhood and elementary teacher preparation. However, as STR initiatives are passed across the US, many teacher education programs (TEPs) are seeing either an elimination of standalone children’s literature coursework or the relegation of its status to “elective” (Graff et al., 2022; Sharp et al., 2018). These changes are concerning as they seem to discount the powerful potential of children’s literature to develop not only STR-specific skills, but to also support diversity and inclusivity (Duke et al., 2021; Seidenberg et al., 2020).

Perhaps most impacted by STR policy reforms is the state of Texas, who passed House Bill 3 (HB 3) in 2019 to focus on improving teacher preparation and readiness for literacy instruction. HB 3 mandates that an STR exam be included as part of initial teacher licensure, leading to significant changes within TEPs: namely, a redesign of coursework and curriculum to match the goals of STR (Texas Education Agency [TEA], 2022a). HB 3 also requires that inservice teachers complete the Texas Reading Academies, a year-long, online professional development focused on research-based literacy practices (TEA, 2020). The Reading Academies includes 12 modules, each centered on the specific skills needed to develop literacy including oral language, vocabulary, phonological awareness, phonics, fluency, comprehension, and writing. There was originally a module exclusively dedicated to children’s literature and establishing a classroom literacy community, but this was reclassified as “optional” after the state received pushback from Texas teachers and administrators about the heavy load of the Reading Academy modules (TEA, 2022b).

The reclassification of these modules means that Texas teachers are only exposed to children’s literature in the Reading Academies when it is embedded into other modules. To illustrate, the “phonemic awareness” module suggests the use of several texts to support specific phonemic awareness skills, but would not address how those texts could also be used to support global awareness, diversity, empathy, and even other literacy areas like writing (Koss, 2015; Author, 2021). Likewise, the depth of how such texts can be used across literacy skills and content areas is not present. In short, children’s literature is not receiving the individualized attention it deserves within these modules (Graff et al., 2022; Sharp et al., 2018). The multifaceted nature of children’s literature can only be actualized when specific and individualized attention is given to the subject, which is why TEPs have historically mandated standalone children’s literature coursework as a part of the English language arts (ELA) curriculum. The fact that this module was positioned as “optional” within the STR-based Reading Academies may be indicative of its prioritization within the literacy framework; in short, already-overloaded TEPs may conclude that children’s literature classes are no longer a necessary requirement within their programs.

The present study uses content analysis methodology to understand how children’s literature is positioned alongside the newly adopted STR policies in the state of Texas. Specifically, this study examines the course descriptions and syllabi of literacy coursework within public universities to determine the number of TEPs maintaining standalone children’s literature courses and the primary focus of these courses. Additionally, this study seeks to understand how children’s literature is being positioned in other ELA coursework to teach STR principles.

## Literature Review

### The Science of Teaching Reading

STR is strongly rooted in decades of prior research and is essentially a synthesis of more than 14,000 peer reviewed journal articles related to instruction on the five pillars of reading: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension (Dehaene, 2010; National Reading Panel, 2000; Petscher et al., 2020). On its face, STR aligns with recommendations from the National Reading Panel (NRP, 2000), which concludes that a balanced program encompassing all pillars is the most effective approach to literacy instruction. NRP recommendations include the intentional use of

children’s literature for fluency development, vocabulary instruction, and the reinforcement of specific comprehension strategies (Moats, 2020; NRP, 2000).

Despite the myriad research and NRP suggestions surrounding children’s literature (Duke et al., 2021; Author, 2018; Silverman et al., 2020), STR has unfortunately become synonymous with systematic phonics instruction and decoding (Goodwin & Jiménez, 2020; Ortiz et al., 2021; Pearson et al., 2020). As such, many educators and policymakers have eschewed other widely recognized best practices in literacy instruction in order to focus exclusively on systematic principles (Seidenberg et al., 2020), sending the message to teachers that language and vocabulary development, background knowledge, and comprehension are less important than the systematic instruction of current STR practices (Duke et al., 2021; Silverman et al., 2020). The use of balanced literacy programs that intentionally incorporate children’s literature within phonics instruction (Arya et al., 2005; Campbell, 2021; Miles & Ehri, 2017) seem to have been forgotten in the face of STR, resulting in a huge disconnect as to how books are used in ELA instruction (Arya et al., 2005; Duke et al., 2021; Seidenberg et al., 2020).

## The Importance of Children's Literature

Books have long been recognized as an essential part of early education (Graff et al., 2022), whether it be decodable readers or the type of high-quality tradebooks that are the focus of this particular study. Tradebooks are texts, whether picturebooks or chapter books, that are relatable, age-appropriate, targeted toward topics that children enjoy, and written to stimulate imagination. Tradebooks occupy a wide range of genres, contain sophisticated vocabulary, a variety of language structures, typical genre characteristics, and thoughtful illustrations (Wilson & Angus, 2017). One reason they are so critical relates to the complexity of literacy development; very few other tools can target the multiple skills of literacy as effectively, efficiently, or engagingly as high-quality tradebooks (Arya et al., 2005; Duke et al., 2021; Seidenberg et al., 2020).

Tradebooks have a variety of uses, including building key skills like comprehension, writing development, vocabulary, oral language, and even phonics (Serafini & Moses, 2014). These books are so powerful because alongside the development of critical skills, they can simultaneously provide natural avenues for classroom discussions and larger language experiences in a way that rote or systematic phonics instruction is unlikely to. Because tradebooks can be incorporated into multiple content areas, literacy comes alive throughout the day as students discuss the texts in relation to other subject areas.

Tradebooks not only support literacy skill development but also build a community of readers (Serafini & Moses, 2014). As teachers engage students in read-alouds, shared readings, interactive discussions, and independent reading, students begin to learn about the world around them (Author, 2021). In her seminal work, Bishop (1990) posited that children’s literature serves as “mirrors, windows, and sliding doors” where children are able to envision, and even experience, themselves as part of a larger world. In this way, tradebooks are powerful tools for reaffirming the self and for teaching children about other cultures (Casto, 2020; Author, 2021). Through books children learn about social values and messages, which promotes self-awareness, global awareness, and self-efficacy (Koss, 2015). The inclusion of diverse, high-quality children’s literature has become one of the best tools for helping build diverse, anti-racist classrooms (Author, 2021). Thus, while STR purports to promote critical literacy skills, the one fear is that this social nature of literacy will be overlooked if the focus on decoding skills becomes too heavy (Serafini & Moses, 2014).

The multifaceted use of children’s literature is recognized and supported by the Texas Reading Academies; each module includes a reference to how tradebooks can be used to teach the particular skill. For the most part, however, these examples are vague and leave much decision-making up to the teachers. This can be seen in Module 5: Oral Language and Vocabulary, where teachers are encouraged to choose “a carefully selected text” for an activity on building oral language

fluency (TEALearn, 2021a). Similarly, Module 7: Pre-Reading Skills suggests that students can practice identifying letters within books during a shared reading lesson (TEALearn, 2021b). Likewise in Module 8: Decoding, Encoding, and Word Study, it is suggested that teachers “identify compound words during shared reading” (TEALearn, 2021c) or “reinforce suffix rules through reading...opportunities” (TEALearn, 2021d). Many of the examples from the Texas Reading Academies also include references to the optional Module 3: Establishing a Literacy Community. So although suggestions are included on *when* and *where* to include children’s literature, the *how* and *what* are left up to the teacher. Without other training on children’s literature, this may mean that teachers select books familiar to them from childhood that most likely lack diversity and/or quality (Author, 2021).

## Children’s Literature Coursework for Preservice Teachers

Children’s literature coursework in teacher education is one way to ensure that teachers are aware of when, where, why, how, and what tradebooks can be used for. These courses have been a staple in TEPs for over half a century, with the first formal survey of their prevalence occurring in 1968 (Graff et al., 2022). For the most part, researchers agree that children’s literature courses should seek to cultivate the following in PSTs: a) knowledge of available literature and wide reading, b) how to critically analyze and evaluate children’s books, c) understanding the importance of diversity in children’s literature while also expanding personal global and cultural knowledge, d) understanding genre, e) pedagogy for how literature can be used to support content areas and develop literacy skills, f) and examining the multimodal nature of children’s literature, including the role of illustrations (Archey, 2022; Graff et al., 2022; Sharp et al., 2018; Tschida et al., 2014). Many researchers argue that the most important component of any children’s literature course is the ability to analyze literature and how it reflects cultural, historical, educational, societal, and political trends (Sharp et al., 2018). Archey (2022) posits that this is particularly important for classrooms today, where one-size-fits-all curriculums are prevalent and often perpetuate hidden values and morals. It is often also the case that, without realizing it, teacher-selected ancillary materials lack diversity or reinforce stereotypes (Archey, 2022). Children’s literature courses should thus “complicate the picture” of what PSTs are exposed to and ensure that diverse stories from multiple identity groups are represented (Tschida et al., 2014, p. 21). In this way, children’s literature courses can help PSTs not only understand how literature aligns with, and enhances the curriculum but also how books can be used to cultivate critical reading through the examination of inequalities that include trivialization of particular groups, inequitable language positioning, inaccurate representation of historical complexities, stereotypes, imbalances of power, and patterns of normality (Archey, 2022).

Researchers contend that standalone coursework in children’s literature is essential to ensure that teachers are knowledgeable about the use of tradebooks. They assert that while children’s literature supports literacy skill development alongside issues of diversity and equity, PSTs will fail to realize this without direct and explicit attention to *how* and *when* and *in what book* (Arya et al., 2005; Duke et al., 2021; Seidenberg et al., 2020). Graff et al. (2022) posit that fundamental knowledge is lost without children’s literature coursework, and Serafini & Moses (2014) emphasize that an exclusive focus on decoding skills in coursework will cause PSTs to overlook the social nature of literacy and the impact this has on reading development. In short, it is not enough for PSTs to be exposed to books; they must be asked to critically examine how tradebooks can support literacy skills, content area instruction, social and emotional education, as well as global awareness (Author, 2021). For this to happen, standalone children’s literature coursework must be a required part of TEP coursework, and tradebooks must be incorporated within all ELA classes.

Although necessary, the widespread implementation of STR paired with budget cuts has threatened the continuation of children’s literature courses (Graff et al., 2022; Sharp et al., 2018). Many TEPs have either removed all children’s literature courses or made such classes electives (Graff et al., 2022). Researchers argue, however, that such fragmentation of content will likely dilute its impact and prevent PSTs from making broader connections between children’s literature and

educational theory, like those connected to STR (Graff et al., 2022; Sharp et al., 2018). Sharp et al. (2018) emphasize the absolute necessity of standalone, mandatory children’s literature courses for all PSTs and argue that these courses should come after PSTs have some understanding of educational theory so that rich connections can be made. Likewise, Flores et al. (2019) contend that the elimination of children’s literature courses results in the loss of key teacher knowledge and limits authentic teacher preparation.

Sharp et al. (2018) conducted a review of TEPs in the state of Texas to examine the required children’s literature courses. At that time, 53 of the 69 Texas universities with TEPs had a mandated, standalone, children’s literature course. Since then, however, the pressure to include STR principles has increased tremendously. How TEPs have adjusted to these new policy changes and where children’s literature stands in regards to course offerings across Texas public universities is a critical question that has yet to be answered.

## Current Study

The present content analysis explores the course titles, descriptions, and syllabi of ELA coursework in Texas public universities with TEPs to better understand how children’s literature is positioned. This study seeks to discern how many standalone children’s literature courses exist and their focus, as well as how other ELA courses are positioning children’s literature within the context of STR. Because Texas public universities are held to streamlined standards determined by the Texas Education Agency, it is worthwhile to explore how the pursuit of STR-based legislation espousing systematic phonics instruction has impacted children’s literature coursework (Jensen, 2021; Silverman et al., 2020). This exploration can contribute to necessary conversations on the positioning of children’s literature within TEPs in order to better understand how STR may be influencing the ways in which children’s literature is utilized in PST coursework, and provide avenues for discussion about its continued use. The present study considers the following questions:

1. How are children’s literature courses represented across ELA coursework within Texas teacher education programs?
2. Based on course syllabi, what is the focus of standalone children’s literature coursework?
3. How is children’s literature positioned within other ELA course syllabi?

## Methods

This content analysis consists of course descriptions and syllabi gathered from Texas public universities with TEPs. Only public universities were included, as these programs are required to be tightly aligned with Texas’s standards for teacher certification and program accreditation, meaning that they are likely to reflect the goals and priorities of the state in relation to STR.

The data in this study is part of a larger scale content analysis in which trained coders culled course titles and descriptions from 674 public universities across the United States. The research team examined university websites to determine the inclusion of university programs for the following reasons: 1) the university has a traditional (four year) TEP that included pedagogical and content-related coursework and at least one year of student teaching; 2) the university offered an undergraduate degree in education; and 3) the TEP led to early childhood and/or elementary teacher certification. Universities were excluded if only alternative or graduate certification were available, if the teacher certification was not exclusively early childhood and/or elementary education, or if the school was a community or technical college. There were 32 Texas public universities that met this criteria, which can be seen in Table 1.

**Table 1: Names of the Texas public universities included in this content analysis**

<b>University</b>	<b>Location</b>
Angelo State University	San Angelo, Texas
Lamar University	Beaumont, Texas
Midwestern State University	Wichita Falls, Texas
Prairie View A&M University	Prairie View, Texas
Sam Houston State University	Huntsville, Texas
Stephen F. Austin State University	Nacogdoches, Texas
Sul Ross State University	Alpine, Texas
Tarleton State University	Stephenville, Texas
Texas A&M International University	Laredo, Texas
Texas A&M University	College Station, Texas
Texas A&M University – Central Texas	Bell County, Texas
Texas A&M University – Commerce	Hunt County, Texas
Texas A&M University – Corpus Christi	Corpus Christi, Texas
Texas A&M University – Kingsville	Kingsville, Texas
Texas A&M University – San Antonio	San Antonio, Texas
Texas A&M University – Texarkana	Texarkana, Texas
Texas Southern University	Houston, Texas
Texas State University	San Marcos, Texas
Texas Tech University	Lubbock, Texas
Texas Woman’s University	Denton, Texas
University of Houston	Houston, Texas
University of Houston – Clear Lake	Houston, Texas
University of Houston – Downtown	Houston, Texas
University of North Texas	Denton, Texas
University of North Texas – Dallas	Dallas, Texas
University of Texas – Arlington	Arlington, Texas
University of Texas – Austin	Austin, Texas
University of Texas – El Paso	El Paso, Texas
University of Texas – Rio Grande Valley	Edinburg, Texas
University of Texas – San Antonio	San Antonio, Texas
University of Texas – Tyler	Tyler, Texas
West Texas A&M University	Canyon, Texas

For the current content analysis, courses specific to Texas public universities were collected and isolated in a separate data sheet. In the initial round of data collection, many children’s literature courses were not required for teacher certification and therefore were not included in the first data set. Thus the authors revisited Texas university websites specifically to identify children’s literature courses. These were included in this dataset as part of the deeper investigation into how children’s literature is represented and conceptualized across literacy coursework. Similarly, the initial coursework was col-

lected in summer and fall of 2020. However, changes to program requirements as dictated by newly legislated House Bill 3 in Texas meant that Texas universities may have also adjusted course requirements. As a result, the same two researchers trained in the coding procedures reevaluated all course titles and descriptions for Texas public universities in the spring of 2022 to ensure continuity of courses. The dataset was then updated to reflect any newly added or recently removed courses. In sum, 219 literacy course descriptions from the 32 Texas public universities were included in the final dataset. Specifics about the coding process and analysis of each research question are included within the findings below.

## Findings

### Research Question 1

The first research question asks *how are children’s literature courses represented across ELA coursework within Texas teacher education programs?* This analysis was conducted using counts within Excel. Within the 2022-23 course catalogs for each school, 219 literacy/ language arts courses were identified in the 32 included universities. Of those, 28 courses (13%) across 27 universities (one university had two different courses centered on children’s literature) were dedicated specifically to children’s literature, and 21 of the children’s literature courses (10%) were required for teacher certification. This means that most, but not all, Texas TEPs included at least one course on children’s literature, whether it be an elective or a mandatory part of the program. This set of standalone children’s literature courses will be examined further below in research question two.

### Research Question 2

The second research question uses course syllabi to understand the focus of standalone children’s literature coursework. Thirteen of the 28 course syllabi (from fall 2022 or spring 2023) were located and downloaded by the authors, and student learning objectives (SLOs) were qualitatively analyzed within NVivo. Coding encompassed key terms determined by a synthesis of research about children’s literature coursework (see Table 2) (Archey, 2022; Graff et al., 2022; Sharp et al., 2018; Tschida et al., 2014) as well as evidence of the five pillars of reading (phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension) (NRP, 2000).

**Table 2: Children’s Literature Coursework Terms**

#### Terms

- Content or subject area
- Diverse or global or cultural
- Evaluate or examine
- Extensive or intensive reading
- Genre
- History



- Illustrations
- Motivation or interest
- Multimodal or other materials
- Pedagogy, methods, or teaching
- Select or choose
- Survey or study

Coding was completed by the second author at the word level for each node. For example, any use of the word “pedagogy” within a course description would be coded within the node “pedagogy, methods, or teaching”. Likewise, the SLOs were coded for anything that was synonymous with “pedagogy, methods, or teaching”, including terms like “instructional techniques”. Coding was completed in this manner to gain a better understanding of how children’s literature SLOs reflect not only the current values of the field but also the integration of the essential pillars of STR. Twenty-percent of the coding was checked by the first author, and acceptable interrater reliability was established. Terms were counted each time they appeared in course descriptions and upon completion; the counts for each node were exported and descriptive statistics analyzed to determine the frequency of terms (see Table 3).

**Table 3: Essential Characteristics in Children’s Literature Coursework as Indicated by Course Syllabi**

Keyword	# of course syllabi with the keyword in their SLOs	Examples
Content, subject area	0	n/a
Diverse, global, cultural, multicultural	9	Select and examine high quality <i>diverse</i> children’s literature representing our pluralistic society including children’s books to open mirrors, windows, and sliding glass doors to elementary students in the K-6 classroom.
Evaluate/ examine	8	Examine texts from a variety of genres, traditions, and cultures
Extensive/ intensive reading	1	Explore the scope and variety of children’s literature by <i>reading an extensive</i> body of works.
Genre	9	Appreciate and understand representative samplings of different <i>genres/forms</i>
History	5	Examine the <i>historical</i> development of children and adolescent literature through the academic lens
Illustrations	0	n/a
Motivation, interest	2	Develop awareness of differentiation of book selection for diverse student populations including make recommendations to specific students or to classes of students regarding quality children’s literature for use in lesson planning in order to stimulate interest, increase <i>motivation</i> , tap prior knowledge, and activate engagement of students.
Multimodal, media, other materials	4	Students will investigate the <i>incorporation of technology</i> on literature/literacy.
Pedagogy, methods, teaching	7	Analyze <i>pedagogical methodologies</i> inherent in the literature;
Select, choose	3	Select and learn ways to integrate high quality diverse children’s literature across the curriculum in the K-6 classroom.
Survey, study	0	n/a
Phonemic Awareness	1	*Demonstrate knowledge of ways to share literature in classrooms to provide authentic experiences that foster children’s growth in oral and written language development in major areas of literacy development: phonological and <i>phonemic awareness</i> ; phonics and morphemic/ structural analysis, sight vocabulary as part of word identification abilities; vocabulary; comprehension; fluency; writing
Phonics	1	*Demonstrate knowledge of ways to share literature in classrooms to provide authentic experiences that foster children’s growth in oral and written language development in major areas of literacy development: phonological and phonemic awareness; <i>phonics</i> and morphemic/ structural analysis, sight vocabulary as part of word identification abilities; vocabulary; comprehension; fluency; writing

Keyword	# of course syllabi with the keyword in their SLOs	Examples
Fluency	1	*Demonstrate knowledge of ways to share literature in classrooms to provide authentic experiences that foster children’s growth in oral and written language development in major areas of literacy development: phonological and phonemic awareness; phonics and morphemic/structural analysis, sight vocabulary as part of word identification abilities; vocabulary; comprehension; <i>fluency</i> ; writing
Vocabulary	2	Critically evaluate literary elements of children’s literature including the use of design elements, symbolism, and <i>vocabulary</i> .
Comprehension	1	*Demonstrate knowledge of ways to share literature in classrooms to provide authentic experiences that foster children’s growth in oral and written language development in major areas of literacy development: phonological and phonemic awareness; phonics and morphemic/structural analysis, sight vocabulary as part of word identification abilities; vocabulary; <i>comprehension</i> ; fluency; writing
*This SLO is from the same syllabus and was the only SLO across stand-alone children’s literature syllabi to indicate the incorporation of the STR pillars		

Most prevalent in the analysis were SLOs related to diverse, global, cultural, and multicultural texts (69%); SLOs indicating that PSTs would be evaluating and/or examining children’s literature (62%); SLOs that described the exploration of various genres across children’s literature (69%); and SLOs that included connections to pedagogy, methods, and teaching (54%). Other minimally mentioned elements include the motivation and interest of students in reading children’s literature (15%); the integration of multimodal, media, and/or other materials (31%); and the indication that PSTs would be involved in extensive reading of children’s literature (8%). The survey or study of children’s literature, the importance of illustrations within children’s literature, and the use of children’s literature across contents and subject areas was not mentioned within the selected SLOs. Only one children’s literature course integrated the essential pillars of STR (phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension).

### Research Question 3

With the understanding that the use of children’s literature in ELA courses may look different as STR policies continue to shift the focus, we deemed it important to ask *how is children’s literature positioned within other ELA course syllabi?* To analyze this, we randomly selected syllabi for courses that were a part of ELA coursework but were not standalone children’s literature courses. Through university websites, we located 14 current course syllabi and looked specifically at the SLOs in order to determine how children’s literature is being positioned or utilized within the course. We decided to look for the target terms “literature,” “books,” and/or “texts” in SLOs and then qualitatively analyze how each was positioned in connection with other literacy skills and/or practices at the sentence level (Table 4). Each author carefully read through the SLOs and made note of the literacy skills being taught/examined in connection to literature. For example, one SLO mentioned that PSTs would “integrate appropriate children’s literature into reading comprehension lessons.” Each author opted to code this as “comprehension” because children’s literature was being used to teach comprehension. The authors then compared codes for interrater reliability, discussed any discrepancies, and came to a mutual agreement.

Analysis revealed that six ELA courses referenced using children’s literature to develop comprehension, one indicated using children’s literature for writing, and another mentioned the use of children’s literature in culturally responsive and sustaining pedagogy. Six courses had no mention of the target terms “literature,” “books,” and/or “texts” in their SLOs.

**Table 4: An example of the positioning of children’s literature within a randomized selection of literacy/ language arts coursework**

Course	Student Learning Objectives (SLOs)	Use of children’s literature?
<b>Reading Comprehension &amp; Enrichment</b>	<p>Students will observe and identify range of individual developmental differences that characterize student in early childhood through grade 6</p> <p>Students will identify assessments to analyze children’s strength and needs for planning instruction</p> <p>Students will identify and select pertinent materials and resources including technological resources to enhance students learning and engagement in the planning process</p>	Children’s Literature not referenced in SLO
<b>Literacy Instruction II</b>	Apply concepts, principles, and best practices related to the <i>comprehension</i> of and critical thinking about <i>narrative and expository texts</i>	Comprehension
<b>Reading &amp; Literacy I</b>	Integrate appropriate <i>children’s literature</i> into reading <i>comprehension</i> lessons	Comprehension
<b>Reading &amp; Literacy II</b>	Students will understand through lesson planning how implementing <i>diverse texts</i> impacts the culture of the classroom and be exposed to <i>texts of authors of various backgrounds</i> that reflect the current society	Cultural responsiveness
<b>Foundational Skills of Language Comprehension for Elementary Students</b>	<p>Understand concepts, principles, and best practices related to the comprehension of and critical thinking about informational texts, and demonstrate knowledge of developmentally appropriate, research- and evidence-based assessment and instructional practices to promote all students; <i>development of grade level comprehension</i> and analysis skills for <i>informational texts</i></p> <p>Understand concepts, principles, and best practices related to the comprehension of and critical thinking about literary texts, and demonstrate knowledge of developmentally appropriate, research- and evidence-based assessment and instructional practices to promote all students; <i>development of grade-level comprehension</i> and analysis skills for <i>literary texts</i></p>	Comprehension & genre knowledge
<b>Reading &amp; Writing Across the Curriculum</b>	Analyze and incorporate <i>children’s literature as mentor texts</i> into <i>writing mini-lessons</i>	Writing
<b>Developmental Reading</b>	Demonstrate and apply ELAR content knowledge related to <i>comprehension</i> of <i>literary texts</i> Demonstrate and apply ELAR content knowledge related to <i>comprehension</i> of <i>informational texts</i>	Comprehension
<b>Methods of Teaching Reading &amp; Language Arts</b>	Demonstrate and apply ELAR content knowledge related to <i>comprehension</i> of <i>literary texts</i> Demonstrate and apply ELAR content knowledge related to <i>comprehension</i> of <i>informational texts</i>	Comprehension
<b>Early Literacy Instruction</b>	<p>Evaluate theoretical frameworks for the process and functions of reading Explain and demonstrate the importance of phonological and phonemic awareness in the development of reading</p> <p>Discuss the necessity of word identification skill and effective strategies/ instructional methods for decoding and word study</p> <p>Evaluate and design effective instruction to meet varied learning needs of students in the areas of fluency, vocabulary development and comprehension using state standards</p>	Children’s literature not referenced in SLO

Course	Student Learning Objectives (SLOs)	Use of children's literature?
<b>Reading Skills Development: The Science of Teaching Reading</b>	Understands the importance of reading for understanding, knows the components and processes of reading comprehension and teaches students strategies for improving their <i>comprehension, including using a variety of texts</i> and contexts	Comprehension

## Discussion

The present content analysis sought to understand how children's literature is positioned within Texas TEPs in light of new STR policies. Standalone children's literature courses are necessary for a thorough and robust education (Flores et al., 2019; Sharp et al., 2018). Likewise, it is essential to integrate children's literature within ELA coursework to highlight connections between STR theories, research, and practice (Sharp et al., 2018). The current analysis found that although standalone children's literature courses only represented a small amount of ELA coursework, most Texas public universities still offered a children's literature course, albeit not always required. This aligns with the study by Sharp et al. (2018), who found that most Texas universities had children's literature coursework, suggesting that the positioning of children's literature in TEPs has not changed in light of STR reforms. While this is a positive finding, there is a concern about the courses that are electives. Teacher education coursework tends to be fairly rigid and jam-packed with requirements; because of this, electives are unlikely to be taken by education majors within their four-year program, begging the question: who is actually taking these children's literature electives? Graff et al. (2022) expressed concern with the realignment of children's literature coursework into electives, positing that this would fragment and dilute its content. Teacher educators must be prepared to advocate for the continuation of children's literature courses as required parts of the curriculum so that it continues to receive the attention it deserves (Graff et al., 2022; Sharp et al., 2018).

To continue to be sustainable in the state of Texas, standalone children's literature coursework must both align with STR principles and with the elements deemed essential by the research community (Archev, 2022; Graff et al., 2022; Sharp et al., 2018; Tschida et al., 2014). Our findings showed, however, that this is not the case within Texas TEPs. Many essential components are either minimally included or absent altogether, and there was little to no alignment with STR. Children's literature courses should, at minimum, include wide reading of a variety of texts that present multiple stories, with special attention given on how to select, evaluate, and critically analyze books to support curriculum and diversity (Archev, 2022; Sharp et al., 2018; Tschida et al., 2014). Also included should be a focus on the pedagogy of book sharing, including authentic integration of the books within content areas and to support early reading acquisition (Sharp et al., 2018). Even when books are suggested as instructional strategies in ELA coursework, there often is not enough time to expand on the foundational and theoretical reasons why books support literacy (Graff et al., 2022). As such, required standalone courses must be maintained and should be placed sequentially after PSTs have built a foundation for educational theories so they are able to make connections between not only how but why these books are used (Sharp et al., 2018).

The state of Texas intentionally attempted to integrate children's literature within its Reading Academy modules to ensure that teachers were prepared to use high-quality books to support STR instruction. The present study was curious to know if TEPs would take the same approach, and integrate children's literature within ELA coursework. This type of integration is essential for ensuring PSTs are highly prepared (Graff et al., 2022). Course syllabi reflected minimal mentions of how children's literature could be used to support any literacy area other than comprehension. This may mean that some PSTs never receive instruction on children's literature (particularly in universities where it is positioned as an

elective standalone course) or fail to realize purposeful ways in which these books can be used to develop early literacy skills. This type of bifurcation between books for comprehension and the more systematic literacy instruction posited by STR may cause PSTs to overly segment their literacy blocks and underutilize children’s literature in their future classrooms. Teachers are already inclined to limit their read-aloud and shared reading time (Campbell, 2021), which this could further contribute to. Prior research has shown that teachers demonstrate a disconnect between systematic phonics instruction and children’s literature, struggling to incorporate them together in meaningful ways (Campbell, 2021; Duke et al., 2021; Miles & Ehri, 2017; Seidenberg et al., 2020). Teachers whose schools and/or districts encourage the utilization of a rigid systematic curricular approach to STR may find it even more challenging to purposefully integrate books if they have not been adequately and explicitly prepared by their TEPs (Arya et al., 2005; Campbell, 2021). TEPs should recognize that explicit training is required on the use of authentic children’s literature to support systematic phonics instruction, within standalone children’s literature courses and ELA coursework.

To successfully integrate children’s literature into ELA coursework, several things must be considered. First, are books being presented as multifaceted or single-use? For example, the book *Chicka Chicka Boom Boom* by Bill Martin, Jr. is repeatedly used by PreK classrooms to teach about the alphabet, an obvious association between the book’s content and a literacy skill. While this is an intentional and perfectly acceptable use of the book, it puts the teacher in the position to dedicate reading time to a book that covers only one skill. TEPs, however, should focus on how this book—and others—could support multiple skills across content areas. For instance, throughout the unit on *Chicka Chicka Boom Boom*, teachers could also focus on alliteration, sequencing, ending punctuation, capitalization rules, and so much more. This could be integrated into a science unit on fruits and/or trees. Similarly for older elementary students, the lesser-known book *Little Roja Riding Hood* by Susan Middleton Elya could be used not only to compare and contrast with another version of *Little Red Riding Hood* (comprehension objective), but also to build vocabulary, reinforce rhyming, build on cultural understandings, and learn about translanguaging. Investigations can be done into the setting of the story for social studies integration, as well as its historical origins. While these recommendations may seem obvious to some, PSTs will likely not be aware of the multiple uses that books can have without being explicitly told (Flores et al., 2019). As such, an introduction to the multifaceted nature of books is essential within TEPs.

## Limitations and Conclusion

While our findings suggest that PSTs are likely enrolling in standalone children’s literature coursework, the missing essential components and minimal mention of STR elements in course syllabi may indicate that PSTs are not receiving the explicit training needed to incorporate tradebooks within their literacy instruction. Concerning is that as Texas continues to shift its focus towards STR-centered instructional practices, standalone children’s literature courses that do not bring value to PSTs’ training may be deemed optional or reduced altogether. Thus, it becomes imperative that current standalone coursework not only include STR practices but also ensure that all essential elements are embedded as part of the SLOs. SLOs are a consistent component of course syllabi regardless of the instructor, therefore the addition of research-based principles in student objectives could help to safeguard standalone courses in the wake of new policies.

In the event that standalone coursework is slowly eliminated, as seen in other states, it is necessary that teacher educators of other ELA courses incorporate children’s literature in ways that move beyond comprehension. Instead of viewing the implementation of STR-centered research as an either-or endeavor (either systematic phonics instruction or literature based instruction), teacher educators must envision coursework that includes both. While we have provided a small sampling of how tradebooks can be easily integrated into ELA courses, teacher educators are challenged to collaborate with current children’s literature instructors as well as colleagues across contents to build a repertoire of instructional practices centered around high-quality tradebooks.

As with other content analyses, the present study presents several limitations. We would like to first acknowledge that by viewing only a randomly selected number of ELA course syllabi, the study may not fully address the extent to which children's literature is included in courses outside of standalone children's literature coursework. Additionally, we acknowledge that TEPs are subject to state-level requirements, including maximum allowable degree hours for baccalaureate-level certification programs along with the new STR mandates. Because of this we recognize that current course descriptions and syllabi SLOs may not fully represent the pedagogical viewpoints of teachers and educators. We understand that there are many instructional practices that go beyond the SLOs listed on course syllabi, however, we also agree that SLOs provide a strong example of what is likely to be covered during the course. Our hope is that these limitations give space for reflection on current course offerings, course objectives, and teacher educator practices within course instruction.

STR policies and curricular changes do not have to upend well established, research-vetted courses, like standalone children's literature coursework. Instead we challenge TEPs and teacher educators to re envision their ELA courses and position children's literature and STR as complementary. This integrated approach develops autonomy amongst PSTs separate from boxed, rote curriculums and elicits a deep understanding of the role that children's literature can play in not only supporting literacy development but establishing a community of learners engaged in social reading practices.

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