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INTERPRETING AND IMPLEMENTING ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS
STATE STANDARDS/EXPECTATIONS IN
SECONDARY CLASSROOMS

by
Amanda Stearns-Pfeiffer

A dissertation
Submitted to the
Faculty of The Graduate College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the
Degree of Doctor of Philosophy
Department of English
Advisor: Jonathan Bush, Ph.D.

Western Michigan University
Kalamazoo, Michigan
April 2012

THE GRADUATE COLLEGE
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Date March 15, 2012

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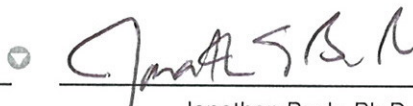
ENTITLED Interpreting and Implementing English Language Arts State
Standards / Expectations in Secondary Classrooms

AS PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE

DEGREE OF Doctor of Philosophy

English


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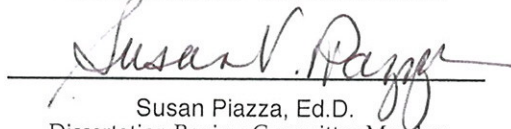
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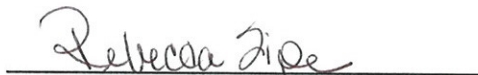
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INTERPRETING AND IMPLEMENTING ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS STATE STANDARDS/EXPECTATIONS IN SECONDARY CLASSROOMS

Amanda Stearns-Pfeiffer, Ph.D.

Western Michigan University, 2012

In my dissertation, I investigate the way in which English Language Arts (ELA) state standards are being interpreted and implemented, and how this implementation process affects the curricular decisions teachers make. This project focuses generally on the standards movement in American education, and more specifically on the ways teachers navigate the standards in their own classrooms.

The goal of this study is to problematize and better understand the end-result of current standards as they are conceived of by the final arbiters and interpreters of those standards – classroom English language arts teachers. Much work has been done in creating standards, and much conversation has occurred *about* standards, both pro and con, but little scholarship has focused directly on the teachers. It is their understanding of, and views regarding specific standards that translates abstract lists of skills and model lessons, projects, and assignments into reality. This study seeks to create an initial picture of those processes in one high school, and we can begin to extrapolate some of the complexities of the negotiation, interpretation, and implementation that occur in each teacher's classroom.

Although much is already known about how teachers meet specific standards through specific lessons or activities, little has been said about the process teachers

undergo in the *negotiation* of state standards and the curricular decisions they make.

What process do teachers undergo when deciding how to meet the expectations, if they are in fact given the freedom to make those curricular decisions? *Negotiating* the standards refers to the distance between what a teacher believes are sound, effective practices that he/she would ordinarily employ in a classroom and what he/she actually employs in order to “meet” the standards. Is this an individual process or is there collaboration within a department? Is there room for teacher autonomy, as was the original intent of the ELA state standards, or are teachers encouraged (or forced) to adopt district unit plans? This study examines how teachers are experiencing the standards interpretation and implementation process, how they are making sense of the implications for their teaching, and how they are responding to those implications.

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Likewise, the remaining three members of my dissertation committee (Dr. Karen Vocke, Dr. Susan Piazza, and Dr. Rebecca Bowers Sipe [Eastern Michigan University]) have all given their time and provided me with essential feedback on this project. Each member of this committee had a unique perspective from which she was able to offer expertise, and this project is a direct result of that balanced perspective. Additionally, I would like to thank Dr. Karen Vocke for not only her academic guidance, but her personal support as well. I never once felt alone on this journey, and Karen was instrumental in making sure of that.

Acknowledgements – continued

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It is not easy work being a high school English teacher, and time constraints are one of the loudest complaints classroom teachers have of their careers (see the last chapter for evidence of this!). I am therefore grateful for the time "Sara," "Ann," Shane," and "Linda" gave me, and continue to be impressed with their dedication to education.

A fortunate coincidence was that Dr. Cheryl Almeda and Dr. Erinn J. Bentley were one year ahead of me in the doctoral program at WMU. I had the benefit of learning from their successes and of always understanding what the next step was going to be for me. They both have provided support, inspiration, and a sense of collaboration that I will carry with me in my career.

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Amanda Stearns-Pfeiffer

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CHAPTER I

THE STANDARDS ENVIRONMENT FROM A TEACHER'S PERSPECTIVE

This project focuses generally on the standards movement in American education, and more specifically on the ways teachers navigate the standards in their own classrooms. The idea for this study came to me before I even entered the classroom; during my undergraduate education, it became clear that interpreting and implementing the standards were going to be immensely important tasks during my teaching career. It also became clear that my colleagues and I would, at times, probably disagree on the interpretations of the standards, as well as how to best implement them. Throughout my teaching career I found both of these to be true, and this personal experience with navigating the standards has led me to this academic project. As I begin, I want to describe this journey first from a personal viewpoint; from there, I will describe the academic and political histories of the standards movement. Finally, I will take on the role of researcher and describe the experiences of four English Language Arts (ELA) teachers as they have navigated the standards in their own curricular decisions.

Teaching to the Changing Standards

The standards movement in education is one that has received much attention, and this attention is often slanted either strongly positive or strongly negative. Rarely is there any middle ground when it comes to opinions about standards-based curriculum. The first up-close and personal experience I had with the ELA standards was when I was still completing my undergraduate degree in 2000. Few of my teaching methods classes

focused heavily on creating curriculum that met particular standards (something I later came to realize is a top priority for current ELA teachers). My methods classes in the late 1990s focused primarily on creating diverse lessons that met the different learning styles of students. This made sense to me; we were talking about the students as the recipients of our teaching methods, and *not* talking about our teaching methods as merely a vehicle for the standards. As I was finishing my undergraduate degree, my former eighth grade English teacher, Linda, invited me to an after school workshop with about twenty local ELA teachers where we looked at examples of the Michigan standards and benchmarks. The 2006 standards had not yet been written for Michigan, but from what I remember the concepts were similar in function. During this workshop we formed groups of four or five and each group was assigned a standard. With much discussion and dissent, each group came up with a lesson that would “meet” the standard; this was my first experience with explaining what a standard or benchmark might look like in practicality. Feeling a newfound anxiety about my chosen profession, I looked around the room at a group of frustrated professionals who found it hard to agree on a uniform definition for any of the standards. I remember taking the backseat in my group, and allowing the other (more experienced) teachers to take the lead. The idea of a standard was not necessarily so intimidating, but the idea that we were all supposed to derive the same conclusion about what a particular standard should look like in our particular classrooms with our particular students was daunting for two reasons. First, like any reader reading a text, we all created different interpretations of the text (i.e. the standard) we were reading. I didn’t realize until years later that this dissent and those diverse interpretations were a healthy

part of adopting the standards and making them our own. There is no one way to “meet” a well-written standard or benchmark, and school districts should not force teachers into believing this limited view. Secondly, beyond making them “our own,” teachers should have the autonomy to make them our “students’ own” as well. Classrooms are comprised of diverse students, and no narrowed version of what lessons should look like for those students should exist. Teachers are best suited to make those specific curricular decisions for their students.

Curriculum Checklists: 91 Benchmarks to “Cover”

In 2001 I was hired into my first full-time teaching position at Central City High School. I was ecstatic to finally have my own classroom, but I struggled (like so many new teachers) to put together meaningful lessons in my English 9 classes. I relied on fellow teachers to help guide me, and I had many great colleagues who graciously shared what had worked for them in the English classroom. Eventually, I began to find my way and started envisioning lessons on my own, all the while trying to focus on what engaged my students. At the time, our school’s “ELA standards” consisted of a checklist with about twenty objectives, each of which we were responsible to write in a date designating when each particular objective was taught or “met.” I visited the document about twice a semester: at the beginning and at the end, in order to see what needed to be covered, and to document when I had taught each objective in the previous semester. There was little explanation or guidance from administration or my colleagues; in fact, it was Shane (he will be introduced further in Chapter Three) who originally explained them to me, as he

was a “seasoned” teacher with three years experience. We used this system of curricular standards for the first four years I taught at CCHS, which resulted in a lot of curricular freedom but also little guidance. This all changed, however, when the state released the final draft of the Michigan secondary ELA standards in April 2006. Our task as an English department then became more complicated.

One of our initial jobs was to take the standards and benchmarks (91 of them) and create a curricular checklist out of them. Because the benchmarks were not initially divided into grade level requirements, our job was to first decide what the benchmark would look like in the ninth, tenth and eleventh grades. At the time, our twelfth grade English course consisted of a selection of electives, so we were relieved of creating a checklist for senior English. We began pouring over the benchmarks, discussing what we already did in our classes that fit these descriptors. We talked about what each benchmark would look like at each grade level. Unfortunately, we were not yet aware that these 91 benchmarks were not meant to be implemented in *every* grade level. They were instead meant to be spread out over the entire four years of English classes (at some point we would be adding a required twelfth grade English), as it states in the introduction to the *High School Content Expectations*: “While the standards are comprehensive, they are not meant to be used as a proportional guide to curriculum development. For example, students and teachers are not expected to spend equal time on each strand or standard, and content should logically be divided among courses” (Michigan Department of Education, 2006, p. 2). It became difficult to discern the particulars, like when exactly imagery in poetry should be taught or when students should learn about irony. We all did

these things at various points in our curriculum, and we could see where the curriculum checklists we were creating would take us. We wondered if we would soon be asked to all teach the same things at the same time. Having only six teachers in the department, it might seem like orchestrating everyone's lesson plans would be easy enough. However, heated discussions about the scholarly merits of *Hamlet* versus *Beowulf* ensued, and we debated whether *dramatic interpretive lesson plans* or *more traditional dialogue journals* were more engaging for students. We each felt the importance of advocating for the lessons and teaching methods we had previously found successful; not surprisingly, many of these lessons and methods represented very different approaches to teaching. We were not immediately asked to teach the same lessons, but we were rightfully skeptical of where these checklists and High School Content Expectations (HSCEs) were heading. However, the standards were written with teacher autonomy in mind, and the authors tried to convey that in the introduction: "Classroom teachers have extensive content knowledge, an ability to make on-going, data-driven curriculum decisions, and the ability to adapt curriculum to student needs. Teacher passion and creativity is essential to learning" ((Michigan Department of Education, 2006, p. 2). Although protecting teacher professionalism and authority was undoubtedly a concern for the authors of these standards, their initial message became lost in the paperwork. There is great attraction in creating "best practice" lessons and dispensing those lessons like, to use Maya Wilson's analogy, a doctor would dispense medicine. Wilson states, "Like drugs, if teaching strategies, methods, and assessments can be proven effective in clinical trials, don't we want them administered properly and consistently? [...] Best practice, then, becomes a

supporting argument for mandating increasingly specific practices” (2006, Intro. XXII).

This explains the motivation behind ensuring that all teachers are teaching the same lessons at the same time, and this explains the motivation behind using the benchmarks as a springboard for this uniformity. Meanwhile, we continued in our classrooms as we always had, and at the end of each semester we would frantically check off what we had completed. Because we only were given about four PD days to work on these checklists and to break down the benchmarks into grade appropriate goals, creating the checklists took us nearly the entire school year.

The following year, with the checklists in place, we were asked to further our development of what the benchmarks should look like in each grade level. During these PD days, we divided into (very small) groups and discussed specific lessons that we were doing that met the benchmarks. Teachers brought in example lessons and important discussions took place about why we used the lessons we used and how they met the benchmarks. While these discussions were professionally helpful and they made us critique our own curricular decision-making, we were asked to write down only *one* activity or project for each benchmark. This forced us to make decisions about which teacher’s activity should be included and which teachers’ activities should not. We never had intentions of making our lesson plans uniform, and our administrators claimed they did not expect us to, but the documents that we turned in made it seem as though all ninth grade teachers in our school were teaching the same activities. We wondered, too, who would see these documents once we turned them in? Who exactly was our audience?

Curriculum Alignment: Defining Words and Interpreting Phrases

Activities such as “Curriculum Alignment” were supposed to be for the teachers’ benefit, a way of helping us organize our curriculum to match the standards, and they most likely would have been helpful if we had been given the appropriate amount of time to work on them. For example, “Curriculum Alignment” meant that we filled out an entire sheet for each of the 91 benchmarks for each grade level. On each of these sheets we were asked to define important vocabulary within each of the standards, such as in Expectation 10.3, which states, “Read fluently tenth grade texts (increasingly demanding texts read with fluency as the year proceeds” (Michigan Department of Education, 2006, p. 25). We were asked to define the words “fluency” and any other words within the benchmark that were key in narrowing the definition or interpretation of the statement. We then filled in a box titled “Locally Developed instructional and Assessment Notes.” In other words, this was where we explained how we met that benchmark within each grade, citing specific texts used, activities and projects assigned. For some benchmarks, this would mean writing down numerous assignments and projects because some benchmarks were covered more often than others. For example, the benchmarks involving the writing process (such as Expectation 10.37 “Edit and revise a pre-existing text for grammar and mechanics”) are covered numerous times within a semester. We were asked to complete all of this information for all 91 benchmarks within only a few days of PD days. There were fifty pages (some pages had more than one benchmark) of documents to fill out, and this was only to help us take account of what we were already doing, *and* it was in addition to the checklists we created the year before. There was no

activity to guide us along, thinking of new, inspired ways of meeting these standards; we spent hours on documenting what we were already doing, while we were still unsure who our audience was, and we were still unsure where these standards were taking us. It is safe to say that we were leery of the future. Albeit we toiled along and we made it through the first nine pages of the fifty given to us; our work was thorough and complete, but the process was tedious. I wonder now how helpful it was to define the key words for each benchmark. Time is a valuable resource in the educational setting (as in most workplaces) and the hours we spent determining what words were confusing, or what words could be interpreted differently, could have been spent talking about the bigger issues at hand (such as where our gaps were in meeting the standards). Although this activity was meant to simplify the process of interpreting the benchmarks, it served only to slow down the process of interpretation and ultimately the implementation of the standards. If we think about the benchmarks as a text, then we have to assume a certain amount of variation in our interpretations; this is not necessarily detrimental to the goals of the standards, which was never meant to be teacher uniformity. Meanwhile we spent our department meeting time and PD time defining words like “metacognition” and “substantial.”

Sample Units

In an effort to simplify the integration of the standards for teachers, by August 2006 the Michigan Department of Education (MDE) released sample units for each grade level. The units were supposed to show how to use the benchmarks comprehensively, and

not in a fragmented, checklist fashion. “As educational designers, teachers must use both the art and the science of teaching. In planning coherent, rigorous instructional units of study, it is best to *begin with the end in mind*” (*Michigan Merit Curriculum*, 2006, p. 1). These sample units began with “Dispositions and Essential Questions” (thematic focus questions) for 9-12th grades. “Anchor Texts” were identified next; these included readings that served as the main focus such as novels, informational essays, or online resources. “Linking Texts” were then identified, and these included all the supplemental texts that would tie the unit together: poetry, speeches, music lyrics and other media were given as examples. Once the texts for the unit were identified, then ideas for projects, activities, research questions, writing prompts, making historical connections, presentation opportunities, and vocabulary words were given. The sample units that the MDE released were never meant to be adopted by school districts as mandated curriculum, they were supposed to provide a framework example so that teachers could then create their own units. What became an instant source of confusion was whether all 91 expectations were supposed to be covered in each unit (as modeled in the sample units) or throughout all four years. There are two places where the language is seemingly confusing, and where readers could have been perplexed. The first instance is in the introduction to the units, found under the subtitle “High School English Language Arts Unit Framework for Grades 9-12.” It states, “Together the newly developed units meet all of the English Language Arts High School Content Expectations” (*Michigan Merit Curriculum*, 2006, p. 6). This is as clear as it gets for determining how to handle the 91 expectations, and the following page convolutes the message. Under the subtitle “Unit

Framework Alignment with ELA Expectations” is a chart with the sections found in each unit and the expectations that are met within those seven sections. The directions for reading this chart state, “The chart below indicates where each of the 91 expectations is addressed in which section(s) of the unit framework” (*Michigan Merit Curriculum*, 2006, p. 7). Because this page is part of a packet that both describes the 9-12th grade units as a whole and includes the specific 10th grade unit samples, it is not readily clear whether this is referring to the grade level units as a whole or to only the 10th grade units (there are four units for each grade). This point became important the following year because many Intermediate School Districts (ISDs), curriculum coordinators, and administrators interpreted this to mean that all 91 expectations should be incorporated into each teaching unit. In retrospect, it is difficult to ascertain exactly where this interpretation came from, as it seems the two likely interpretations are that the 91 expectations should either be incorporated over the course of all four years or within the 10th grade units. Nevertheless, teachers were told they must create teaching units that incorporated all 91 expectations.

In spring 2007, our English department took part in a four-day workshop at a local ISD where we were to create our own units based on the unit samples released by the state. We were told we must address all 91 expectations in our units. Although we explicitly asked our curriculum leaders at this workshop if they were sure we needed all 91 expectations in each unit, they emphatically answered that we did. We trusted their leadership and spent the entire four days working on one unit. Few groups finished their units, and the groups that did finish rushed to meet the deadline. Upon completion, we took the units back to our classrooms, and tried our luck at teaching massive units in

small spans of time. Thankfully we soon received official word from the standards authors that relieved us of what we had been trying to do. In an open letter to educators, administrators, curriculum specialists, and the Michigan Department of Education, the authors of the standards collaborated with practicing teachers to clarify what the intent of the standards really was. An important paragraph states:

We wrote and reviewed the 91 content expectations with the clear understanding that each expectation was to be addressed at least once over the four-year high school span -- *not in every year or course*. Many of the expectations will be covered multiple times, and others less frequently, decisions that can and should be made by teachers (letter).

While this letter served to clarify some of what had been happening, change was slow to occur. By March 2008, the MDE was still spreading word that each *course* should cover all 91 expectations. In a document meant to clarify questions about required Speech or Technical Writing classes being one of the four requirements for ELA, the MDE answered:

If the Speech or Technical Writing courses meet all 91 expectations and offer students the opportunity to build, refine, apply, and extend the knowledge, skills, and strategies included in the unit framework and incorporated in the model units of instruction for the grade level, and include opportunities for developing the dispositions, a district could assign credit for these courses (*Course/Credit Content Expectations and Guidelines*, 2008, p. 71).

The conflicting information became difficult to sift through and impossible to follow.

Meanwhile, teachers continued teaching lessons based on best practices and checked off curriculum checklists as districts required.

Literature Review Part One: The Evolution of the Standards

All of these professional experiences made me academically curious about the factors that created these conditions. How did teachers become consumers of curriculum rather than producers of it? How did the opinions, values, and voices of people *outside* the classroom come to override the opinions, values, and voices of those of us *within* the classroom? As many of our curricular choices today rely upon “meeting” standards, I became particularly interested in understanding how teachers became acted upon, rather than as active participants in standards development. The increasingly mandate-driven atmosphere in education was not born overnight. In fact, as we consider the current state of standards, it is helpful to survey the history of the standards movement.

Whose Voice Gets Heard?

There has long been a battle among teachers, parents, and colleges about what should be included in English curriculum. In the past 30 years, however, another potentially powerful voice has entered the debate: the political voice. We have witnessed, and continue to witness, the influence of the political front in education, and although the goal seems toward a streamlined curriculum, the result is perhaps more convoluted than ever. We are left with lists to be translated and goals that often do not relate to the needs of our students. This, however, is not an entirely new phenomenon, and although

“standards” education is a relatively new catchphrase, the idea for a standards-based curriculum has been around for over three centuries. Wanting to validate English as a viable subject to study, scholars pushed for an emphasis on grammar and word origins in the English curriculum of the 1700s. The questions were already being asked then: *What do we want to include in our curriculum? How do we define what goes on in an English class?* A major difference in how we answer that question now and how we answered it then is that then the conversation took place mostly within the English community, between English scholars and teachers. Now we have a multitude of voices weighing in on this matter, and unfortunately the teacher’s voice is often the one that gets squeezed out when curricular decisions are being made.

What determines who has a say in the English curriculum? Classroom teacher voices have been historically marginalized. Often scholars were most concerned with strengthening the stringency of English curriculum in order to compete with science and math, the *real* academic subjects, at the university. “Before it could emerge as a major school study, English, and in particular English literature, had to develop a methodology rigorous enough to win academic respect” (Applebee, 1974, p. 21). Reading literature was considered an acceptable pastime for women and those belonging to polite society, however, it was not accepted as an appropriate academic subject for real scholars. This began to change in the 1850s as philological studies led the way to a more focused study of literature, and many universities began to offer degrees in literature. Concurrently high schools began to look seriously at literature, initially only in the most prestigious schools. By 1900 the prevalence of literature study in high school English classes spread, mostly

due to the college entrance exams; this is similar to the current trend in making all high school curriculum college preparatory. As universities began answering the question *what goes on in an English classroom*, high schools began to respond by reading canonical texts. Soon it was understood that in order for students to do well on the college entrance exam, there needed to be some guidelines in place outlining what would appear on the exam the therefore how teachers could best prepare students to do well. In 1879 the Conference of New England Colleges was formed with the goal of creating requirements for high school students in that region, and soon thereafter a number of similar committees in other regions took on this same work. These committees all had this in common: they soon began to control the curriculum of high school English teachers. The universities had the power to create lists of texts that should be read and the schools followed this lead.

The Committee of Ten

Soon it became clear that in order for comprehensive curriculum lists to exist, there must be more cohesion within the field. With this thought in mind, the National Council of Education and the National Education Association created the Committee of Ten. The Committee of Ten was comprised of nine subject areas and ten members in each area. The members were given the task of creating guidelines about what should be taught in each subject area. Interestingly, the committee for English created a list of two broad guidelines for student outcomes: 1) understanding of and expression of thought, and 2) an appreciation and a “taste for reading” (Applebee, 1974, p. 33). Ironically, this

second guideline focusing on the enjoyment of literature is nearly an absent idea in the lists of today's ELA standards, a point highlighted by anti-standards advocates such as Susan Ohanian. The Committee of Ten also recommended how often English classes should be offered per week, and this number varied between two and five times weekly, based on the demands of the other subject areas. Documents were published to help teachers figure out how to incorporate these guidelines into their classes (such as *Suggestions to Teachers of English in the Secondary Schools*). "It is for the purpose of showing how such requirements may be satisfied that the following suggestions for teachers have been prepared; not, however, with any thought of prescription, nor in the vain belief that any scheme can obviate the need of independent method and attack" (Bradley & Gayley, 1894, p. 6). The authors also had their own ideas about what students should learn in order to prepare for the university: elements and science of grammar, word-study, composition, rhetoric, and a long list of literature including mythology, poetry, and drama (Bradley & Gayley, 1894, p. 15-44). The number of publications with this aim has multiplied, and teachers continue to be coerced into utilizing guidelines and organizing their classes based on prescribed teaching models. This group of individuals paved the way for creating guidelines for teachers, and although their list began as a broad overview, soon the requirements became more rigid.

College Entrance Exams and "The Cardinal Principles"

One reason for the rigidity of the uniform requirements was the lists of texts provided by the National Conference on Uniform Entrance Requirements in English.

These lists of texts were the texts that colleges would use on their entrance exams; high school teachers were given these lists and the suggestion of what to teach was there, as highlighted here:

“Another question which the emerging list of texts raised was whether the high school or the college was leading the way in shaping the requirements. Here there is no simple answer: neither the colleges nor the high schools reflected any sort of consensus about the specific works to be read” (Applebee, 1974, p. 35).

Publishers of the 1880s and 90s saw these lists as an opportunity to make sales on anthologies that grouped those texts together; hence the first anthologies were created and they’ve been highly popular since. Although the college entrance exam lists may have been the catalyst for students reading literature in high schools, nationwide the Committee’s suggestions for the inclusion of literature had an uneven ripple effect, especially in the percentages of students taking literature courses within high schools. By 1900 courses in literature were still a new phenomenon, and the likelihood of a student studying literature depended highly on *where* that student was enrolled in school. For example, 32% of students in New York took literature courses, whereas in Washington D.C. and California the percentages were much greater at 96% and 84% respectively (Applebee, 1974, p. 37).

In 1918 the Cardinal Principles of Secondary Education (not exclusively the English class) were created with the hopes of broadening the goals of education, and giving teachers independence with curricular decisions. English courses were specifically studied under the subgroup given the task of “reorganizing English in secondary

schools.” Although the Cardinal Principles were touted as being a move toward democratizing education, the final report of the *Reorganization of English in Secondary Schools* looked much like the National Committee on Uniform Entrance Requirements in English. Unfortunately, the reorganization resulted in another list of texts that greatly resembled the existing list, with the exception of three changed or missing novels (Applebee, 1974, p. 64-65).

The uniformity of the guidelines brought about another major trend within the schools, and secondary teachers who became tired of colleges dictating their curriculum initiated this trend. This began in 1910s and 20s as a rebellion toward the rigidity of the book lists and entrance exams and became what could be viewed as one of our nation’s first attempts at social justice education. Teachers began to argue for a school model that fit the needs of the students, rather than a school that tried to mold every student for a life in academia. John Dewey led this educational reform movement that moved teachers and students toward an educational model that included literature outside of the classics, and curriculum that prepared students for a life other than one at the university. There was more emphasis on vocational preparation and less emphasis on the academia beyond high school. The lists, however, were not completely abandoned until 1931; this also marked the time when high schools began to come out from under the domination of the college curriculum, although the shadow of the College Entrance Exams loomed in the not-so-distant background.

Education as a Business

As the wave of democratization in education began to gain momentum, the rise of scientific inquiry also began to influence educational decisions, as it promised a way to prove the most “efficient” way to teach and organize a school. Schools began consulting “educational efficiency experts” to help them reconfigure their teaching strategies and administration techniques; these people, usually men, would suggest ways to reorganize the educational setting to look more like a business model. Who exactly were these “educational efficiency experts?” “There were those men who worked full time in the efficiency bureaus which had been established in many of the large cities after 1911, and prominent professors of education who made their services available as consultants” (Callahan, 1962, p. 95). In today’s educational setting we have curriculum coordinators and policymakers who have the arduous task of making education efficient; these individuals are often as removed from the classroom as the efficiency bureau employees of the 20s and 30s. Similar to the push for efficiency and standardized testing in the current educational climate, the emphasis in the 30s and 40s was on IQ testing and measurable results (Applebee, 1974, p. 94). Objective testing, something that may intuitively seem counterproductive in a literature-based classroom, was also central to many curriculum initiatives at this time. This was a move toward standardization that teachers mostly supported; they were attracted by the promises of fair testing in the placement of students and by the high standards that this type of testing set for all students. Many of these same sentiments for standardized, objective testing can be found in the arguments of today’s education policy makers.

Not only are the histories of standardized testing and standards-based curriculum evident in the earlier half of the twentieth century, but beginning in 1935 the terminology of uniform curriculum building, such as “strands” and “sample units,” was coined (Applebee, 1974, p. 122). Yet another committee, The Curriculum Commission, was appointed by the Executive Committee of National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) and was formed with the purpose of organizing and standardizing English curriculum; this committee coined these terms that are still used today. Sample units are units created with particular goals or standards in mind (as described earlier), and are currently commonly created and distributed along with the state standards documents. These sample units, much like in 1935, are supposed to provide teachers with a “model” of how to incorporate standards into their curriculum.

Literature Review Part Two: Educator Reactions to the Standards

Robert Mager’s Influence and Changing Teacher Behavior

As attempts to systematize English curriculum became the norm, standards evolved from very broad, basic goals to more specific objectives. With Robert Mager’s publication of *Preparing Objectives for Programmed Instruction* in 1961, the process of creating benchmarks (used interchangeably with the term “objective”) became a study in itself (Applebee, 1974, p. 234). In this text, Mager lays out general guidelines for creating successful teaching objectives applicable to any subject area, and it was one of the first comprehensive guides to show what objectives or standards in education should look like, what they should include, and what teachers should ultimately do with them.

Mager defines an objective as “an *intent* communicated by a statement describing a proposed change in a learner – a statement of what the learner is to be like when he has successfully complete a learning experience” (1961, p. 3). Objectives were intended to create a meta-cognitive view of the curriculum, whereas Mager’s publication intended to take a meta-cognitive view of objectives. The inclusion of behavioral benchmarks (measuring the “enjoyment” of literature, for example) increased the difficulty of scientifically measuring the outcomes of many standards, a problem that continues in today’s “programmed” instruction, outlining the problem that many current scholars have with the standards-based English curriculum: “What we seek to do in English is not to add discrete components of skill or knowledge, but gradually to elaborate the linguistic and intellectual repertoire of our students, a process that is more fluid than linear, more fortuitous than predictable” (Applebee, 1974, p. 255). Therein lies the difficulty with lists – lists of books, lists of skills to be dominated, lists of goals. Lists can be divided into their individual components and when these individual components are taught independently from one another, there can be a disconnect between the original goal of the standard and the outcome within the classroom. Many of the processes teachers are asked to utilize in order to “unpack” and interpret today’s standards, force teachers to look at the list of standards as individual entities, separate pieces to a puzzle. Carol Jago comments on the implementation of state standards in California schools and how teachers are required to write the standards that are being addressed in that day’s lesson on the board. The goal is to provide administrators with an idea of the “big picture” of the daily lessons lest they should visit the classrooms, as well as ensure administrators that

teachers are aware of the bigger picture of “meeting” the standards. Jago states, “Behavior modification, whether it be a student’s or a teacher’s, must engage those whose behavior is to be modified on a deeper level. If standards are to rally students to achieve, they must be more than bumper stickers” (2001, p. 8). Approaching English state standards and benchmarks in this way create an atmosphere of fragmentation and product orientation, rather than focusing on the process in student work; standards are touted as something to be covered and then crossed off the list, rather than highlighting the intertwining nature of studying language, literature, composition, or communication.

Competing Voices in a Changing Field

The trend toward systemic standards in English courses continued to gain momentum, but there were also competing voices in the argument of what those standards should incorporate. This debate, however, did not slow down the advancement of the standards movement. The momentum toward standardization was there, and the competing views about what those standards should look like only served to inspire greater debates. These competing voices, while still mostly dominated by individual university scholars like Northrup Frye, also included the New Critics, National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE), various university committees (such as an annual meeting at Yale), and even classroom teachers to some degree. “Most of the changes discussed so far were the result of the work of academic scholars, with assistance from teachers only to the extent that the teachers were convinced of the value of the academic

point of view” (Applebee, 1974, p. 208). The majority was in agreement that standards in the English classroom should be created, but few agreed what those standards should look like. Beginning in the 1980s there were two concurrent movements toward creating subject area standards. The idea was for each subject area to create “its own clear-cut descriptions of what to teach and how to teach it” (Daniels, Zemelman & Hyde, 2005, preface vii). One of the standards movements, funded by the U.S. Department of Education, was comprised of teachers and professional organizations (such as NCTE). Although little consensus was reached as to what the standards should look like (some were very broad, while others were very detailed), they were nevertheless standards created “from within the profession” (Daniels, Zemelman & Hyde, 2005, preface viii). The other standards movement was founded by governmental and political entities that had interest in what was being taught (see Susan Ohanian’s *One Size Fits Few* for an in-depth explanation of why those entities might have cared). This group was comprised of individuals outside the profession, and “almost all subscribed to the more-is-better school of rulemaking, generating hundreds of standards, targets, benchmarks, goals, and procedures” (Daniels, Zemelman & Hyde, 2005, preface viii). These two groups remain at odds, and there is still great discrepancy as to what constitutes an English classroom; what are the priorities in English class and who decides?

The last forty years in education have trended toward more and more standards-based curriculum. What began as a movement toward defining what English classes should look like morphed into what some see as a micro-managed system of teaching reading, writing, and literature. Even the term “standard” has become something it once

was not, carrying with it many negative connotations. Harvey Daniels, Steven Zemelman and Arthur Hyde discuss the changing attitudes about standards: “Now, under the banner of ‘higher standards,’ forty-nine of the fifty states have developed their own often-idiosyncratic system of frameworks, targets, benchmarks, rules, and, above all, *tests* for both students and teachers. It’s unfortunate. A movement that began as a sincere attempt to provide all children with first-rate teaching has mutated into a contentious, costly battle[...] (2005, preface v-vi). The reactions to the standards movement have been numerous and varied; some secondary English teachers and English education scholars are vehemently opposed to the enforced uniformity that standards can impose, while others see value in using standards to raise the achievement level for all students in all schools. Major voices in the debate include NCTE, Ann Gear, Thomas Newkirk, Peter Smagorinsky, Alfie Kohn, Susan Ohanian, and Rebecca Bowers Sipe; while these voices surely do not comprise a comprehensive list, they do present representative voices from slightly different perspectives. The majority of English education scholars agree on one thing: rigidity in a standards-based curriculum is not an effective model of teaching and learning for our English classrooms.

NCTE’s Role

Perhaps the loudest voice in all English Education is the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE). As an advocate for best practice, teachers and students, NCTE has voiced its concern over *standardized* education numerous times, and in various ways over the years, but it does advocate having *standards* for ELA classrooms.

In 1996 NCTE collaborated its efforts with the International Reading Association (IRA) in publishing an independent set of twelve standards for the secondary ELA classroom titled *Standards for the English Language Arts*. These standards were meant to “complement other national, state, and local standards and contribute to ongoing discussion about English language arts classroom activities and curricula” (ncte.org/standards). They reflect on the need for multiple voices to be heard in the creation of comprehensive ELA education, and they do not tout their standards as the only standards document. Including teachers in the process of creating standards was paramount in their endeavor, and the exclusion of current classroom teachers in the creation of our current state standards is an aspect of the process that NCTE has renounced. Of their own twelve standards, NCTE cites five guiding principles:

- All students must **have the opportunities and resources to develop the language skills** they need to pursue life's goals and to participate fully as informed, productive members of society.
- These standards assume that **literacy growth begins before children enter school** as they experience and experiment with literacy activities—reading and writing, and associating spoken words with their graphic representations.
- They **encourage the development of curriculum and instruction** that make productive use of the emerging literacy abilities that children bring to school.
- These standards provide ample room for the **innovation and creativity essential to teaching and learning**.
- They are **not** prescriptions for particular curriculum or instruction.

- These standards are **interrelated and should be considered as a whole**, not as distinct and separable (ncte.org/standards).

NCTE has predicted where the standards initiatives were heading, and warned against a singular rigorous set of national (or as the case may be, state) standards.

Although this organization promotes the benefits of having standards, it is also very specific about what those standards should look like. NCTE believes that “standards can articulate a shared vision of what the nation’s teachers, literacy researchers, teacher educators, parents, and others expect students to attain in the English language arts, and what we can do to ensure that this vision is realized” (IRA & NCTE, 1996, p. 2). One of this national organization’s major concerns is that teachers remain the curriculum designer in their own classrooms; teacher autonomy is extremely important in an education model that pushes high-achieving students and accommodates students with learning difficulties. A notable feature of the above statement is the inclusion of teachers in the creation of standards. Many of the authors of the MI state standards are members of and leaders within this organization; therefore NCTE had a voice in the creation of the state standards, but current classroom teachers were not included in the authorship. Likewise, the absence of current classroom teachers in the final product of the state standards is a remarkable difference between those and the NCTE standards. Although they can be argued to fit under the “from within the profession” type of standards previously described by Daniels, Zemelman and Hyde, the state standards do leave out current teachers’ voices. The NCTE standards were created organically, with the belief that the professionals within the classrooms every day are best suited to make decisions

about what goes on in those classrooms every day. The implementation of the state standards has proven inorganic, following a top-down approach to education that NCTE and the authors of the standards attempted to prevent. While NCTE was undoubtedly represented by some of its members taking part in writing the state standards, and while NCTE is perhaps a representative voice for teachers, their absence is nevertheless a notable difference between the two sets of standards.

The organization's position statements on standards in general highlight the need for curricular freedom and comprehensive implementation. The statement asserts: "These standards provide ample room for the innovation and creativity essential to teaching and learning. They are not prescriptions for particular curriculum or instruction. These standards are interrelated and should be considered as a whole, not as distinct and separable" (ncte.org/standards). The standards created by NCTE and IRA are very broad, and do not identify specific outcomes for students; the assumption is that teachers will decide the specific outcomes for each standard. For example, the ninth standard states, "Students develop an understanding of and respect for diversity in language use, patterns, and dialects across cultures, ethnic groups, geographic regions, and social roles" (ncte.org/standards). The broadness of this statement allows for individual teachers to make individual decisions about how to "meet" that standard within their classrooms; teachers are able to use their own strengths in content knowledge and background in creating their lesson plans. If we allow for individuality in the interpretations of the standards, we admit the flexibility necessary in a process that requires hundreds of teachers reading the same words: various interpretations will undoubtedly follow, just as

they would with any given text. Mager addressed this in his 1961 publication: “Since a statement of an objective is a collection of words and symbols, it is clear that various combinations may be used to express a given intent. What we are searching for is that group of words and symbols which will communicate your intent exactly as YOU understand it” (1961, p. 10). While Mager’s suggestions are directed at teachers wishing to write their own objectives for their curriculum, the overarching idea remains: objectives, benchmarks, and standards are all “groups of words” that are subjected to interpretation, just as is any text. NCTE believes that the variance in interpretation should be honored, rather than systematically remedied through curriculum alignment and standardization.

One of NCTE’s major representative voices in standards education is that of Peter Smagorinsky. He has collaborated on multiple standards initiatives and is a proponent of ELA standards that do not inhibit teachers’ abilities to make decisions. “I believe instead that teachers take into account who and where the learners are; that a teacher in a large, comprehensive, multiethnic urban high school does not make the same decisions about implementing a curriculum as does the teacher in an affluent, homogeneous suburban school or the teacher in a small rural community [...]” (Smagorinsky, 1996, intro XI). This reflects the belief that students’ backgrounds, cultures and interests should not only be respected but also celebrated in our classrooms. NCTE has adopted Smagorinsky’s views as demonstrative of the organization’s stance on standards by endorsing his books and employing his skills in writing teacher guidelines for NCTE’s standards in the series *Standards in Practice*. Although these writings are specifically geared toward the

implementation of the collaborated NCTE and IRA standards, the organization's position statement on standards-based ELA education can be consistently applied to all standards. As an organization that is deeply rooted in research, best practices, and student advocacy, NCTE's stance on the standards trend in ELA education matters. Educators pay attention to what this organization says and does as the evolution of standards progresses. Many English educators echo the same sentiments and concerns about standardized standards within our classrooms; the reasons for and degree to which educators challenge standardized curriculum vary, but most English educators do challenge it.

The Anti-Standards Movement

Of the anti-standards crusaders, Susan Ohanian undoubtedly stands out as one of the loudest. While many educators see value in having consistent standards and argue only against the mismanagement of their implementation, Ohanian argues that there is nothing beneficial about the current trend of creating narrow, inflexible standards and the push for more standardized testing. Daniels, Zemelman and Hyde, although fundamentally supportive of broadly-defined, research-based standards, do support Ohanian's view that the current standards trend is ineffective: "In its reliance upon control and specification, this reform approach recapitulates the failed school efficiency fad of the 1920s and the similarly discredited 'behavioral objectives' movement of the 1970s" (2005, preface ix). Ohanian's accusations against the "Standardistos" (Ohanian's word for anyone with a vested interest in standards-based education) also echo many of Smagorinsky's assertions, and she expands on his idea that textbook publishers are guilty

of pushing the standards as a way to mass produce education and make large profits. Smagorinsky also cites textbook publishers as a culprit in making the standards standardized: “Commercial textbooks and statewide curricula often assume that teaching is a one-size-fits-all proposition; that the discussion and homework questions prescribed in the teacher’s manual are the best questions to ask about literature no matter who is teaching or learning” (Smagorinsky, 1996, intro XI). Ohanian takes these ideas and develops them into theories about how educational decisions are made, often citing corporate and political entities as the driving forces rather than teachers.

One of Ohanian’s main concerns is that classroom teachers are rarely consulted when standards are created; the state-level committees usually consist of textbook publisher, corporate representatives, scholars from each field, and other politically affiliated people. While these are all highly intelligent individuals, the students have no representative voice at this table. Ohanian argues that standards are not a viable way to teach students because students are diverse and their diverse learning needs cannot adhere to a timetable. She denies that a “skills schedule” can be helpful for students who may learn at different paces and in different ways. “Standardistos insist on a uniformitarian curriculum delivered on schedule; taking a nineteenth century, instrumentalist position, they treat education as a commodity to be regulated (but not paid for) by the government” (1999, p. 14). Ohanian warns that this instrumentalist position leads to the de-professionalizing of teachers, relegating their job to skills facilitator rather than acknowledging their creative (and usually highly effective with nontraditional students) approaches in the classroom. Daniels, Zemelman and Hyde echo this concern: “The

resulting mandates undermined classroom practitioners' autonomy and professionalism in a variety of ways. Teachers were increasingly told by their states what to teach, when to teach it, and how – often in pre-scripted, word-for-word, 'teacher-proof' programs that not only ruled out teachers' creativity, but their humanity as well" (2005, preface viii). Because teachers have training in pedagogical methods, and because teachers know their students' needs and capabilities, teachers should be the ones who make the specific daily lesson plans, comprehensive units, and assessments. NCTE guidelines for effective standards and teaching also support Ohanian's assertion: "Teachers know that their students develop language competencies in different ways and at different rates, and that learning needs must be addressed as they arise and in ways that seem most appropriate. Adaptability and creativity are far more effective in the classroom than thoroughgoing applications of a single approach" (1999, p. 5). No document should dictate when or how teachers meet the needs of their students. Increasingly, though, the pressure to create the documents is put upon teachers in the implementation of state standards.

Similarly opposed to rigid standards like Ohanian is Alfie Kohn. Kohn's arguments parallel Ohanian in that he believes standards-based curriculum approaches learning and teaching in counterproductive ways. The meaning of the word "standard" varies from use to use, Kohn points out, and he classifies the uses of the word into two categories: horizontal and vertical shifts. Horizontal shifts refer to standards that will create changes in "the nature of instruction" (2004). Vertical shifts refer to standards that claim to "raise" the achievement level for students: "a claim that students ought to know more, do more, perform better" (2004). Distinguishing between various types of

standards definitions and acknowledging the need for a certain type of standards in ELA, he accosts the current trend of the vertical approach where “toughening standards” means testing more and creating standardized curriculum that teaches to those tests. He sees five major problems with this type of standards-based education: it gets motivation, pedagogy, evaluation, school reform, and improvement wrong (1999). Vertical standards focus too much on student performance rather than student learning. They focus too much on the accountability factor that standardized testing supposedly supplies, as Kohn points out: “‘Accountability’ usually turns out to be a code for tighter control over what happens in classrooms by people who are not in classrooms – and it has approximately the same effect on learning that a noose has on breathing” (2004). He does, however, see value in the more student-centered horizontal standards: “We’re not proposing that there shouldn’t be any guidelines for what goes on in classrooms or that our current approaches shouldn’t be changed. (One look at the ‘bunch o’ facts’ model of instruction in a traditional classroom and the need for new standards – horizontal movement – becomes painfully clear” (2004). Informed with this knowledge, the authors of the MI state standards wrote horizontal standards aimed at reinforcing best practices, and were process-focused rather than product-oriented. The language of the standards, however, is only as liberating as the implementation process will allow them to be.

Accommodating the Standards

While educators often reside at one end of the standards debate spectrum (either in favor or not), and English educators are typically anti-standards, there is also a group

of educators that has moved away from arguing against the standards (although this is often their fundamental belief) and focuses instead on *accommodating* the standards in a way that also meets best practice in the ELA classroom. Over the years, NCTE has published hundreds of articles by teachers explaining how they meet the standards, or how they help prepare students for standardized testing without “teaching to the test.” Taking a “this too shall pass” mentality, these teachers hold onto their best practice beliefs. Ann Ruggles Gear, Thomas Newkirk and Maya Wilson are primary examples of this approach as these authors have published a number of articles and books on the topic. In Newkirk’s book *Holding on to Good Ideas in a Time of Bad Ones* he spends the first two chapters discussing the “mechanization of teaching;” however, the last seven chapters are dedicated to good teaching practices, such as allowing for student choice in writing topics and reading selections. He states his fundamental stance on standards here: “Standards are useful when they do not proliferate, when they can be used to focus instruction and not disperse it. They are useful when they are general enough to allow for extensive teacher decision making” (Newkirk, 2009, p. 6). While he readily acknowledges the stress that a multitude of indoctrinated expectations put on teachers and the classroom environment in general, he spends far more time focusing on what good practices teachers should never compromise: more emphasis on the *pleasures* of reading and writing, and less emphasis on achievement, achievement, achievement. Jago also readily addresses how standards can negatively affect teacher and student motivation alike: “Motivating such students to work toward excellence is a challenge. I need a standard that will rally me, their teacher, as well as one for my talented but reluctant

scholars” (2001, p. 14). Jago finds this motivation in the readings and poetry she chooses for class; Newkirk find this motivation in the best practices he chooses to focus on in his teaching and writing. While both educators may see some value in ELA standards, neither educator is willing to tout standards as being fundamental to good teaching or learning.

Similarly, Ann Ruggles Gear addresses how to teach ACT and SAT standardized writing using best practices, and Maya Wilson investigates how rubrics can be useful outside of standardized testing and grading. Gear co-authored *Writing on Demand* with Leila Christenbury and Kelly Sassi, and in this book they illustrate how to meet the pressure to “teach to the test” and continue with classroom activities that align with best practice philosophy. Assuming an accommodation mentality is essential, according to Gear, Christenbury and Sassi, in order to weather the storm of standards and standardized testing. “Until thoughtful educators are in complete charge of schools and allowed to make and enforce sensible decisions about assessment, teachers will continue to live in a world where externally mandated, large-scale, high-stakes tests are an inescapable part of the educational landscape” (2006, p. 9). Until teachers are granted the trust and autonomy to construct lessons that best fit the needs of their students, teachers need to learn to accommodate the requirements thrown upon them. Teaching students how to write the ACT genre is essential, but it should not dictate all classroom instruction; this is the point of greatest importance to Gear, Christenbury and Sassi. Likewise, in her introduction Wilson confronts the troubles with standardized testing and, specifically, standardized writing assessments. Continuing with her education-as-medicine analogy, she compares

administering schoolwork and “best practices” like a doctor would administer medicine. “If only good teaching were as easy as following an approved list of prescriptions. Unfortunately, children are not bacteria to be obliterated by the correct dose of penicillin, and classes are not control groups whose every variable can be isolated” (2006, intro XXII). While she returns to the uncertainties of rubrics, assessment, and standardized testing periodically throughout her book, her main focus is on how teachers can use rubrics in productive, process-centered ways. She does this by creating her own rubrics that do not have predetermined categories for scoring and by leaving room for unique writing styles or approaches to the writing tasks. This is not to say that Wilson or Ruggles support standardized grading or teaching; however, these educators have found ways to combat what they believe is an ineffective trend in ELA education. They have decided to reconfigure standardized assessment and grading practices so that their teaching remains flexible to meet the needs of their students and improves their writing instruction.

Perhaps the best scholarship to date on this subject is Rebecca Bowers Sipe’s *Adolescent Literacy at Risk?* While Sipe argues from the perspective that standards can provide an organizational platform for English education (similar to the NCTE platform, Kohn, and Smagorinsky), she rallies against how the standards have been implemented in many school districts and individual classrooms, especially those within Michigan. “The vision that shapes standards at the state level and the ways those standards are perceived, implemented, and tested by local school districts play an enormous role in determining whether teachers have time, resources, and even energy for planning and delivering rich instruction that truly does represent world-class expectations” (2009, p. 2). As one of the

authors of the MI state English Language Arts standards and benchmarks, she understands the balance necessary between uniformity and consistency. “Standards, in other words, are not the same as standardization” (Sipe, 2009, p. 15). Although the goal of the standards for Michigan’s English Language Arts Content Expectations was not for them to become a prescription of lessons, the result has been close to that (2007, Letter to Teachers and Curriculum Planners); these prescriptive lessons (in the form of sample unit plans) lead toward the standardization that Sipe and other authors of the standards fear. Sipe focuses on how important the implementation of standards is; i.e. how the standards are dealt with in a given school district or classroom. “If standards are to achieve even a portion of their early promise [...] educators everywhere must consider carefully the role of standards in curricular planning, and collectively we must avoid being bogged down in an assembly line approach to covering expectations [...]” (2009, p. 43). Sipe shows there is in fact a disconnect between what the authors of the MI standards originally intended for standards implementation and what actually occurs by providing a glimpse at three scenarios of standards implementation: an intern teacher faced with prescriptive unit plans, an English department that receives important professional development training on standards implementation, and an English department without the same training.

Sipe does an important job of examining the ways English departments are *implementing* the standards. The outcome of implementing the standards includes creating curriculum checklists, pacing guides, incorporating all ninety-one benchmarks into each class, and buying prepackaged units. “The content expectations grew organically as we collaboratively considered the scope of each of the standards; they

were never intended to become a requirement on a list to be covered and checked off” (Sipe, 2009, p. 38). Sipe lays the foundation of my study by acknowledging that what was meant to happen with the standards and what has happened can be very different in action. She questions the implementation processes and the aftereffects of them: “As is so often the case, though the road to adoption of the standards was challenging, the path to implementation has been even more so. To our frustration, the message that was so central to our work – local development of curriculum based in these inclusive standards – has gotten somewhat lost along the way” (2009, p. 33). In my dissertation, I will also examine the differences in teacher interpretations of the standards, and the individual curricular decisions teachers make within their classrooms based on those interpretations. Although Sipe provides valuable evidence that a disconnect exists between the original goals of the standards and the *reality* of standards implementation, I will further this knowledge by investigating what effects standards and expectations have on the daily curricular decisions that *individual* teachers make. To what extent do teachers use their “power to affect the outcome of policy implementation?” (Sipe, 2009, p. 47).

In This Study

This history has led us to where we are now in the evolution of standards development. Almost as long as there has been organized education, there has been something resembling “standards.” While the political, business, and scholarly voices have dominated the conversation about what those standards should look like, teachers continue to attempt making their own voices heard. Universities have created lists of texts

for students to read (and therefore teachers to teach) that have dominated secondary curriculum, committees have been formed with the intent of creating “guidelines” for teachers to incorporate, and documents have been published that direct teachers in how to incorporate these guidelines (again placing teachers in the role of curriculum consumer rather than producer). Few of these initiatives involved input from classroom teachers, or viewpoints from *within* the profession. Unfortunately, much of this has not changed in today’s climate of standards-driven mandates. Furthermore, the role of NCTE, other professional teacher organizations, and individual teachers has been to accommodate the standards. In other words, many educators find themselves weathering the storm and figuring out ways to balance what they believe are solid pedagogical practices with meeting state standards.

My personal experiences, coupled with this knowledge of the political and academic history of the standards movement, has led to this study. I became increasingly curious about the implications of standards on teachers’ curricular decisions as I personally struggled with balancing the expectations with my own teacher knowledge. It became progressively evident as the teachers around me discussed the trials of navigating a premade curriculum checklist that we all wondered how to best implement the standards, yet none of us knew exactly where to begin. And just as the standards can have a fragmentary effect on curriculum, the implementation process for teachers has likewise been fragmentary. Teacher freedom was not meant to be affected, however, the trend toward narrowing the standards does in fact limit our autonomy. Similarly detrimental is that teachers have received contradictory directions on how to implement the benchmarks

(such as how often we were required to “cover” the benchmarks). Checklists are mandatory in many districts, although we know they are not supportive of best practices and the recursive nature of ELA. How can these standards improve our teaching if our interactions with them invariably leave us questioning our role in the classroom?

Teachers are being pulled many different directions, and are not given proper time to complete the curricular tasks assigned. The only task we were initially given time to see through to completion were the checklists, a tool that is primarily used to hold teachers accountable for systematically “covering” the benchmarks. The standards could help teachers think critically about their lessons and how they spend classroom time, but the implementation process has left us wondering which is valued more in our educational system: student success or curricular uniformity.

While much has already been said by educational scholars and teachers about the effects of standards-based curriculum on students’ success, little research has been done on *how* teachers decide to incorporate the standards and expectations in their classrooms, how the interpretation process affects teachers’ curricular decisions, or how interpretations may vary from teacher to teacher. While there are some notable publications that address general issues of teacher interpretation and implementation of state standards, important distinctions from my study include a focus on curricular areas other than English Language Arts (ELA) (Hill, 2001; Nasstrom, 2008; Loveland, 2003; Sarroub, 2001; Manolya, 2008; Bierdziewski, 1995), a focus on teacher *change* as a result of the standards (Barr, 2000), and a focus on *either* teacher interpretation or teacher implementation of the standards (rather than an integrated look at both) (Sipe, 2009;

Jago, 2001; Newkirk, 2009; Smith, 2003). I will study what influences are affecting teachers' interpretations of the ELA standards and expectations, how those interpretations may vary, and to what degree the standards and expectations influence teachers' curricular decisions. Most importantly, through a case study methodology, I will examine the specific case of a single high school English staff in Michigan and consider how they interpret these standards for their own classrooms. I will pay considerable attention to the knowledge they draw on, the lenses by which they interpret these standards, and how they implement them in their classrooms. I am particularly interested in understanding how variances occur even in the face of such restrictive attempts. Many of the processes teachers are asked to utilize in order to "unpack" and interpret today's standards, force teachers to look at the list of standards as individual entities, separate pieces to a puzzle (2007, Letter to Teachers and Curriculum Planners). Approaching ELA state standards in this way creates an atmosphere of product orientation, rather than focusing on the process; standards are touted as something to be covered and crossed off the list, rather than highlighting the intertwining nature of language, literature, composition, or communication.

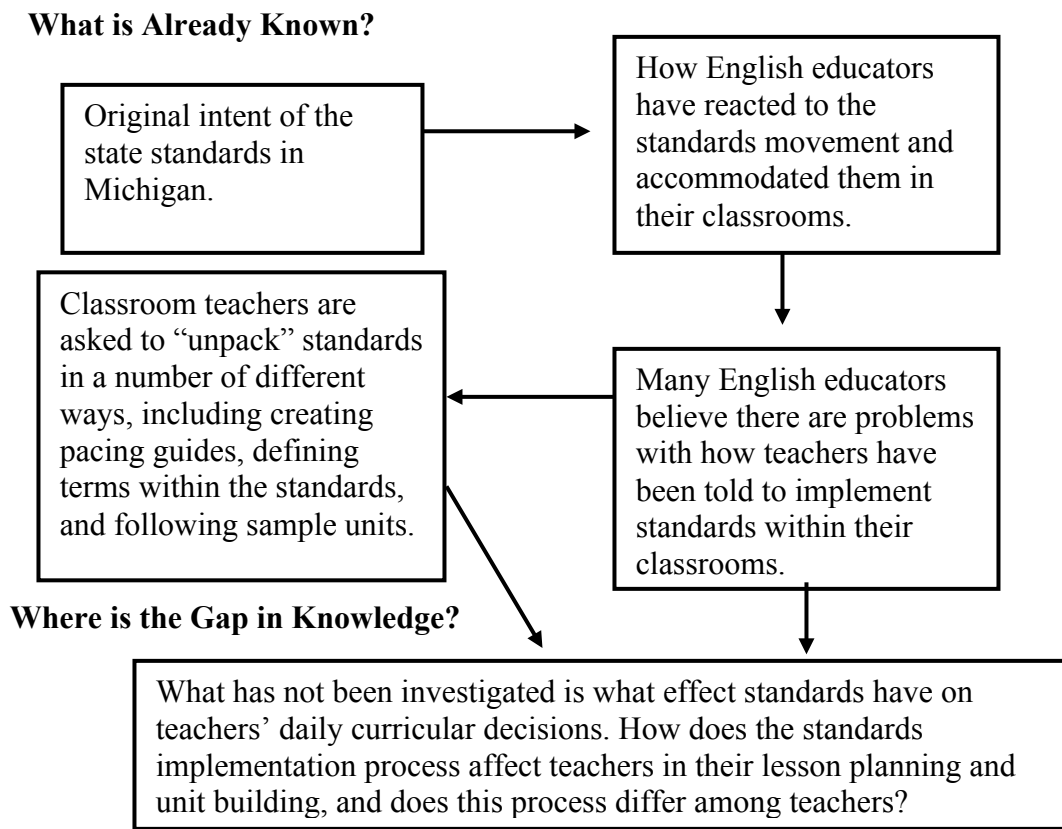


Figure 1. Gap in Knowledge of Standards Implementation

This leads me to the goals of this study – to problematize and better understand the end-result of current standards as they are conceived of by the final arbiters and interpreters of those standards – classroom English language arts teachers. Much work has been done in creating standards, and much conversation has occurred about standards, both pro and con, but little scholarship has focused directly on the teachers. It is their understanding of, and views regarding specific standards that translates abstract lists of skills and model lessons, projects, and assignments into reality. This study seeks to create an initial picture of those processes in one high school. From this study, we can

begin to extrapolate some of the complexities of the negotiation, interpretation, and implementation that occur in each teacher's classroom.

Even as I write this, a new set of standards threatens to overtake this current set. My focus, however, is on the teachers' reactions to the standards, and my findings can be applied to any set of standards. Specifically this study is about four teachers at CCHS and their interpretations/implementation of the state HSCEs. Generally this study is about how teachers react to and negotiate the interpretation and implementation of any set of standards or mandates that aim to "define what all students are expected to know and be able to do" (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2011 p. 6). Because of the reflective nature of this study (i.e. looking at "what happened"), it was necessary for me to focus on a string of events that already took place. Therefore I focused primarily on the specifics of the current state HSCEs, a set of standards that will undoubtedly soon be replaced. The reactions to these standards, and the curricular negotiations teachers went through in implementing these standards, are not necessarily specific only to the HSCEs, but rather are emblematic of a reaction to any set of standards.

Furthermore, another perceived limitation in the nature of this study is its incomplete understanding of how the implementation of standards affects student outcomes. While this study tries to discover what happens when teachers implement and negotiate the standards in their curricular decisions, how this negotiation affects *student outcomes* is not investigated. I attempt here to follow the individual processes teachers undergo in their own understanding of how to negotiate the standards; other studies

might, and should, follow up this study by investigating how variations of standards implementation affect student outcomes.

Focus of the Study

If the current MI ELA “HSCEs” are taken at face value, teacher freedom and ingenuity are respected and have a certain amount of priority in standards implementation, as highlighted in the “Beliefs” section of the introduction:

Classroom teachers have extensive content knowledge, an ability to make on-going, data-driven curriculum decisions, and the ability to adapt curriculum to student needs. Teacher passion and creativity is essential to learning (MDE, 2006, p. 2).

A similar claim toward maintaining teacher autonomy is made in the introduction of the 2010 Common Core State Standards document: “The Standards define what all students are expected to know and be able to do, not how teachers should teach [...] The Standards must therefore be complemented by a well-developed, content-rich curriculum consistent with the expectations laid out in this document” (MDE, 2006, p. 6). Again this highlights the universality within many of the standards documents; they aim to provide structure without overtly dictating teachers’ curricular decisions, creating a similar situation for teachers as they await the next set of mandated standards. While in many school districts it remains to be seen whether implementation of the CCSS will follow a similar pattern as described here with the GLCEs, what we do know is that the trend thus far has been toward narrowing the interpretation of the standards in many school districts may in fact *limit* teacher autonomy. “Sample” unit plans, curriculum maps, and various

“unpacking” activities aimed at assisting teachers in the interpretation of standards all move teachers toward streamlining their classrooms to match their neighbor’s classroom. The following table outlines potential outside influences on teacher interpretations of the standards, including administrators, curriculum coordinators, professional development activities, and school district workshops.

In Figure 2 (below), I map out the process by which teachers become familiar with and implement the standards within their classrooms. Teachers go through a number of interpretation and implementation activities, often required by schools districts. These activities include “unpacking” the standards (as previously described), creating curricular checklists, and encouraged to adopt “sample” teaching units as their curriculum. These outside influences, coupled with the pressure from administration to “meet” the standards and for students to perform on standardized assessments, all weigh on teachers as they make their daily curricular choices. Which “voices” matter most to teachers as they decide what lessons and teaching methods to implement in their classrooms? How do these outside influences on teacher interpretations of the standards, including administrators, curriculum coordinators, professional development activities, and school district workshops affect the ways teachers ultimately implement the standards? And finally, to what extent do the standards influence the curricular decisions teachers make?

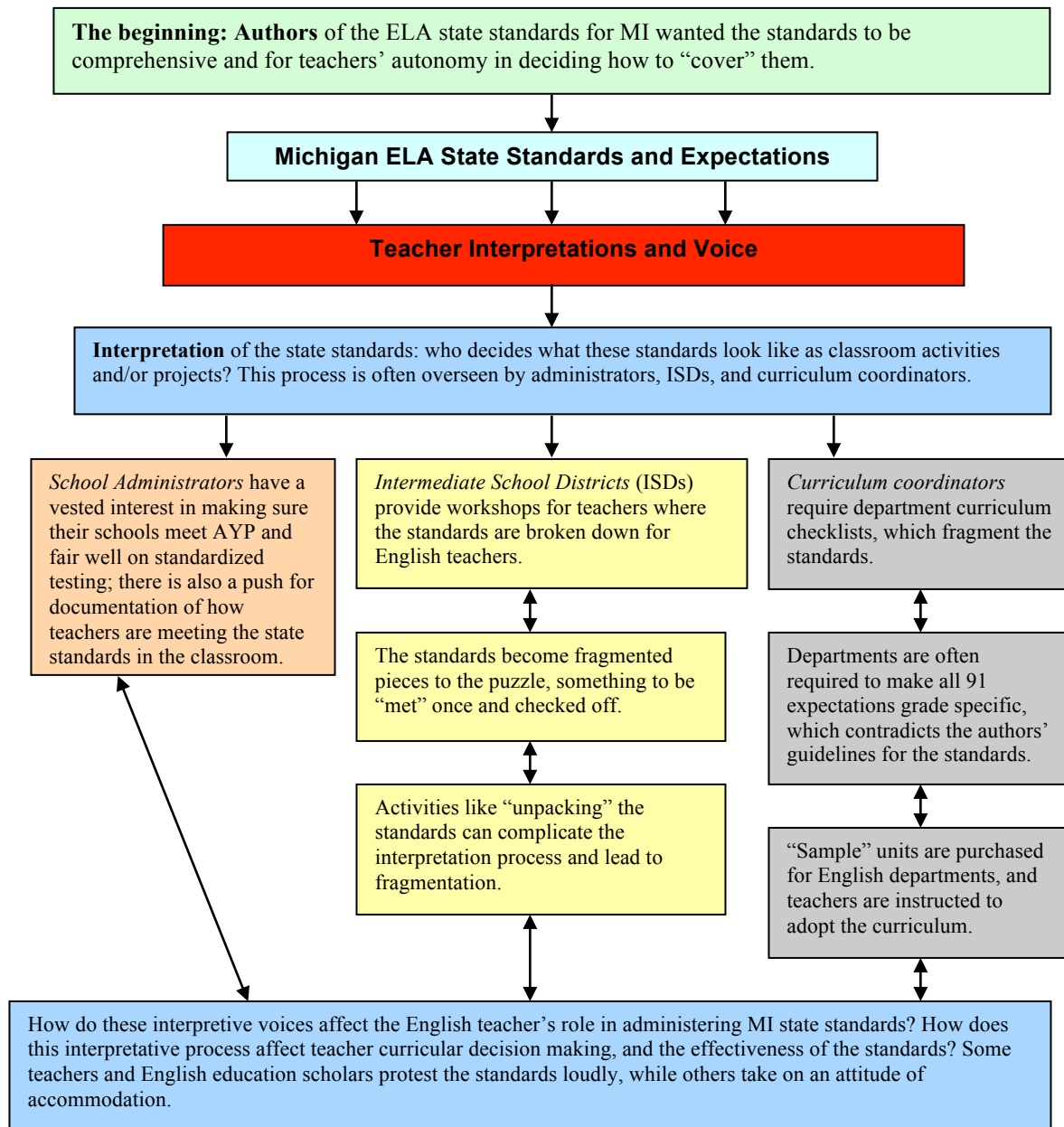


Figure 2. Potential Influences on Teacher Interpretation of Standards

Variables Affecting Curricular Decisions

In order to learn what influences *other* than state standards might affect teachers in their everyday curricular decisions, it is important to recognize that a multitude of variables goes into each individual's professional knowledge. A teacher's subject-area (in this case, English) education, teacher education background, his/her continued professional development, personal beliefs about what it means to teach, and personal beliefs about how to best meet students' needs are just a few of these variables. Pamela Grossman terms this professional knowledge "teacher knowledge" and defines it as: "teachers' cognitive processes – their thoughts, judgments, decisions, and plans" (1990, p. 4). Likewise, Grossman describes how the field of research is turning from investigating what constitutes teacher knowledge to how this knowledge *affects* the teachers' plans and decisions. A teacher's professional knowledge influences what that teacher decides to do in the classroom: what texts to read, what writing assignments to assign, and how to "teach" grammar.

In *The Making of a Teacher: Teacher Knowledge & Teacher Education*, Grossman establishes four different areas of teacher knowledge: *subject matter knowledge*, *general pedagogical knowledge*, *pedagogical content knowledge*, and *knowledge of context*. Within each of these classifications is a list of the types of knowledge each encompasses. "Subject matter knowledge," which includes knowledge of syntactic structures, content and substantive structures, is best described here as knowledge about English studies; this includes literary theory, ongoing academic debates, and canonical texts. This is an important aspect of teacher knowledge because "lack of

content knowledge may affect the level of classroom discourse” (Carlsen, 1988, as quoted in Grossman, 1990, p. 7). “General pedagogical knowledge” includes “a body of general knowledge, beliefs, and skills related to teaching” (Grossman, 1990, p. 6). This refers to the basic skills or knowledge a teacher has about classroom management, beliefs about learners and learning, and general instructional strategies or techniques. “General pedagogical knowledge” includes knowledge about how to teach a generic subject, whereas “pedagogical content knowledge” includes knowledge about how to teach a specific subject (i.e. English). “Pedagogical content knowledge” refers to “knowledge that is specific to teaching particular subject matters.” This is the knowledge that Grossman focuses on in her study, especially the teacher education courses that some teachers experienced in their undergraduate degrees.

Grossman outlines how teachers develop “pedagogical content knowledge;” apprenticeship of observation, disciplinary background, professional coursework, and learning from experience are the four main ways that teachers gain this type of knowledge. “Pedagogical content knowledge” is the main type of knowledge that drives the curricular decisions of the four teachers in my study, and therefore I have delineated where this knowledge developed for each teacher. Often the teachers in my study have been influenced by the “apprenticeship of observation,” or by attempting to “replicate the strategies they experienced as students” (Grossman, 1990, p. 10). Although none of the teachers in my study who experienced professional coursework as part of their undergraduate degrees give much credit to those courses for influencing their curricular decisions, there are definitely areas in their teacher knowledge that have been informed

by this coursework. Finally, all four of the teachers in this study show signs of relying on their experience in the classroom to dictate their curricular decisions, especially in terms of teaching writing and grammar. They rely on trial and error in order to figure out what techniques work with particular classes and/or students.

Grossman is primarily concerned with how a teacher's professional coursework affects his/her curricular decisions. In other words, Grossman investigates how teachers with a teacher education background differ, both in the ways they teach and in their personal pedagogical beliefs, from teachers with no teacher education background. Her study reveals that teachers with a teacher education background are generally more flexible, innovative, and student-centered than their non-teacher education counterparts. They also have a better idea of how to bridge the gap between their subject matter and students' interest/skill levels. Grossman's ideas are outlined in her theoretical framework below; this theoretical framework is the framework she uses to outline her own study. Here her framework is used to show where state standards fit into this discussion. This highlights the need for an increased understanding of how standards are influencing teachers in their daily practices.

Grossman's Model of Teacher Knowledge

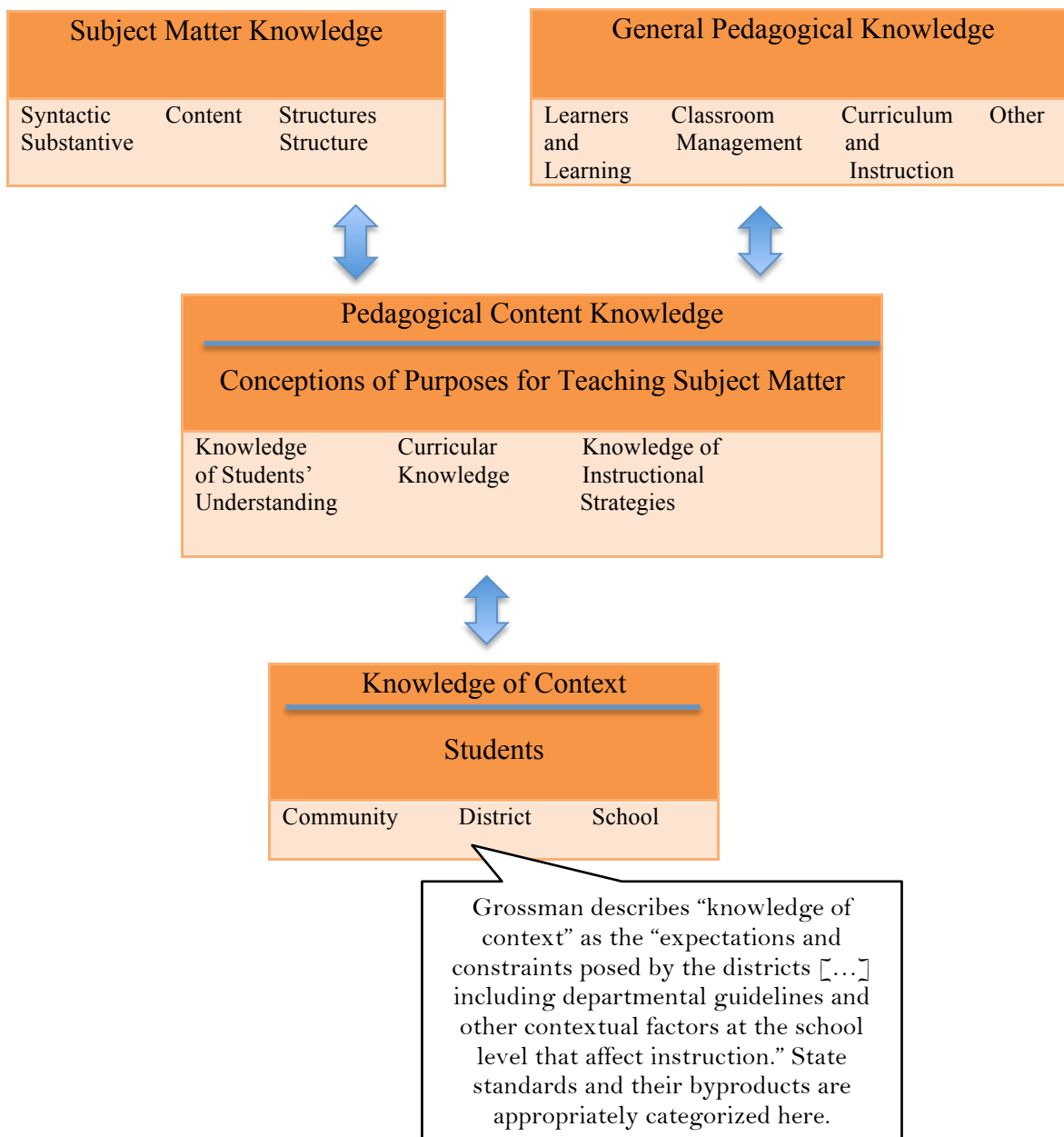


Figure 3: Grossman's Model of Teacher Knowledge and State Standards

While Grossman does an important job of investigating how teachers develop “teacher knowledge,” especially in terms of professional coursework, there are areas of teacher knowledge that are left out of her discussion (as indicated in Figure 3). This is especially true with the fourth type of teacher knowledge – “knowledge of context” – as it goes largely ignored in her study. The “knowledge of context” includes an understanding of one’s students, community, district, and school. This type of knowledge speaks to the “specific school settings and individual students” (Grossman, 1990, p. 9) and includes:

“knowledge of the districts in which teachers work, including the opportunities, expectations, and constraints posed by the districts; knowledge of the school setting, including the school “culture,’ departmental guidelines, and other contextual factors at the school level that affect instruction; and knowledge of specific students and communities, and the students’ backgrounds, families, particular strengths, weaknesses, and interests” (Grossman, 1990, p. 9).

Knowledge of the specificities of a school and its district is becoming even more important as the trend toward incorporating state standards in departments depends greatly on how that district’s leaders decide to incorporate them. Understanding the state standards and its byproducts necessitates all types of teacher knowledge (knowledge of subject matter, curriculum and instruction, and instructional strategies) in some school districts; however, a knowledge of the context of one’s school district – its requirements, its beliefs about state standards and teacher autonomy, and its adoption process of the standards – is paramount in understanding what is expected within one’s curriculum,

even if the district is relatively lenient in allowing for teacher autonomy when implementing the standards. There still requires an in depth understanding of how teachers are working together to meet the expectations/standards.

As aforementioned, some school districts require teachers to follow a set curriculum in the form of “sample units,” while other districts allow teachers to decide for themselves how they want to meet the standards in their department. Whatever level of teacher autonomy is given in any particular English department, teachers are still responsible for knowing their specific “departmental guidelines” and working together as a department to meet those guidelines. It is inevitable that a teacher’s curricular decisions will be more directly affected by “knowledge of context” than perhaps ever before. The teachers in this study were given complete freedom from their district to meet the standards in whatever documented way they saw fit, as long as the process included pacing guides and common assessments. As a department, they created their own pacing guides and common assessments; however, the autonomy is restricted for teachers who have come into the department since those documents were created. This puts an immense amount of importance on the “knowledge of context,” since teachers are expected to not only “meet the standards” but to do so by following a curricular outline created by other teachers in the department. The “departmental guidelines” created by this department has, in some ways, become the most important “knowledge” for these teachers – especially the teachers who have only recently come into the group. The importance of the “knowledge of context” seems to have increased in the English department at CCHS since I left the school; teachers now must carefully attend to the

pacing guides and common assessments as established by the department itself. The degree to which the four teachers in this study have negotiated their own personal teacher knowledge in order to accommodate the knowledge of the “context” varies greatly; the following chapter will begin to outline each teacher’s personal negotiation with his/her professional knowledge in regards to the standards and their byproducts.

In chapter two I outline the benefits of using a case study methodology for this study, including the flexibility of open-ended questions, the depth of investigation, and a focused case study’s manageable size. Likewise, I delineate the benefits of revisiting the English department I left three years ago. Utilizing relationships already in place and relying on my personal background knowledge about what this English department has undergone in terms of standards interpretation and implementation allows for a more complete picture of the teachers in this department and the curricular decisions they make. Finally, in chapter two I identify the research questions guiding this study, and the way I analyzed the data as I collected it from interviews and document analysis in order to answer those research questions. Consequently, I define the three terms I used in organizing my data (*interpretation influences*, *level of negotiation*, and *the level of variance in implementation of standards/expectations*) and explain how these categories of information serve to answer my guiding questions.

CHAPTER II

METHODOLOGY

In order to provide a more complex and holistic illustration of the current standards situation in secondary ELA education, I will now outline the details of this specific study. I conducted a case study of the English department at Central City High School, which included three open-ended interviews with four different teachers; document analysis of the pacing guides, curriculum binders, sample units, and other documents created in the interpretation and implementation of the standards within this district; and participant-observation of a professional development experience. These documents, interviews and observations allowed me to learn about the individual experiences of the four ELA high school teachers in their interpretation and implementation of the state standards/expectations. I investigated (through interviews, document analysis and participant-observation) how teachers interpreted and implemented the standards at this high school, how those interpretations vary, and how this school district may have influenced the teachers' interpretive processes and curricular decision-making.

Case Study Background

For this study, I utilized an intrinsic case study methodology ("this type of case study focuses on the case because it holds intrinsic or unusual interest" [Creswell, 2007,

p. 245]) and investigated the interpretation and implementation processes of Michigan's ELA standards by classroom teachers within one high school. This high school, Central City High School, provided me with four teachers to study. Central City High School is situated in a mid-sized, middle-class town located in the mid-west. The school's size is desirable with about 550 students; this allowed me to interview all teachers within this specific English department and provided me with a comprehensive view of the implementation process of the standards in this school. I also have personal history at this school; I taught English there for seven years (2001-2008) and took part in many of the "unpacking" activities that the teachers discussed with me (as described in chapter one). There were also many changes made in the three years since I taught there; these changes include the creation of common assessments, strict adherence to pacing guides by teachers who did not create the pacing guides, and no department curriculum coordinators (due to funding cuts). In the fall of 2005, I took on the job of department chair for Central City's English department. With many changes in curriculum requirements from 2005-2008, our district spent much time keeping up with new state requirements and the release of new standards in core content areas. Standards implementation was the focus during many PD days then, and it remains the focus of most PD days now. A major change to those PD experiences now is that there is no leadership within the department to organize the department's priorities. The "department chair" leadership position, a paid position, was terminated three years ago due to budget constraints. The department chair used to have the responsibility of organizing the priorities of the English department, and would lead monthly meetings outlining these

priorities. The department chair also organized and oversaw the all-day meetings that took place during PD days. These PD days provided the longest uninterrupted sequence of time for the department to collaborate and focus on its work, and it was then that teachers were able to “unpack” the standards, and complete the work described in chapter one. The department chair, although not a figure of authority, was also in charge of organizing this department time and reporting back to administration what took place. Since the position has been cut, the teachers report being given even less departmental time to work, brainstorm, and troubleshoot the standards, mostly because there is not anyone “in charge” who will lead the meetings. Secondly, because no one is identified as the department chair, no one in the department takes on the responsibility of, or spends the extra time to, work on organizing the department’s priorities and needs. This confounds the problem presented by the standards: a lack of time and an increased need for collaboration.

I chose to utilize a case study methodology for this research because it allows researchers to study “a case within a bounded system” (Creswell, 2007, p. 73), which describes the situation of investigating the standards interpretation and implementation processes at Central City High School. “The “bounded system” in this instance is the state-mandated standards that each school district must meet; the “case” I’m compiling a holistic observation of is the CCHS ELA department in its handling of the state standards. Likewise, providing a “holistic” picture of a situation is one of the benefits of a case study: “As the product of an investigation, a case study is an intensive, holistic description and analysis of a single entity, phenomenon, or social unit” (Merriam, 2009,

p. 46). I was able to study the complex issue of implementing standards/expectations within one school in an in-depth manner, rather than shallowly investigating these processes in many schools.

A case study provides the best way to investigate an issue that involves many variables, such as the implementation of state standards does: “In a case study, a specific case is examined, often with the intent of examining an issue with the case illustrating the complexity of the issue” (Creswell, 2007, p. 93). Additionally, case studies provide a more holistic picture of the situation: “Case studies takes the reader into the setting with a vividness and detail not typically present in more analytic reporting formats” (Marshall & Rossman, 2006, p. 164). Moreover, Case studies also allow for multiple forms of data collection, such as interviews and document analysis (Creswell, 2007, p. 75); both of these data collection methods were utilized within this study, and both provided me with unique perspectives on the interpretation and implementation of the standards.

This study best fits the tradition of an *intrinsic case study* because I was interested in gaining in-depth information about *one* organization rather than little information about many institutions. Studying the interpretation and implementation process of the state standards involves a great amount of data; to study numerous sites would weaken the available resources, as John W. Creswell notes: “The researcher must consider whether to study a single case or multiple cases. The study of more than one case dilutes the overall analysis; the more cases an individual studies, the less the depth in any single case” (2007, p. 76). The “do-ability” factor (Marshall & Rossman, 2006, p. 11) of this

study also made it more feasible to study one school in depth rather than multiple schools in little depth, given the constraints of time.

Three types of data collection methods were utilized in this study: open-ended interviewing, document appraisal, and participant-observation, as illustrated below in Figure 4. I began first by observing a PD day at CCHS in which Ann, Sara, Shane and Linda participated. This particular PD day consisted of department meetings, discussions about standards implementation, and introductory meetings about the upcoming Common Core State Standards. After the PD day, I then conducted three rounds of unstructured, open-ended, one-on-one interviews with the four practicing teachers within this school's English department.

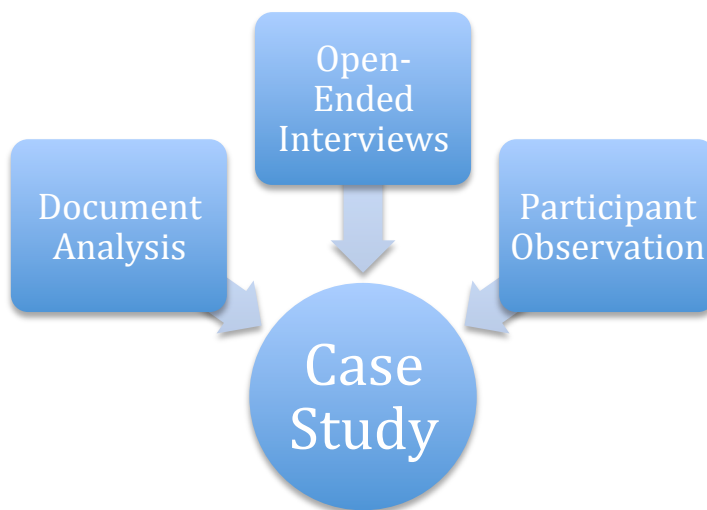


Figure 4. Types of Data Collection

Capturing the teachers' individual teaching philosophies, especially in terms of teaching literacy and writing, was important in determining what influences are present on the teachers' curricular decision making; Grossman's work on teacher knowledge influenced

my understanding of how teachers make curricular decisions and what guides their beliefs, values, and thoughts about teaching. Teachers' interpretations of standards/expectations are likewise an important factor in making curricular decisions. Although these teachers all took part, to some degree, in the same implementation workshops and PD days, the interpretation of that information is quite different. Those differences in interpreting and understanding are paramount in a study about standards/expectation implementation and curricular decisions. Because I was concerned with the interpretation and implementation processes of these teachers, open-ended questions were best suited for allowing a variety of answers and explanations without the hindrance of "predetermined response categories" (Marshall & Rossman, 2006, p. 101). The answers I was given during each interview led me to my next inquiry. Each teacher was asked the same basic set of five-six questions (Creswell, 2007, p. 133) for each interview (for a total of three sets of questions for three interviews).

Finally, I looked at the documents created during PD days; many of the documents I analyzed were created while I was still part of the English department at CCHS. For this study, though, I was also interested in investigating the documents that these teachers have created since I left the department, especially the pacing guides as they have become vital in curriculum building in this department.

Participant-Observation

Before conducting the three open-ended interviews with the four teachers in this study, I first observed a PD day at CCHS during which the upcoming implementation of

the CCSS, among other topics, was discussed. I also participated *minimally* at these meetings by asking questions but not making opinion statements in order to remain neutral. The objective of becoming a participant-observer in an intrinsic case study is to change “one’s role from that of an outsider to that of an insider” (Creswell, 2007, p. 132); however, my position in this study is unique because I was, for seven years, an *insider*. My natural role in CCHS’s English department is one of an insider, not as an outsider, so in some ways I was balancing my new role as an outsider with my established insider role. This is generally not the case with researchers. Because of my insider status, I never had to assume an inauthentic, contrived role (Marshall & Rossman, 2006, p. 74) in my research setting; my level of personal interest was high and helped me reconnect with my former colleagues.

This PD day experience helped inform the questions I created for this study’s interview process. During these meetings, we often worked with a partner; I again participated in the activities (by asking questions and listening to my former colleagues voice their concerns/opinions about current challenges in policy and upcoming changes in curricular mandates) so that my presence would less likely be a distraction to the other participants. Many of the questions I wrote for the first and second rounds of interviews for this study were inspired by discussions that took place during this PD day, especially those regarding teacher reactions to standards interpretation and implementation.

Document Appraisal

Aside from rereading documents found in my own CCHS folders from when I taught there, the teachers in this study also provided me with the pacing guides, common assessment examples, and other documents created during various implementation tasks required by the district. Before I conducted the interviews for this study, I consulted the documents produced while I was teaching there; these helped inform the questions I decided to ask the teachers. As I reread these documents, though, I was more concerned now with investigating how these documents were influencing teachers and the curricular decisions they were making, whereas when I was ensconced in the department, I was hardly as analytical about the nature of these documents. I was more concerned with their practical use at that time, especially in terms of satisfying the district's requests to comply with "meeting" the standards (which usually meant creating a checklist system). I see this same desire to comply with the district's mandates now in the teachers I interviewed for this study. I recognize my own tendencies to become buried in the work without questioning what the work is aiming toward.

The Open-Ended Interviews

The first set of interviews I conducted with teachers focused on each individual teacher's philosophy of teaching, writing, and literacy. I found that teachers were more comfortable talking if I did not record, so I took notes as they answered my questions. Establishing the teachers' teaching philosophies helped to form a complete picture of

how each teacher makes curricular decisions when implementing the standards (specifically the standards about writing). The guiding question for this first interview was: *What influences a teacher when he/she decides how to “meet” an expectation?* In other words, I wanted to find out what guides these teachers’ compasses as the daily lessons are mapped out for their classes. Here are four areas of potential influence:

- **Foundational beliefs about writing or literacy:** Does this teacher have a strong belief system of how students learn writing? These foundational beliefs are often the product of his/her methods classes in college or from engagement in professional organizations (such as NCTE).
- **One’s personal relationship with writing:** Does a personal connection to writing (e.g. journaling, poetry writing, or other types of expressive writing) drive a teacher’s curricular decisions about how to teach writing? For example, teachers who were naturally drawn to writing as an adolescent might try and inspire students to find that same attraction.
- **Past teachers or teaching styles:** Is there a former educator in this teacher’s past who shaped the way he/she believes writing is best taught? For example, a current teacher who was inspired by a former teacher who incorporated journaling every day in the classroom, or who had students outline research papers in a particular way might be two examples of how the past can shape a teacher’s current curricular decisions.
- **Foundational beliefs about learning/teaching writing or grammar:** Does this teacher have a steadfast belief system about how to best teach

grammar/conventions? Does he/she adhere to the “skill and drill” method, or does he/she favor a more holistic approach to addressing grammar issues?

Knowing what beliefs ground teachers in their daily practices helped to paint a complete picture of what drives curricular decisions. The first set of questions uncovered each individual’s background with writing and reading, which informs a teacher’s foundational beliefs about teaching those subjects areas.

The second set of interviews, which were transcribed as I took notes as the teachers talked, was aimed at determining what experiences each teacher had with interpreting and implementing the standards. The teachers within this group all entered the English department at different times within the past ten years. Two of the teachers have experienced *all* of the professional development activities that were intended to help teachers interpret the expectations shortly after they were released in 2006; the other two teachers entered the English department full time more recently, after the department established a routine for implementing the standards. The second set of interviews investigated how each teacher’s experiences with the interpretation and implementation process color one’s personal system for “meeting,” or implementing, the standards.

The third set of interviews investigated how these teachers “meet” four specific content expectations concerning writing. I examined how four teachers in the same English department implemented the same four expectations in their individual classrooms. The following were my guiding questions for this interview:

- **How did these teachers explain their personal approaches to implementing the standards/expectations?** Each teacher has his/her own

way of making sure specific expectations are being met. For example, does the teacher create lesson plans and then “check off” the expectations being met? Or does the teacher overtly try to meet certain expectations as lesson plans are being made?

- **How did each teacher interpret the expectation; what elements were deemed “most important” for each expectation?** The standards/expectations are a text, and therefore open to many interpretations. How have these four teachers interpreted four specific expectations, or what aspects of the expectations do the teachers focus on when there are multiple sub-goals within the expectation?
- **How did each teacher decide to meet the interpreted goal of each expectation?** Finally, how does the teacher describe meeting the specificities of these four expectations? How does the teacher describe making this curricular decision?

Although it was not mandatory for every teacher at every grade level to “meet” each expectation (the 91 expectations are to be met over the *four* years of high school), I chose four writing content expectations that were *most likely* met at each grade level due to their broadness. I then studied the documents provided by the teachers (especially the pacing guides and common assessments) to clarify the classroom practices, curriculum, and lesson plans the teachers explained during the third interviews in order to have a clear sense of what curricular decisions were being made and how those decisions connected to the specific content expectations in question.

Data Analysis/Theoretical Framework

The purpose of this study is to further current understanding of how the ELA state standards are being interpreted and how this interpretation process affects the curricular decisions teachers make. This study examines how teachers are experiencing the standards interpretation process, how they are making sense of the implications for their teaching, and how they are responding to those implications.

In order to explore this further, I developed a guiding question and several sub questions. These questions help to organize the main concerns of this study.

Guiding Question: What does a single English department in a typical Michigan school look like in the current standards environment? To investigate this question, the following sub questions will be examined:

- What are the influences on the interpretation process of Michigan ELA standards by teachers and school districts?
- How are Michigan ELA teachers experiencing and responding to the process of interpreting the MI curriculum standards and expectations?
- How do these teachers describe the process of interpreting and implementing these standards in their school districts and/or departments?
- How do these teachers describe the process of interpreting standards for their own teaching, and do the interpretations of the expectations vary among teachers?
- Do the teachers' interpretation or implementation of the expectations conflict with what they believe to be critical learning and best practices?

- What influence do the standards/expectations have on classroom English teachers' daily lesson planning?
- Do curricular decisions reflect a strong adherence to meeting the expectations?
- Do curricular decisions reflect a strong teaching philosophy?

These questions will uncover the ways teachers are experiencing the interpretation and implementation of the standards and expectations within one Michigan school district.

Although much is already known about how teachers meet specific standards through specific lessons or activities, little has been said about the process teachers undergo in the negotiation of state standards and the curricular decisions they make. What process do teachers undergo when deciding how to meet the expectations, if they are in fact given the freedom to make those curricular decisions? *Negotiating* the standards refers to the distance between what a teacher believes are sound, effective practices that he/she would ordinarily employ in a classroom and what he/she actually employs in order to “meet” the standards. Is this an individual process or is there collaboration within a department? The purpose of this study is to further current understanding of how the ELA state standards in Michigan are being interpreted and implemented by teachers in their classrooms. Is there room for teacher autonomy, as was the original intent of the ELA state standards, or are teachers encouraged (or forced) to adopt district unit plans? This study examines how teachers are experiencing the standards interpretation and implementation process, how they are making sense of the implications for their teaching, and how they are responding to those implications.

As data from my interviews, observations, and document analysis was collected, focusing on the original research questions was paramount. I identified patterns in the data, which was an important aspect of my analysis as well. “Identifying salient themes, recurring ideas or language, and patterns of belief that link people and settings together is the most intellectually challenging phase of data analysis, and one that can integrate the entire endeavor” (Marshall & Rossman, 2006, p. 158-9). As I immersed myself in the data (including notes from the PD day observation, rereading documents, and interview notes), I looked for patterns in how teachers interpreted the standards implementation process, how this implementation process affected their curricular decisions, and what level of negotiation was present in the implementation of the standards (how teachers described what they do with the standards in comparison to their philosophies on teaching writing and literacy).

To complete this analysis, I developed three initial categories of data analysis: *interpretation influences*, *degree of negotiation*, and *the degree of variation in implementation of standards/expectations*. I decided on these categories because they represent the areas I am most concerned with in this study. In other words, these three categories provide a simplified basis for organizing the data in order to answer my research questions. Looking through my notes, which were first written as a running log, I then identified the pertinent areas of information to use in this study based on these three categories of data. These categories were not only used to categorize the data, but also to help exclude unnecessary data from the interviews, participant-observation, and document analysis.

Influences on Interpretation of Standards/Expectations: *Influences* are defined as any factors that may act upon teachers as they interpret the standards document. For example, professional development activities such as “unpacking” the standards (an activity that varies among districts), defining the standards, creating pacing guides, teaching units that meet all 91 expectations, creating curricular checklists, teacher knowledge/writing philosophies, and administrative pressure all constitute potential *influences on interpretation*.

Teacher Negotiation: *Teacher Negotiation* is the variation between what a teacher believes to be the most effective pedagogical decisions for his/her students and what a teacher chooses to implement in the classroom. This variation may exist due to the aforementioned *influences*. Are curricular decisions based on a strong adherence to meeting the expectations, or do they reflect a strong teaching philosophy? The more a teacher’s pedagogical philosophy is compromised, the higher the *level of teacher negotiation*.

Variation in Implementation of Standards/Expectations: *Variation in Implementation* refers to the different ways teachers may choose to implement the same expectation. Although these teachers have undergone the same professional development experiences and have experienced the same level of administrative influence, do the teachers choose to implement the expectations in very different ways? Are these differences due to a difference in grade level, or are they a product of different teaching philosophies or interpretation of the standards? The ways teachers ultimately implement the

standards/expectations in their classrooms will reflect whether teacher autonomy or uniformity is the resulting product of standards implementation in this school.

Influences on Interpretation of Standards/Expectations	Teacher Negotiation	Variation in Implementation of Standards/Expectations
<input type="checkbox"/> What are the influences on the interpretation process of Michigan ELA standards by teachers and school districts? <input type="checkbox"/> How are Michigan ELA teachers experiencing and responding to the process of interpreting the MI curriculum standards? <input type="checkbox"/> What influence do the standards/expectations have on classroom English teachers' daily lesson planning?	<input type="checkbox"/> In what ways do the teachers' interpretation or implementation of the expectations conflict with what they believe to be critical learning and best practices? <input type="checkbox"/> In what ways do curricular decisions reflect adherence to meeting the expectations? <input type="checkbox"/> In what ways do curricular decisions reflect a strong teaching philosophy?	<input type="checkbox"/> How do these teachers describe the process of interpreting and implementing these standards in their school districts and/or departments? <input type="checkbox"/> How do these teachers describe the process of interpreting standards for their own teaching, and do the interpretations of the expectations vary among teachers?

Figure 5. Data Analysis Categories

Figure 5 (above) illustrates the data analysis categories and the research questions that were answered within each category. Teacher interviews provided most of the data necessary for each category. The first set of interview questions established the teaching (of writing) philosophies that each teacher brought with him/her, thus establishing the “teacher knowledge” influencing the interpretation of each expectation. These interviews begin to answer how ELA teachers experience and respond to the process of interpreting the MI curriculum standards and expectations, and what influences the standards/expectations have on classroom teachers’ daily lesson planning. The second set of teacher interview questions served to establish what the teachers’ relationships are with the standards, and therefore what degree of negotiation between personal teacher

knowledge and outside influences (such as district mandates, “sample” unit plans, etc.) are taking place in standards implementation. How closely do teachers follow the suggested curriculum set forth in the pacing guides, and is there a connection between strong beliefs in the teaching of writing and a resistance to following mandated curriculum? Are teachers more likely to follow their own teaching styles and rely on their own teaching methods rather than adopt methods proposed in the interpretation process activities? What are the characteristics of the teachers who are more likely to compromise their personal teaching knowledge to “meet” the standards? What are the characteristics of the teachers who are more likely to make curricular decisions based on past practice versus state-mandated standards? Finally, the third set of teacher interview questions highlighted the individual ways teachers are “meeting” the expectations. Although these teachers all participated in the same professional development activities (albeit to a varying degree), these questions investigated the level of uniformity/variance in the ways teachers meet the expectations. The answers to this final set of questions showed whether teachers are practicing autonomy when making curricular decisions and implementing the standards in their individual classrooms. Are teachers following pacing guides and “sample” units without exercising personal freedom in curricular choice? The final interview examined to what level teacher autonomy has been maintained, and to what level teacher expertise is being utilized. The ways teachers decide to “meet” the expectations are vital in showing what effect the interpretation/implementation processes, outside influences, and personal teacher knowledge have on the actual curricular decisions teachers make.

Studying the documents teachers produced during the implementation of the standards was also an important aspect of my data analysis as it showed how the (district mandated) *interpretation* process influenced the standards *implementation* process. Findings from this study will not be generalized to suggest that the implementation of the standards is the same in other school districts as it is in Central City's school district; the language I use in my data analysis will reflect this limitation.

CHAPTER III

THE RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

Sara, Shane, Ann, and Linda

In this chapter, I will provide an overview of the participants in this project. During this project, I examined the professional practices and guiding concepts of four teachers – Sara, Shane, Linda, and Ann – at Central City High School, and focused on how these teachers have interpreted and implemented the state standards for their own classrooms. I was especially interested in how the standards have influenced these teachers' curricular decisions. Before I begin, I want to acquaint readers with these teachers and provide a sense of their teaching styles, pedagogical beliefs and goals. Learning what these four teachers value in the classroom, what motivates them, what they like about teaching English, and what they find challenging about teaching English will help in painting a complete picture of these individuals. I have personally and professionally known these four teachers for over ten years, and I was once a part of the English department described in this study. I know each of them to be very professional, responsible educators who take their jobs very seriously. They all have very different teaching styles, but each of them has individual strengths that make them exemplary educators; their energy/enthusiasm for the subject, their level of expertise in teaching English, their knowledge of the subject matter, and the way they connect with students all vary greatly, but are all part of the fabric that makes up these individuals. These teachers have all taken very different roads in becoming English teachers, and this personal information is vital in understanding who they are as educators and what guides their

pedagogy. I have created four categories of information in order to help build the profiles of these four teachers: *Why Teach English?*, *Relationship With Writing/Grammar*, *Attitude Toward Standards*, and *Teacher Knowledge*. I will describe each of these categories below.

Why Teach English?

Each of these four teachers came to teach English in very different ways. At one end of the spectrum, Sara played school as a child and knew from a young age that she wanted to be an English teacher. At the other end of the spectrum, Linda did not seek her ELA certification until after she was hired. Somewhere in between are Shane (who first sought a career path in the medical field) and Ann (who loved reading and writing before she decided to teach those skills). This category will be helpful in determining the level of comfort the teachers have with teaching ELA, the path each teacher took in becoming an English teacher, and the level of personal interest in English as a subject. What drew these individuals to English studies, and how has this influenced their teaching? Were they avid readers and writers when they were young, or was teaching English something that happened more through a serendipitous route? While all four teachers report either being an avid reader or writer as a child, the level to which each individual enjoyed those pastimes varies greatly. Shane was a voracious reader, but he did little writing. Linda has more memories of writing rather than reading. Sara made an art form out of crafting reports and stories in the third grade, and took great pride in sharing her work with others. Ann experienced a rich childhood of both reading and writing, and followed her love of

literature and writing into a career of teaching those crafts. The backgrounds of these four teachers are important in understanding the personal motivations behind choosing ELA education as a career, and also in understanding what motivations are at play in the classroom when developing lesson plans.

Relationship With Writing/Grammar

In order to have a sense of how each of these teachers interpreted and implemented the standards, I chose four specific expectations for us to discuss. These are all related to writing (such as prewriting strategies, editing and revising techniques, and portfolio grading). Because of this focus on writing, it is important to consider the personal relationships these teachers have with writing. Do these teachers view writing as something merely pragmatic in practice, or do they view writing as a means of entertainment or that it has therapeutic qualities? Three of the four teachers (Ann, Sara, and Linda) describe keeping a journal when they were younger, and view writing as something that is personally important to them as well as professionally. Shane considers himself more of a reader than a writer, but describes encouraging creative writing in his classes. All four teachers describe trying to balance the types of writing they assign in their classroom by including creative, persuasive/argumentative, research-based, and journal writing intermittently. The individual teacher's relationship with writing may also play a part in *how* these teachers decide to teach writing in their classrooms, and therefore it will be important to understand in more detail the individual teachers' viewpoints on writing.

All four teachers agree on one thing when it comes to teaching writing: there needs to be more direct grammar instruction. Sara was the most hesitant of the four to say that isolated grammar instruction is the way to help students improve their writing, but all four did agree that in some way students should be exposed to the grammar rules more than they are currently. They all have also struggled with how to incorporate grammar into their curriculum, and they all describe the different methods they have tried. Some of these activities include isolated activities on apostrophes, commas, and other punctuation; determining recurring mistakes within the class and doing mini-lessons on those skills; tracking individual student's recurring mistakes and having students learn independently how to master that skill; and peer review sessions with specific grammar skills highlighted. These four teachers all described feeling like they are not doing enough with grammar inside their classes, and all four feel frustrated that what they have tried does not seem to lead to much improvement. Again, the individual viewpoints on how to teach writing and incorporate grammar will be principal in investigating what drives the curricular decisions these teachers make.

Attitude Toward Standards

In this project, *attitude toward standards* is defined as the fundamental beliefs these teachers have about standards-based education. In other words, do these teachers believe that having a set of standards in place is necessary in providing structure for ELA education, or do they think state mandates such as these are a hindrance to education? (Or, what is more likely, perhaps their beliefs land somewhere in the middle of these two

poles.) The teachers' personal opinions about state standards are important to establish so that the teachers' motivations for meeting the standards are clear; are they *intrinsically* motivated because they innately feel standards are necessary, or are they *extrinsically* motivated because they fear being reprimanded by a superior. Even though none of these teachers admitted knowing what the consequences of not meeting the standards might be, and none of them could explain exactly who is overseeing their department and making sure the standards are met, none of these teachers were willing to neglect standards completely. "We're professionals and this is our job" was a general retort I heard in response to the question *why bother if there is no accountability?* In this way, all four teachers are to some extent extrinsically motivated to meet the standards; in other words, there is not necessarily a deep desire to follow these standards because these educators believe they represent the most effective ways to help students learn ELA skills. Each teacher, to some degree, feels obligated to "meet the standards" because it is what they have been asked to do. Having said this, each teacher also stated that he/she believes there is importance in having a set of standards in place. The validity of a standards document comes from the overarching goal of organizing curriculum so that major gaps in content and material are filled. Ann, Sara, Shane, and Linda all see the value in that. They do, however, differ greatly in how much investment they've put forth in learning about the standards, working with the standards, and organizing their individual curriculum to meet the state standards. A major reason for this is the initial wealth of time that was allotted to the department for "unpacking" the standards, and the subsequent lack of time for revising and revisiting the pacing guides and common assessments

created from the unpacking process. The recent loss of department leadership (the department chair position and the district's curriculum coordinator position were both eliminated two years ago due to budget cuts) coupled with less allotted department time has affected Shane and Linda the most. Shane has been affected greatly because he is fresh in the classroom after a ten-year stint in the school's media center; he desperately needs the time to learn about the standards and revise the pacing guides to meet his curriculum. Linda has also been affected as she has recently been moved into a new teaching assignment (English 11) and does not feel that she is as familiar with the curriculum as she would like to be. She would also like to see the pacing guide for English 11 revised, but there has been no department time to do this. The individual stances these teachers take toward this highly politicized topic will influence how much personal obligation they feel in meeting the standards in their daily lessons. This information will help in determining what influences the standards have on teachers' curricular decisions.

Teacher Knowledge

Teacher knowledge is generally defined as teachers' "cognitive processes – their thoughts, judgments, decisions, and plans" (Grossman 4) as it relates to the pedagogical decisions teachers make. Understanding a teacher's knowledge is paramount in recognizing the varied influences on the pedagogical decisions teachers make. According to Grossman, there are "four general areas of teacher knowledge [that] can be seen as the cornerstones of the emerging work on professional knowledge for teaching: general

pedagogical knowledge; subject matter knowledge; pedagogical content knowledge; and knowledge of context” (5). For this project, I specifically refer to *teacher knowledge* in relation to the “knowledge of context” as this category includes the context of the district’s “departmental guidelines” (Grossman 9), which most closely describes the role of state standards. My goal for this section of the teacher profiles is to determine which categories most highly dictate each teacher’s individual decision-making processes. Grossman’s book was published in 1990, before there was as much emphasis on meeting state standards. This is perhaps why there is no mention of the standards in her description of what constitutes teacher knowledge. While the intent of this study is to investigate if and how the state standards influence teacher decision-making, I am also interested in understanding what other “teacher knowledge” plays a significant role in the curricular decisions these four teachers make. Again, recognizing the entirety of what constitutes these teachers is fundamental in understanding what constructs their pedagogical practices.

Sara: The Cross-Curricular English Teacher

Sara has been in the classroom for thirteen years, the last ten of which have been at Central City High School. Sara sees much of her English teaching being influenced by her background in psychology. Having a double major in psychology and English has presented Sara with the opportunity to teach both of these subjects, as well as drama and forensics, at the secondary level. In her discussion with me about teaching English, she often makes comparisons and draws analogies between teaching writing and theatre, and

between her psychology classroom and literature discussions. Her fundamental view of teaching is that it provides a way of helping one another figure out who we are as people, whether in the psychology or English classroom, or acting on stage. She specifically sees literature as a window into that world of self-discovery. She describes her curiosity about why people do the things they do as a main motivation for reading literature. Sara intertwines her identity as a student of psychology with her identity as a teacher of both psychology and English. She also makes many comparisons to her work in theatre, both as an actor and as a drama teacher. She views this curiosity for investigating the world as the quintessential component of her inspiration for teaching English and psychology.

Sara's Inspirations for Teaching English

Sara was drawn to English as a subject to study through her personal relationship with literature. Upon further questioning, Sara also admits to a lifelong relationship with writing, but she immediately goes to her memories of connecting with literature to describe the blossoming of her interest in English. She describes herself as someone who came to love reading as a child; she found literature to be a way she could “recharge her batteries.” A self-described introvert, Sara found that she connected with literature before she connected with her peers, and suggests this could be because she was an “only child” and often found herself interacting with books rather than other children. She states, “Literature became a friend to me.” What began as an independent activity – asking questions about the characters’ motivations in the books she read – became the impetus for many classroom discussions about literature later in her career.

Sara admits loving the moments when students interpret a text in a “surprising” or new way; she also admits that these moments are rare when her classes are discussing a text she has read numerous times. The “unexpected ideas” that occasionally arise excite Sara and provide “perspective on why we do what we do, that what we do is important.” She explains how she will recall and embrace these moments later when she might be having difficulties with a parent or dealing with other concerns in the classroom. The surprises keep Sara looking forward to another day in the classroom, even when times might be tough.

Sara’s Relationship with Writing

Sara describes herself as someone who has been a “recreational” writer for as long as she was able to write. She recollects two important writing endeavors she undertook as a young writer. The first was a collection of Garfield adventures. The second was a “Flirtation Guide” that she was “sure I’d publish someday,” she relates with mock self-assuredness at her ten-year old ambitions. The flirtation guide was a list of flirtatious actions meant to “get” the guy; Sara completed this guide with tables outlining how effective each action had been with three different boys. She also admits to sharing this guide with her current psychology students, as a way to show her interest in the actions of others at a young age.

Sara admits to having an awareness of audience when she wrote this guide. She was not writing this only for herself, and definitely not for a teacher, but she was writing this for an audience of other girls who might need ideas on how to win a boy’s attention;

the evidence she provided with the graphs and tables is indicative of her awareness to win over her audience with “proof.” She describes the process that she fears students probably undergo as their original, authentic “audience awareness” is drained and replaced with writing to make a grade. She connects the routines of “writing because we’ve read something” with the shut down that she admits seeing in students. Instead of writing only at the conclusion of reading a text, Sara describes the way she “scaffolds” writing activities into the reading with the hope of building writing confidence in her students.

When asked about issues of grammar, Sara confesses that she has “grammar arrogance;” in other words, she believes the eleventh grade English students she teaches should “already know this by now.” Her personal prejudices deter her from spending much direct time on teaching grammar; however, she does address it in the context of students’ writing by tracking error patterns. She is not willing to spend time on “skill and drill” grammar activities as she sees them as tedious and largely unnecessary, but does see the potential importance in knowing grammatical rules “as a foundation.” She is aware that there is an increased focus on vocabulary on current standardized tests, and she fears she does not do enough with vocabulary in her classes. She does not believe in memorizing vocabulary lists, but rather would like to incorporate a more “organic” approach to vocabulary instruction through investigating patterns of word usage and analyzing word nuances.

Sara's Attitude Toward Standards

The five-year long process of unpacking and implementing the standards has been, in Sara's words, a "long and daunting" process. She reflects on the early activities that the department was asked to do, including translating each expectation, and she remembers wondering whom the audience of this translation was. Were they translating these expectations for "new teachers," as some workshop leaders suggested? Or was the audience supposed to be the parents of our students, as other workshop leaders suggested? "I had no idea who I was writing this for – not myself! I understood what the standards meant." There truly was no *audience awareness* during these translation activities and having a "phantom audience" was confusing. Having the question answered inconsistently was similarly confusing and also frustrating, Sara states. Would anyone outside of their department read through these translations? In other words, the level of accountability was likewise unclear.

Once the department worked through the unpacking and translating stages of implementing the standards, Sara acknowledges seeing the value in having a set of standards, as well as pacing guides, in place. If the goal with standards-based education is to encourage a certain self-reflection in the classroom, to force teachers to step back and ask themselves if these goals are really being met in their classrooms, then Sara believes there is great value in the standards. The standards, and creating pacing guides that match those standards, can be really helpful in seeing the gaps in your curriculum. However, Sara believes this "simple purpose" often gets lost in tedious translation exercises.

Pacing guides have been a focal point of this English department's handling of the state standards. All four teachers almost cannot talk about the standards without also talking about pacing guides. Sara sees the pacing guide as a tool that helps with keeping the focus on the end goals, and keeping curriculum on track towards those goals. The pacing guide for English 11 was created by Sara, as she states, "It was created by myself, for myself." Because she was the only teacher teaching English 11 at the time the pacing guides were created, Sara had the freedom to customize the guide to her own lessons. She views the main point of these implementation activities as being a catalyst for department dialogue about what goes on in the classroom; however, dialogue is difficult because the department is small and occasionally only one teacher teaches a certain grade level. Overall, Sara views standards as necessary in organizing the English department's curriculum and filling in the curricular "gaps" in one's lessons. She does not, though, want to see a movement toward standardized teaching, and hopes that teacher autonomy will continue to be valued at this school. She concedes that being told *what* to teach is acceptable; being told *how* to teach is intolerable.

Sara's Teacher Knowledge

Sara's professional knowledge about teaching comes from many places: her ongoing personal professional development such as her membership in NCTE, her loyal reading of *English Journal*, and a constant adjustment and readjustment based on her own students. She denies that her teacher education background continues to influence her pedagogical decisions; however, she is well-versed in the scholarly language that is

common in English teacher education (such as “reflective practitioner” and “backwards design planning”). Using Grossman’s theoretical framework, Sara clearly relies heavily on the “pedagogical content knowledge” category to inform her teaching decisions, while the “subject matter knowledge” and “general pedagogical knowledge” have less influence (as indicated below in Figure 6). Sara places much emphasis on using different instructional strategies in the classroom, as well as meeting her students “where they are.” She describes herself as a teacher who loves to plan, sometimes more than actually executing the plan. Planning, to Sara, is where she can let her creativity shine, and she finds herself sometimes having to “reel in” her grand ideas and not try new lessons for the novelty of newness. She intuitively relies steadfastly on the “backwards design” process of lesson planning (i.e. beginning with the end goals in mind). As highlighted in Figure 6 below, her love for variety in the classroom also points to a heavy influence of “pedagogical content knowledge” in that she emphasizes the importance of the instructional strategies she uses in the classroom. She is constantly revisiting the purposes for what she teaches and how she teaches; these are two touchstones of backwards design planning and “pedagogical content knowledge.”

Grossman's Model of Teacher Knowledge: Sara

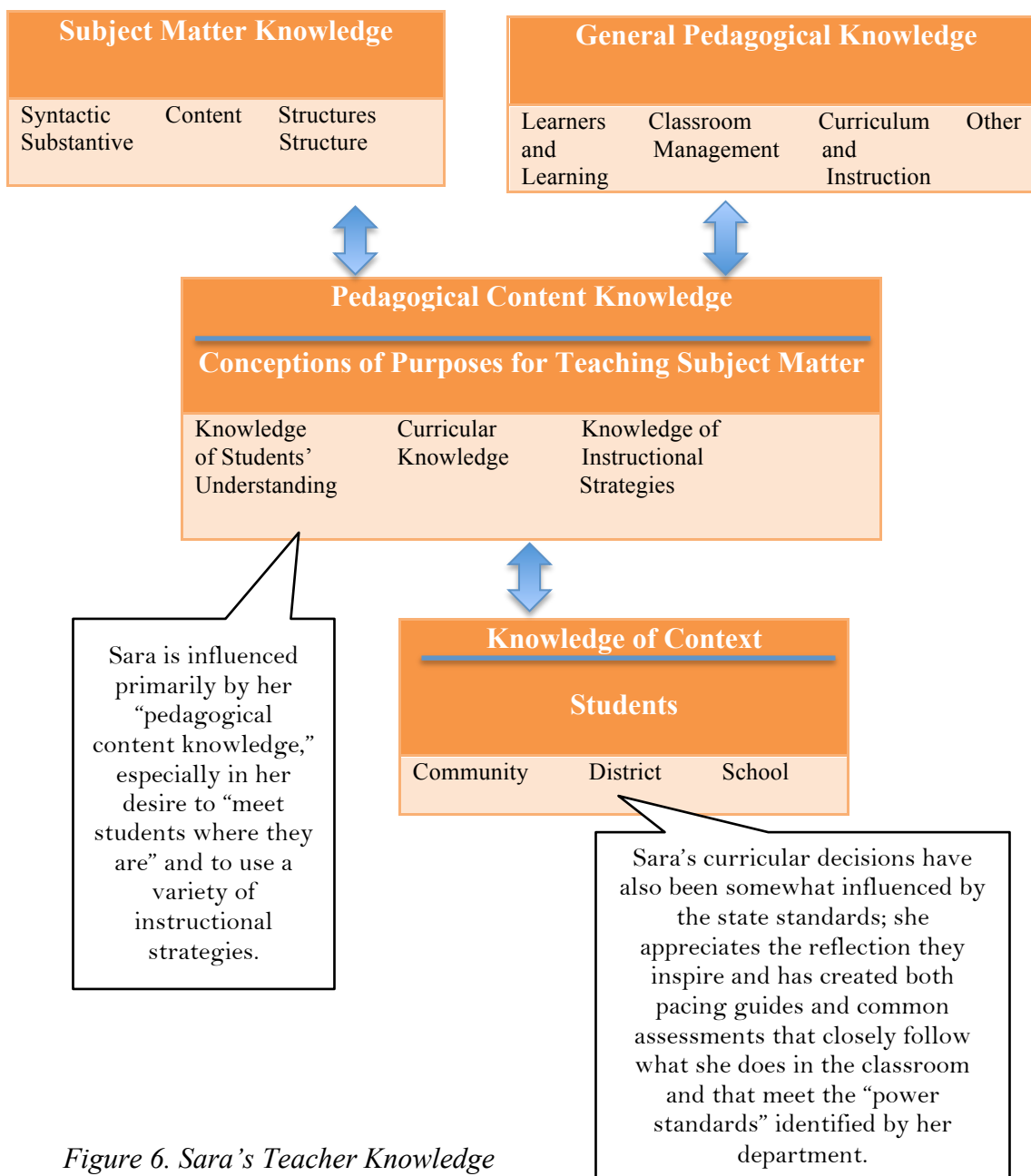


Figure 6. Sara's Teacher Knowledge

Sara does not seem heavily influenced by former "formal" teachers, which points to little reliance on the "apprenticeship of observation." She recalls one psychology

teacher she had in high school who used nontraditional methods of reaching his students. She states that he had the most influence of any formal teacher on her. She has also learned elements of her classroom conduct through informal teachers, such as her grandfather. Sara admits having learned the importance of the student voice from her grandfather, but spends little time reflecting on other people as a major influence in her teaching persona. In Sara's viewpoint, teaching is instead "incredibly personal." She continually points to her students, their interests, and their needs as her northern stars. She refuses to rely on any formulaic way of teaching, and she sees students as being central to everything she does in the classroom. Ingenuity in classroom lessons is also essential to her teaching knowledge.

Shane: the Veteran "New" Teacher

Shane is, by anyone's standard, a veteran educator. He is new *again*, however, to English teaching. He was hired at Central City High School in 1997, and spent the next four years teaching various English classes. In 2001, Shane earned his master's degree in library science and was moved into the media center to serve as the school's media specialist. He spent the next nine years in the media center; his first year back in the classroom is this current school year. It is because of this shuffling around that Shane provides a unique perspective on how the English department has changed at CCHS, how the expectations for teachers have changed, and how curriculum has changed. Shane has much to say about his experiences "before" in the English classroom versus his current situation. He says so much has changed that he most definitely feels like a new teacher

this year; in fact, he is “new” to this job but does not receive the same support that a newly hired teacher would receive (such as a mentor teacher), and is not freshly out of college with the current knowledge about standards and curriculum that the methods classes would provide for most new hires. He describes relying heavily on his colleagues this year for both curricular and moral support; they have given significant guidance, but he believes there are still gaps in his teaching knowledge.

Shane’s Inspirations for Teaching English

Shane describes himself as a lifelong avid reader; he was the kid who read a book in the locker room during halftime of a basketball game. He says he always scored higher in math and science classes, but was always drawn to English (especially reading). Reading provided an escape for him, an outlet from the world. He tries to bring his passion for reading into the classroom, something he was consistently able to do for students on an individual basis in the media center. He likes to run his class in a discussion-oriented fashion, and says that he does not like to approach literature discussions in a technical way. He wants to hear what students have to say about the literature, how they feel and what they think as they read it. He admits enjoying the human element of teaching the most, and his love for people drives his love for literature. He likes the daily interactions with students and colleagues, and continues to like school as much as he did when he was a student.

When Shane entered college he began studying science classes in order to follow the medical route. Although he made it through many of the “weed out” classes, he

learned fast that he did not want “to be in an environment where some people actually wanted to see me fail.” He decided the cutthroat competition of medical school was not for him. He preferred an environment where learning was encouraged and nurtured, which is the same environment he tries to create in his own classroom. At the same time as the competition was heating up in his pre-med classes, he was also excelling in his English courses. He decided to make a career of what he enjoyed doing in English classes, even though his counselors told him teaching jobs were hard to come by at the time. And although, in retrospect, Shane chose education as a profession in order to “get away from the competitive/political realm,” he has since found that teaching is filled with politics. Teaching is too much like the brutal business world that he attempted to stay away from, and he wishes this were different.

Shane’s Relationship with Writing

Shane admits having a much stronger relationship with reading than with writing. He says he is very creative, but not necessarily with writing. The types of writing he enjoys most, though, are the more creative and expressive elements of writing rather than the analytical genres. He finds that the “grammar rules are challenging.” Shane does do a lot of writing in his classes, though, and believes there should be a stronger focus on teaching grammar. He likes to focus on journal writing, short stories, and other short, reflective in-class writing.

Shane describes watching the decline of teaching grammar since he was last in the classroom. He reflects, “there were grammar books under each of the desks, and that’s

really gone away.” Describing some of the grammar mistakes that he regularly sees now, he says that “r” is often substituted for are/our, apostrophes continue confusing students, and “are” and “our” are used interchangeably. Shane believes that because the grammar lessons are “eroding” from our curriculum, so is our students’ grammar. He states that we will inevitably see a “backlash” from walking away from grammar studies, and that “we’ll pay for not teaching it.” He describes the process of reading a piece of writing aloud and identifying when there is a grammatical problem with the sentence. He admits he might not be able to identify the exact rule that was broken, but he can identify that something is conventionally wrong. “You can’t identify that something is wrong, though, without knowing the rules,” Shane says. Many mistakes or fragmented sentences sound correct to a lot of students, and “drill and kill has its place” in order to help students become exposed to the grammatical rules that are often broken. Shane believes that it is “unfair to hold it against students” if they are not exposed to grammatical rules and then break those rules.

Shane’s Attitude Toward Standards

More than anything else, the standard’s byproducts define how Shane currently teaches his English classes, as indicated in Figure 7. Specifically, the pacing guides and common assessment created by his fellow English teachers define what lessons he conducts in his classroom. Although Shane is not sure how accurately the pacing guides actually line up with meeting the standards (he has rarely looked over the original standards document), he knows that the pacing guides were created based on “power

standards” that the department chose to emphasize. He admits that the pacing guides might reflect the chosen power standards, but probably do not reflect the standards document as a whole. Regardless of their merit, Shane describes his ongoing attempts to “do the right thing” by following what his colleagues have laid out in the pacing guides. He admits feeling sometimes inadequate because he is so used to creating his own lesson plans, and instead now he is following what someone else has created. At times he feels “like a substitute teacher in my own classroom” and that he has to “re-unpack someone else’s work” as he interprets the pacing guides and common assessments.

When teachers were first introduced to the state standards (in 2006), Shane was privy to the conversations, but he often felt that the information did not apply to him. He was busy with media center concerns, and could not necessarily contribute to conversations about how specific expectations were being met in the classroom because he was not then in the classroom. Shane was at these “unpacking” department meetings, but the teachers around him were often answering the questions “What are we already doing that accomplishes this expectation? Where is this covered?” The English department, since losing its department chair and curriculum coordinator in 2009, has not been given the same amount of time to meet and discuss curriculum. As Shane points out, this time should again be given to the department because there are “new” teachers teaching some of the English classes.

Grossman's Model of Teacher Knowledge: Shane

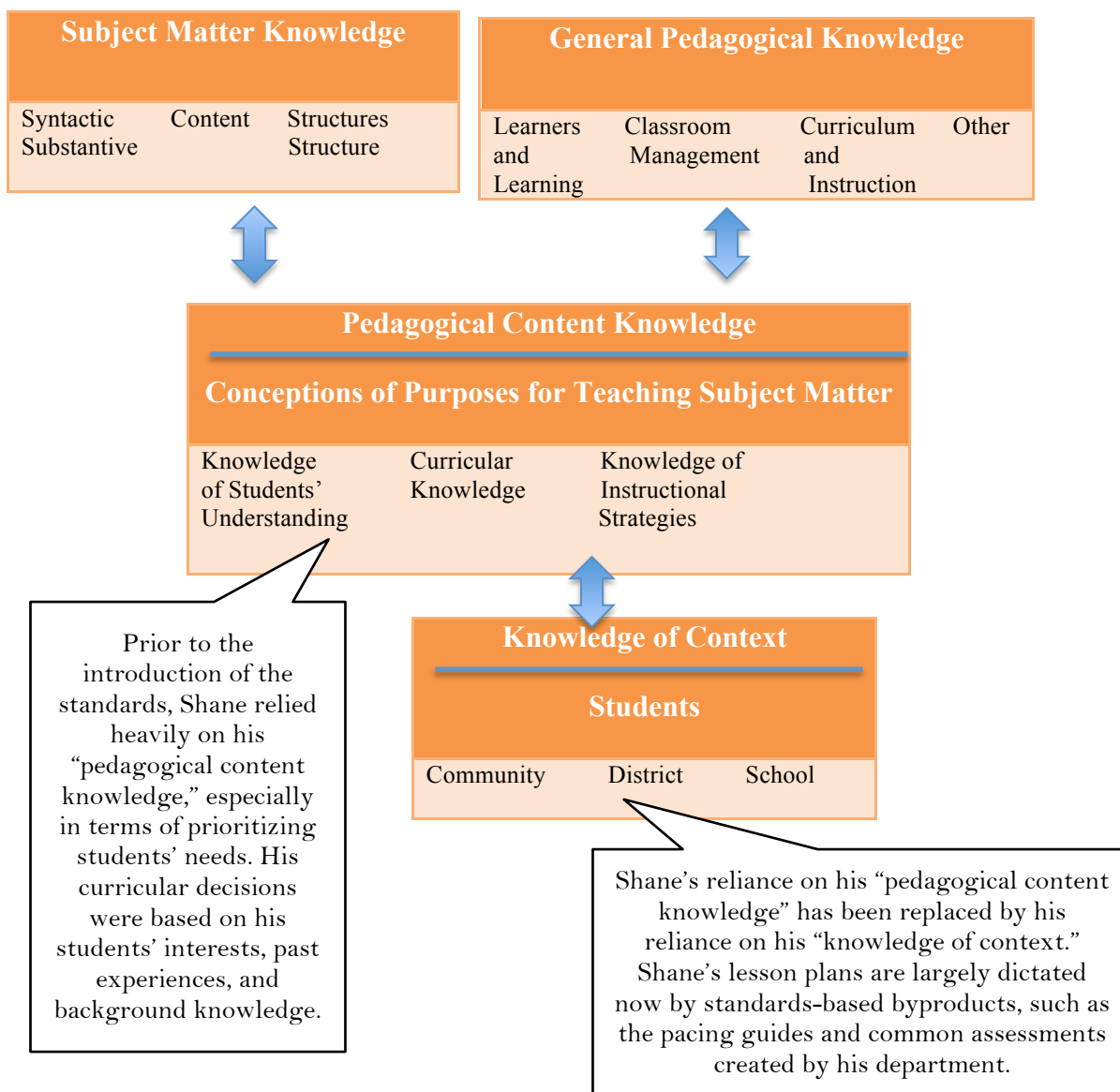


Figure 7. Shane's Teacher Knowledge

Despite the extra work that the standard's byproducts have caused for Shane, he admits seeing the value in having a set of state standards in place. He describes the

perceived benefit of the unpacking process because it causes teachers to talk about and look critically at what they are doing in the classroom. Instead of just doing the same lessons year after year “because it’s what I do,” teachers are forced to reflect on the merit of their curricular decisions. Through this reflection, Shane says, teachers can hopefully change and improve their teaching methods “in order to meet best practice.” He recalls having a checklist of very vague standards when he first started teaching; teachers were simply required to put dates next to the standards when those standards were met. There was no inter-department coordination like there is now. Shane feels like the current set of standards, which are more specific in what should be covered, are a better way for teachers to look critically at their lessons.

Shane’s Teacher Knowledge

Shane demonstrates a strong influence by what Grossman calls the “apprenticeship of observation.” Although Grossman categorizes “apprenticeship of observation” as a contributing factor to *content pedagogical knowledge*, Shane likely adopted much of his teaching style from his high school math/science teacher “Mr. Lively” (rather than his English teachers). Mr. Lively was a retired college professor who taught at Shane’s high school for only four years, but those four years happened to coincide with Shane’s four years of high school. Being that Shane attended a very small school, he ended up having Mr. Lively eight times throughout his high school career. Mr. Lively stood out from the rest of the teaching staff because of his age (Shane estimates he was over 70 years old) and because of his fun-loving, carefree attitude. Mr. Lively was

not concerned with how much money he made, and the school as an institution did not intimidate him and his students could tell. He was there because he really wanted to be there, and he was light-hearted “wasn’t broken or beaten down as a teacher.” He was energetic, everyone loved him, and he was “hilarious.” He began class each day with a joke or some light-hearted banter, which is something Shane attests to trying every day as well. He remembers really responding positively to Mr. Lively’s humorous side, and tries to emulate that with his own students. Shane also describes how many people in his life – both present and past – have influenced who he is as a person, and as a teacher. Teaching is “not a job, it’s a way of life,” and he believes that all of our experiences and interactions shape who we are in the classroom. Everyone he has met has influenced the teacher he has become. He likes letting students into his life, letting them see who he is, and he believes the more we can connect with students the better off our students will be.

Shane relies heavily on what Grossman terms “pedagogical content knowledge,” especially in terms of understanding his students’ needs and interests and building his curriculum from there. He recalls how he used to plan his lessons and how he was often very passionate about what he was teaching because of the thought and time he put into each lesson. That way of organically creating lessons has gone by the wayside for Shane, though, as he presently struggles to “meet the pacing guide” and common assessments. He admits that “it is very humbling, and sometimes humiliating, to rely on other teachers’ lessons when before it was a badge of honor to create my own *stuff*.” He describes beginning the current school year with “grandiose ideas” about what he wanted to teach, but he soon realized that the suggested assignments on the pacing guides are pretty

specific about what is supposed to be taught. Shane's "pedagogical content knowledge" has been replaced by his "knowledge of context," especially in terms of adhering to the "departmental guidelines" (Grossman 9). Shane's teaching has changed drastically since his first stint in the classroom almost ten years prior to his present teaching experience. While he may be covering more material and concepts, Shane says, he is definitely lacking the enthusiasm and passion he had when he was able to create his own lessons.

Ann: Hard Work and Great Expectations

Ann takes her job as an English teacher very seriously. She works hard to ensure the bar in her classroom is set high, and she continually emphasizes her desire to get students to do *more*: more reading, more writing, and more grammar studies. Ann is a teacher who is respected by students for her high standards, and students work hard in her classes. She is not afraid to admit that there are things about her job she wishes were different, including the amount of time she spends grading papers, and the increased neglect of grammar studies in middle school. Ann's desire to help her students succeed in reading and writing by motivating them to work hard is reminiscent of a coach's mentality on the practice field. She expects a lot from her students, but she also is not afraid to give them a lot in return.

Ann's Inspirations for Teaching English

As a young student, Ann was attracted to reading and writing, and she often received praise for her efforts. Ann describes herself as someone who is motivated by positive feedback, and she responded to the positive feedback by continuing to pursue reading and writing ventures. She always felt confident about the work she produced when she was in English class, and although she did respectably in other subject areas, English was definitely her strongest discipline and she followed that path. Not being “exposed to other career options” also helped shape her future as an English teacher; she knew what she was successful with, and she naturally envisioned making a career out of her strongest traits.

Although a love of the subject initially attracted Ann into teaching English, she soon understood that it takes more than a personal affection for reading or writing to be a good teacher. “I used to say that I got into teacher English because I loved reading and books, but it’s not about what *you* like. It’s about them – the students.” Learning to balance the difference between a personal interest in the subject and teaching students how to read and write texts is something that Ann continues to perfect. She describes her own waning excitement over reading *A Separate Peace* for what feels like the thousandth time, yet also wishing she could inspire her students to read more. The frustration of students not doing the assigned reading is something that many teachers have felt at some point, and Ann is no exception.

Ann's Relationship with Writing

Ann describes herself as someone to whom writing came fairly easily; she enjoyed all types of writing in school, from poetry to formal essays. In fact, she does not remember working very hard at writing until college when she “realized I wasn’t as good at writing as I thought,” and she found herself working hard to perfect the craft of academic writing. Over time, writing became less and less pleasurable, and she admits she no longer writes unless it is a necessity. Professionally, Ann applies her own experiences of hard work and practice, and applies them to her classroom practices.

Ann is traditionally minded when it comes to the types of writing students should master, how she goes about teaching that writing, and her expectations of what student writing should look like. She feels a “responsibility to respond in a meaningful way” to all student writing, and admits that this “zaps” her energy as she finds it too overwhelming and too time consuming to adequately respond. One way she has found to limit the responding she does is to have students do peer- and self-review at the revision stage. She waits until the final draft to see a paper in its entirety, and she focuses her commenting on this final draft. She feels there is less emphasis on revision now, especially with the increased attention given to standardized testing (in which only end product is considered); she acknowledges feeling an obligation to teach types of writing that will help students succeed on standardized tests, as well as later in life. She relies on the *Six Traits of Writing* to build a universal vocabulary with her students when teaching the “basic skills of writing;” however, Ann ultimately believes there must be a desire to learn writing on the student’s part in order for any real changes to occur in one’s writing.

Students must *practice* writing in order to improve their writing skills, and Ann finds the lack of practice frustrating.

Ann feels an “unending frustration” when it comes to students’ grammatical skills and figuring out how to teach grammar to her students. She admits suspecting at times like there is nothing she can do about it. She describes the methods of teaching grammar she has tried: spending weeks on subject-verb agreement and noun-antecedent agreement, worksheets covering various topics, Daily Oral Languages, pointing out common grammar mistakes for each student, and focusing on classroom grammar goals. She blames, to some extent, the lack of teaching more focused grammar lessons in middle school for the continued problems students have with knowing the punctuation rules or parts of speech. “Kids don’t know this regimented stuff anymore. There’s no vocabulary to talk about grammar with them, and they can’t identify an incomplete sentence.” She also suggests this lack of conventions knowledge might come from not reading much outside the classroom. Ann describes hearing arguments that some grammatical rules are “linguistically a moot point” because they no longer reflect the way we speak; however, Ann believes she still has an obligation to teach “accepted academic practices,” especially for her students going on to college.

Ann’s Attitude Toward Standards

The process used by her English department to interpret and implement state standards frustrates Ann. She says that all of the “unpacking” activities took her department almost a year to complete, as they were asked to do many of the same, or

similar, activities repeatedly. Some of the “very time consuming” activities included rewriting the standards (in their own words), choosing power standards, writing out pacing guides, and writing their own “philosophy” of teaching English. She feels many of those activities were asking teachers to “reinvent the wheel” in their repetitive nature. Incidentally, one of the most “irritating” characteristics of these in-service days was that “there were always assumptions made [by the in-service speakers] that what’s done in our classes right now isn’t good enough or meaningful.” This assumption was offensive, Ann says, because the in-service speakers truly had no idea *what* the teachers were doing in their classrooms, yet they were always pushing for change. However, in some ways, Ann concedes, these activities *were* useful in getting to know the standards and what was expected in the classroom. As time wore on, though, it began to feel like too much time was spent “cutting and pasting a Word document” and there was no tangible benefit from the effort put forth. The processes did not seem meaningful, and the teachers began rushing through the given tasks during professional development days in order to “say we have a document.” Those documents, most recently, are the pacing guides.

Initially the teachers were given adequate time to complete what was asked of them, but eventually the allotted time to meet as a department was limited. This is partially because of budget cuts; the district’s curriculum coordinator position and all department chair positions (Ann held this position in the high school English department from 2008-2009) were cut in 2009. This left no one in charge of organizing department meetings, overseeing district curriculum, or providing guidance in creating pacing guides and common assessments. The English department, along with all other departments in

the district, was left with no leadership and no time to work on organizing curriculum. Because of these dire cuts, Ann says, the department “is struggling to stay afloat” in meeting the district’s curricular expectations, which includes making sure the department is “meeting” the standards adequately. Ann describes how last year the teachers all created pacing guides for English 9, 10, and 11. Because this is a relatively small department, there was generally only one teacher teaching each of these classes; this made it much easier to “pigeon-hole what we were already doing in the classroom to fit the slots” (i.e. the expectations), rather than create all new lessons. Ann admits that she does not think this is necessarily a bad idea and again suggests that what she has been doing in the classroom is, generally, meaningful. There are, however, some “extra” activities that she no longer does because she is not sure she could justify their place in the curriculum and does not want to be questioned about this by fellow teachers.

Ann’s Teacher Knowledge

Ann relies heavily on what Grossman terms “pedagogical content knowledge,” and seems to have developed this knowledge from many places. One source of her *pedagogical content knowledge* is the “apprenticeship of observation” (Grossman 10), as highlighted in Figure 8. Ann recalls two teachers in particular who have helped to shape her teaching style and persona: her second-grade English teacher, and her husband. She learned the importance of praise and positive reinforcement from her second-grade teacher. Ann recognizes that she is an affirmation-centered person, and she in turn tries to use this approach with her own students. She describes the ways that she tries to subtly let

students know that their work is exceptional and encourage them in ways she does not necessarily encourage her entire class; being singled out for excellence is something that can really inspire a young writer, as she learned in the second grade. Ann also learned a great deal from her student teaching mentor teacher (who is now her husband), especially in terms of establishing a classroom persona and a workable learning environment. She describes having “no idea how to act in front of a class” when she first began student teaching, and her mentor teacher “had an ease of manner and he understood how to relate to a class of teenagers.” How Ann acts now in front of her class is based greatly on him, as she tries to emulate his conduct.

Another source of Ann’s “pedagogical content knowledge” is from her teacher education and graduate courses. She describes using projects she completed for her graduate courses, and adapting them in order to teach in her own high school classes. Ann describes the way she used her professor’s project as a catalyst for her own American “road literature” unit. She reworked his idea to make it high school-appropriate in terms of both content and level of difficulty. Adopting and altering the ideas of her professor is a combination of “apprenticeship of observation” and knowledge about teaching a specific subject area (English); she learned the “road literature” idea from watching her own professor assign the project, but she also realized she needed to alter his assignment to fit the needs of her high school sophomores. This is, though, one project she has quit doing because of the standards – she did not feel as though she could justify this project enough.

Grossman's Model of Teacher Knowledge: Ann

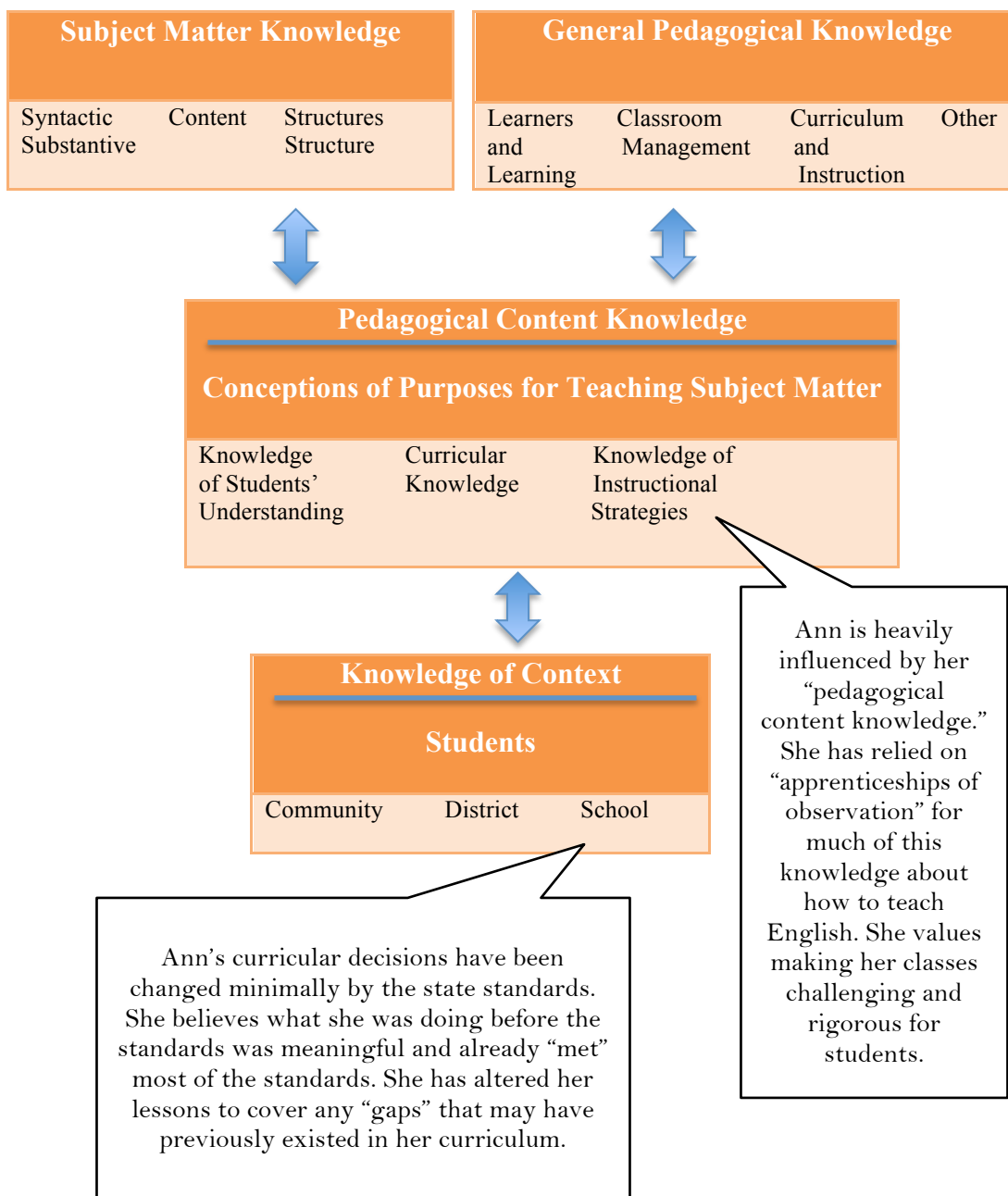


Figure 8. Ann's Teacher Knowledge

Linda: the Reluctant (yet enthusiastic) English Teacher

Linda is a popular teacher; she is a teacher to whom many students go with problems because they know she will genuinely listen, and she has been consistent with this in her fourteen years as a teacher. She is a teacher who brings a lot of energy into the classroom with her, especially when she is teaching something she is passionate about. She is *always* passionate about teaching Spanish; she earned a Spanish major and English/biology minors for her undergraduate degree, and aspired mainly to teach Spanish upon graduation. In fact, when she was hired at CCHS she was not certified to teach either English or biology. She took the certification test to become certified to teach English language arts, but she has never become certified to teach biology. She describes finding it difficult sometimes to ignite the same natural enthusiasm that she has when she teaches Spanish, when she is teaching English. She is a confident, excited, sure Spanish teacher; she is, at times, an unsure, insecure English teacher because of her self-proclaimed lacking coursework (especially, she believes, in comparison to her colleagues). She took 15 credit hours in English as an undergraduate and consequently feels self-doubt when it comes to teaching English. She is, though, highly motivated to inspire her students, and often conjures up the necessary enthusiasm in order to do right by them in English class as well as in Spanish class.

Linda's Inspirations for Teaching English

Although Linda did not set out to teach English initially, she admits wishing that she would have double-majored in Spanish/English. She enjoys teaching some aspects of English immensely, but is often discouraged by the uncertainty she feels. Students are her main motivation, though, and she was drawn to education primarily because she wanted to work with students. She describes enjoying the feeling that she is helping them, that she is making a difference in their lives even if it is only a small difference.

One of her favorite aspects of teaching English is finding a novel that students “really get excited about reading.” She strives to find literature that students cannot put down, but is often frustrated with the lack of options in the department’s selection of classroom sets, the limitations the pacing guides put on her options, and being forced to teach books that she does not like and does not want to teach. She is equally frustrated when she hears teachers complain about students not reading; she describes thinking, “you know why they’re not reading? Because our reading selections are boring!” She admits this is when she feels like she is not a “true” English teacher. She does not love *Lord of the Flies* or some of the other classics that she feels forced to teach. She wishes there was more of a balance between the classics and contemporary texts, and feels that her students would be happier, more engaged as a result. When students spend their free time with activities such as texting and video gaming, “old, boring books can’t compete,” Linda explains. She describes how she really enjoys *Romeo and Juliet* and a contemporary novel called *Painting the Black*, and she thinks she does a good job teaching those texts because she likes them. She “gets into them” and has energy with

those texts in a way that is motivating for her students. She believes students in English class should not have to know specific texts, but rather they can learn the necessary literacy skills (how to read and interpret literature, how to write well, etc.) via any text. Reading texts that do not excite her, Linda feels, not only has a negative influence on her own energy and motivation, but, more importantly, it has a detrimental effect on her students' motivation. She feels that if she could choose the reading for her classes more then she could better help students get enthused about English class. As it currently stands, Linda often finds herself trying to "sell" English class to her students, and she feels like she comes up short too often (especially in terms of the reading selections).

Linda's Relationship with Writing and Grammar

Although Linda does not see herself as a "writer," she has loved to write all throughout her life. Her high school English teacher once told her that she would write a book one day, and Linda admits seeing herself doing that. She jokes that she would "write a good one to replace some of those boring, stale ones" that students are so often forced to read. She has little time to write personally now, although she kept a journal for years and only recently abandoned it. She remembers writing these journals with her children (ages 10 and 8) in mind, for them to read when they are older.

Teaching writing, however, sometimes seems overwhelming, Linda explains, mostly because students' writing abilities and skill levels are "all over the place." She believes writing can be taught, but students "need practice with it." Some students can articulate their thoughts on paper (or on the computer screen) more easily, while other

students need a lot more guidance and “help setting up their ideas.” Linda has really enjoyed teaching persuasive writing this year, and has gotten a lot of ideas from Barry Lane’s *Why We Must Run With Scissors*. One of her favorite classroom examples of student engagement with writing this year was with a persuasive writing exercise from Lane’s book. The activity has students argue about something they are passionate for, and then argue for something they are not passionate about or with which they do not agree. She felt this activity really strengthened their ability to formulate ideas and support those ideas with reasons. The example topic they discussed as a class was the new policy of paying for a parking space in the school’s parking lot. She asked the students tough questions about the fairness of this policy, and she was pleased with the level of student engagement and response. She then wrapped a collection of these essays up as a present and gave them to the school’s superintendent, which was taken both as a comic gesture but also allowed the superintendent to hear the opinions of some students about the parking lot issue. This gave the students’ writing a “real” audience, and in turn gave the superintendent insight into the students’ perspective. She admits she “doesn’t know if this is what English teachers do,” but also feels like she is “on the right path.”

When it comes to teaching grammar, Linda admits not knowing where it should fit into the curriculum, but she does feel like “we should be teaching more grammar.” She thinks that English curriculum needs “to get back to the basics” and include a semester, or even a full year, of grammar class. She admits that this “might sound old school,” but sometimes students “can’t even come up with a complete sentence.” She knows that historically it shows that teaching grammar in isolation does not necessarily translate into

better writing, but she believes the two can be incorporated more. Linda believes her background in teaching a foreign language (Spanish) has shown her how isolated grammar studies *can* be incorporated into a student's writing and are sometimes necessary in helping students understand a language. She has learned a lot of Spanish grammar such as the parts of speech, and this has helped her learn the parts of speech in English as well. She worries that many English teachers do not teach grammar because they do not know it themselves. Linda explains that she would love to teach a grammar class because it would be very objective, "black and white, right or wrong." There would be less guesswork about what to include in the curriculum than she feels there is now.

Linda's Attitude Toward Standards

Linda confesses having a lot of confusion when it comes to understanding the standards, and she admits that some of this confusion may come from having to divide her professional development time between the Spanish and English departments. A main concern she has is the wording of the ELA expectations; she feels they are written in very broad, vague language, and are left open to many different interpretations. She feels that if the wording of the expectations were more direct, then they would represent more tangible goals for her classroom. She describes never hearing anything about standards during her teacher education courses (in the mid-1990s), and wishes she had some background or training in understanding the standards before being thrown into her current situation. She has found the process of unpacking the standards to be very sporadic and fragmented, and it has taken years to complete the various tasks assigned to

them. She admits that she knows very little about the actual standards and what they mean. Truthfully, she says, they “don’t mean anything to me, they are so convoluted and generic.” She understood the goal of the unpacking process was to make the expectations more specific, but she is not sure how well that actually worked. She is also confused about how the common assessments tie into the standards; “where do they fit in, and where did they come from?” These are questions that Linda wishes someone took the time to explain to her without making her feel judged.

Overall, Linda sees the validity in having a set of standards in place because they have the potential to help her stay in check and focus on what she’s supposed to teach. She wishes they were formatted in more of a checklist, though, so that she had a more tangible goal of what to accomplish in her classroom. She likes that the standards are trying to help teachers “hit certain topics,” and she feels this is important so teachers broaden their content. She also feels resentment toward the standards because she feels like they take away teacher’s creativity in the classroom and belittle teacher’s integrity to make curricular decisions. She feels like teachers are not trusted enough when it comes to curriculum: “Yes, you have a degree, but we don’t think you’re good enough.” She believes there must be a better way to balance teacher integrity and the standards, but currently feels like her autonomy is lessened.

Linda’s Teacher Knowledge

Although Linda is hesitant (because of her pedagogical insecurity) to admit this, she *does* have an understanding of how English class should “look.” In other words,

Linda has a sense of what Grossman terms “pedagogical content knowledge,” though it is not as strong in English pedagogy as it is in Spanish pedagogy. Her *pedagogical content knowledge* has largely been influenced by her “apprenticeship of observation” (Grossman, 1990, p. 10). Linda describes being inspired by former teachers; one in particular is her 7th grade English teacher. She describes Mrs. Vargas as being very outgoing, and “she made English class fun for her students.” They worked on skills such as paragraph writing, grammar, and linking verbs in Mrs. Vargas’s class, and Linda remember fondly some specific skills she learned in 7th grade English class. Above all, Linda hopes that she is upbeat like Mrs. Vargas was, although she “feels arrogant saying she has those characteristics.” Linda’s mother, who was also an English teacher, was also a source of inspiration for Linda but more so in terms of her mother’s relationships with her students. Linda recalls seeing her mother’s students in the grocery store and having to wait (for what seemed like a long time) while her mother talked to these young adults. Mrs. Vargas and Linda’s mother definitely inspired Linda to teach; however, Linda has become the teacher she is because of her desire to connect with and help her students.

Linda appreciates the daily opportunities she has with students, and works hard to connect with them. She is often invited to weddings years after she has had a student in class. She is, above all else, motivated by her belief that students are central to everything that a teacher does; Grossman refers to this as “general content knowledge” or her “knowledge and beliefs about the aims and purposes of education. Linda explains, “The students, that’s why we’re really there,” and she describes her frustration during PD days when the focus is only on curriculum and incorporating the standards. It makes teaching

“seem so impersonal when really we’re there because of the students.” She believes focusing solely on curriculum and the standards takes the personality out of the classroom. She enjoys wearing the “many different hats” that are required of a teacher; she enjoys connecting with students and being a compassionate, caring adult for them to rely on. She reflects that “a good teacher teaches material, a great teacher does a whole lot more than that.” A great teacher, Linda believes, gets students’ papers returned to them in a timely manner, listens to their problems, and supports them when he/she can. She believes we need different personalities in teaching because we compliment one another, and different students connect with different teacher personalities.

Finally, as highlighted in Figure 9 below, Linda aspires to improve what Grossman calls *pedagogical content knowledge*, or her knowledge of how to successfully teach this specific subject – *English* – to her students. She acknowledges that her educational training and subject-specific coursework was lacking in ELA; she works now to make up the difference by reading professional texts such as Barry Lane’s *Why We Must Run With Scissors* and other ELA pedagogical texts. She admits wishing she had a “textbook package” rich with great teaching ideas for specific novels, and with lessons that “meet the standards” and all other departmental guidelines required of her. She thinks these packages would be “very beneficial for someone like her.” On the one hand, these “packages” would provide Linda with an outlined sense of what she should be doing in the classroom while still allowing her to choose her classroom readings; on the other hand, these “packages” would still lessen Linda’s pedagogical autonomy,

something that she seems to have contradictory thoughts about. She wants the freedom to be creative, yet the reassurance that she is covering what she should be covering.

Grossman's Model of Teacher Knowledge: Linda

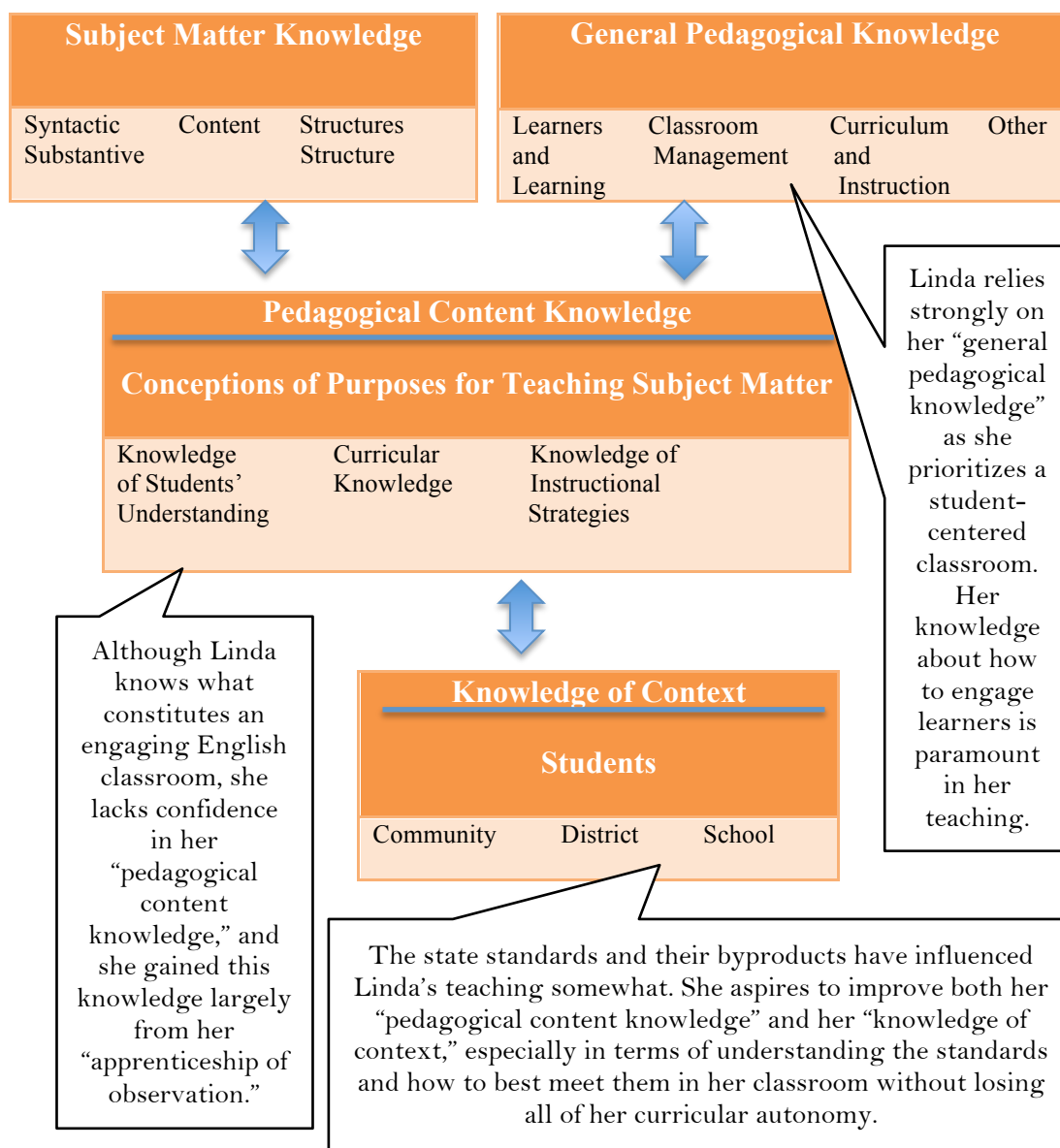


Figure 9. Linda's Teacher Knowledge

Concluding Thoughts

In this chapter, I introduced readers to the four teachers involved in this study. Their backgrounds are especially important in understanding how they come to their pedagogical decisions. Each teacher's personal relationship with writing is also addressed in this section because of the focus on writing in the "expectations" I discuss with them in the next chapter. I assigned each teacher an encompassing metaphor that attempts to capture the teaching personality of each teacher at the time of this study. Sara is the "cross-curricular" teacher because of her emphasis on intertwining concepts from psychology class into her English classes (and vice versa). Her focus on the human element in literature and writing is critical to her pedagogical decisions. Shane is dubbed the "veteran new teacher" because of his extensive time spent away from the ELA classroom and in the school's media center. At the time of this study, his pedagogical confidence was shaken. Ann's teaching metaphor is "hard work and great expectations;" she continually pushes students to work harder and do more, a teaching strategy that works well with some students. Finally, Linda is branded here as the "reluctant (yet enthusiastic) English teacher" because of her ability to energize a classroom, even if she is insecure about what she is teaching.

Equally important to knowing these teachers' personalities, is understanding where their teacher knowledge was derived. Grossman establishes the framework from which I build the discussion for each teacher, and I especially pay attention to the category of "knowledge of context" as I see state standards fitting into this category. My aim with this section was to address possible influences on these teachers' curricular

decisions and teacher knowledge, and to create a teaching persona for Sara, Shane, Ann, and Linda.

In the next chapter, I aim to draw connections between teacher knowledge, standards implementation, and curricular decision-making. I will go into more detail about these teachers' relationships with the standards/expectations, with the pacing guides (a standards "byproduct") created by this department, and explain each teacher's personal process for implementing the standards (specifically, four "expectations" from the writing strand). In chapter four, I will take a closer look at what drives these teachers' curricular decisions and to what extent the standards/expectations have influenced the daily pedagogical decisions each teacher makes.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS ON TEACHER KNOWLEDGE, THE STANDARDS, AND TEACHER NEGOTIATION

Teacher Negotiation

As we investigate the four teachers in this study and their relationships with the standards, it is important to remember our definition of *teacher negotiation*, as stated in chapter two:

the variance between what a teacher believes to be the most effective pedagogical decisions for his/her students and what a teacher chooses to implement in the classroom. This variance may exist due to the aforementioned *influences*. Are curricular decisions based on a strong adherence to meeting the expectations, or do they reflect a strong teaching philosophy? The more a teacher's pedagogical philosophy is compromised, the higher the *level of teacher negotiation*.

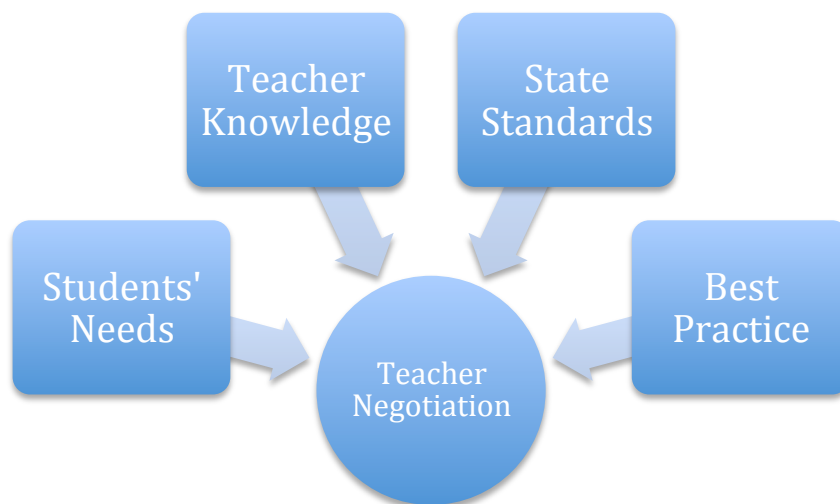


Figure 10. Components of Teacher Negotiation

Figure 10 illustrates the components that make up *teacher negotiation*. It follows, then, that every teacher has his/her own personal level of curricular negotiation when “meeting” the standards. Each teacher has taken into consideration his/her own personal beliefs about what engages his/her specific students, what is expected of this teacher within this specific school district, and what his/her colleagues expect within the department. For example, if a teacher is required (through a pacing guide or other standards byproduct) to teach writing in a product-oriented way (i.e. “teaching to the test”), and this teacher is philosophically against teaching writing this way, then this is a curricular *negotiation* the teacher has made in order to meet the requirements of the state or district mandates. The teacher would *like* to teach writing to his/her students via the writing process method, but is required to follow the guidelines; guidelines which often favor approaches to teaching that overtly prioritize the ways writing is “tested” on standardized tests (five-paragraph essays and product-based writing situations). This teacher may be aware of the education research that shows students learn writing best when all steps of the writing process are taught, but is obliged to meet the requirements set forth by curricular mandates. There no longer exists a teaching/learning environment where one can just “close the door and teach.”

Educators in all school districts cannot help but feel the pressure of outside interests (in the form of standards, standardized testing, or administrative mandates) weighing on the curricular decisions an educator must make. There no longer exists a teaching space where educators are completely left to their own devices when making curricular decisions, and for this reason every teacher negotiates between his/her teacher

knowledge and state-mandated standards. The texts a teacher chooses to employ in the classroom (classics or contemporary), the ways a teacher chooses to address “grammar” with students, if/how peer review is employed and innumerable other daily pedagogical decisions all are made with a certain input from these outside sources. Linda’s determination to incorporate contemporary young adult fiction into her ninth grade English class, even though the sample units purchased by her school and the pacing guides her colleagues created all favor more classic texts (such as *The Odyssey*): this is an example of that negotiation at play. Likewise, Sara’s struggle to conduct “organic” vocabulary activities (as her inner “NCTE voice” guides her to do) in order to meet the expectations that call for vocabulary instruction is indicative of her personal negotiation. The distance a teacher is willing to migrate from his/her ideas or knowledge about how to best teach students is referred to here as “negotiation.” The standards are but one influence, (along with subject matter knowledge, pedagogical knowledge learned in methods courses and through membership in professional organizations, and contextual knowledge of the school and students) on the amount of teacher negotiation that might exist for a teacher; however, the influence of the standards on teacher negotiation is an important research question for this study.

It can be argued that a certain amount of teacher negotiation could be a positive influence on a teacher’s pedagogical decisions. This points to the belief that some administrators, curriculum consultants, and other power players hold that teachers are resistant to change, even if it is to better meet students’ needs, unless it is forced. Take for

example the teacher who replays the same lesson plans year after year without any reflection or rethinking about how to improve. This belief is reflected here:

State monitoring and accountability systems reflect a concern that local educators will not work hard enough to support student learning unless coerced. Promotion of national achievement tests reflects a lack of trust that state and local educators will select the wisest instructional focuses unless the preferred instructional outcomes are specified. National statements of educational goals, state identification of the components of a common core of knowledge, [and] administrative efforts to articulate a clear vision of the purposes of the school all exhibit the belief that teachers and principals prefer to have their professional lives externally controlled. (Astuto and Clark, as quoted in Berliner, 1995, p. 189).

For teachers who have become caught in routine, this belief holds, a certain amount of coercion or “negotiation” might be productive in that it can disrupt the otherwise comfortable environment that routine provides. *Negotiation* should not be confused, however, with a sense of professional reflection; reflection allows for informed changes to be made. Reflection takes into account a teacher’s specific teaching situation: the students, the district, the needs, or the standards. Negotiation instead refers to the changes a teacher might make that *contradict* what he/she believes would be most beneficial for the students within a particular classroom (i.e. teaching writing in a product oriented way rather than a process oriented way, as described above). For example, when a teacher repeatedly teaches “to the test” by having students produce a piece of writing that is

scored only on its final product, fits a strict formal genre, and is often a timed writing, this teacher is focused on meeting the particular standards that address standardized testing and is not focused on the recursive nature of writing. Students miss out on the prewriting and rewriting strategies that are important for writing development when product-oriented writing is the sole focus in the classroom. This is an example of a negotiation that a teacher might make in her classroom in order to meet the standards; this negotiation is at the expense of her students' writing development and contradicts what teachers know about the recursive nature of writing.

While this study has uncovered many examples of teacher negotiation with *negative* implications, this study has also revealed some positive consequences of the standards implementation. The four teachers in this study all initially talked about the process of interpreting and implementing the standards as being “frustrating,” “tedious,” and “drawn out.” Eventually, however, and after long discussions about the negatives, the teachers also all described some positives of the implementation process. For example, these teachers were grateful for the opportunities they were given to discuss their curricular decisions with their colleagues. On more than one occasion, in the early stages of implementing the standards, teachers were given time to create pacing guides and standards checklists. This inevitably led to discussions about how we were already meeting particular expectations in our classes. These early conversations were beneficial because they allowed teachers to collaborate and compare ideas. Although there was an explicit task at hand, there was still time to discuss teaching units and strategies. This rarely happened before the standards were introduced, mainly because the teachers were

previously only concerned with meeting the standards on an individual basis. However, the nature of having a set of standards that must be divided amongst all four grade levels, and interpreted individually for each grade level, resulted in some in-depth conversations about what each expectation should look like for each grade level, what the teachers should be prioritizing in their classrooms, and what they were already doing in their classrooms that *worked*. These department discussions, coupled with the opportunity to reflect on what teaching strategies, methods, and lessons proved effective with students, are just two of the positive outcomes the standards have inspired. I will focus on these two positive outcomes of standards implementation, as discovered in this study, in the upcoming sections: *Standards as a Catalyst for Discussion* and *Standards as a Catalyst for Reflection*.

Standards as a Catalyst for Discussion

The state standards have, as Shane, Sara, Ann and Linda describe in this study, opened the line of communication between teachers and encouraged discussions about what goes on in our classrooms. The standards have become a catalyst for discussions at department meetings, PD days, and lunch tables about what should have a place in classrooms, what we value in English education, and what we're *currently* doing versus what we maybe *should* be doing. As chapter one highlighted, however, the teacher's voice is one that is routinely left out of the discussion about what should happen in English class; there have always been other voices of politics, business and academia dominating these decisions. However, even though teachers may not have much of a say

in the creation of standards, the standards do have the potential to provide a platform for the teacher voice, to help departments decide amongst and between themselves what they value in curriculum: what books to read, how to incorporate grammar, how to teach writing, etc. It is, no doubt, idealistic to assume that allowing teachers the freedom to talk about *how* they meet the standards is the same as having the freedom and power to *create* those standards; these two are by no means the same. But as teachers continue the struggle against mandates that dictate what (not how) they teach, perhaps the openness of communication that the standards can inspire is the silver lining.

This silver lining, however, only exists in school districts where teachers have the freedom to construct their own lesson plans and teaching units. As discussed in chapter one, some districts do not allow teachers to create their own lesson plans; teachers are required to use the district's adopted curriculum, usually in the form of a state-released "sample unit." The teachers at Central City High School have all stood firm on not adopting a prefabricated curriculum, and the administration has complied. Ann reflects on the decision made in the beginning of standards implementation to hold steadfast to the department's own curriculum:

I think it's coming back to haunt us. There's a lot of frustration in our department right now. People are upset because other teachers don't follow the pacing guides, or people are upset because they're asked to teach something they don't want to teach.

This autonomy is often called into question, as it was on a professional development day while I was conducting my research for this study. As a speaker from

the local ISD talked about what to expect as the new Common Core State Standards (CCSS) are released, she asked, “What units do you use now? The ones provided by the state?” Her question was met with blank stares, so she decided to answer her own question. “Oh. You must use the Montgomery units,” referring to the neighboring ISD’s teaching units. Again, her statement was met with blank stares, when finally Ann raised her hand and replied, “Actually, we created our own.” The surprise on the woman’s face was initially masked with confusion as she again asked, “You what?” Her tone was of surprise and incredulousness. She later explained that she so rarely hears that answer that she wasn’t sure how to react to it.

The determination of the teachers at CCHS to maintain a level of autonomy existed when I taught there as well, in the years the “new” state standards were being released and implemented. There was, at the time, considerable outside pressure from our ISD to adopt the sample units created by a neighboring district. These units were touted as perfect examples of how to address all 91 expectations in one teaching unit. They were released during the time when the misinformation about fitting all 91 expectations into each school year (or into each teaching unit) was being perpetuated. These teaching units raise great concern with teachers because of the length of time they require. As Ann points out, “It would take eight weeks to make it through *The Catcher in the Rye* using these model units!” I ask her if there’s something to be said about quantity, and she responds:

Some of the units that have been created beat a dead horse. I can’t spend two months teaching, or *reading*, one book, like *To Kill a Mockingbird*! Maybe one

month... It's not even just about attention spans, it's just not *meant* to take that long: the unit becomes too drawn out. It's meant to be read in three or four days. An ISD person recently told us: 'Those units aren't designed to use everything in them. Try to cut some of the material, and focus more on fitting the standards into shorter units.'

This is contradictory to what we were told when we were first introduced to the sample units. Ann also feels her students should have experiences with many different texts, so she focuses more on reading faster and including more texts.

While there are many supplemental texts included (Ann's class does not *only* read *The Catcher in the Rye* when this text is taught) in each unit, Ann explains that spending eight weeks on one central theme/idea/text would probably feel like overkill to many students; we already struggle keeping students' attention focused, and we certainly do not need to add overkill or burnout to the list of distractions. Ann's point, though, is only one of many arguments against including all 91 expectations in every teaching unit; however, the most important argument is that the expectations were not designed even to be implemented every *year*, let alone every teaching unit.

It is important to reemphasize here where this chapter began: the silver lining in this seemingly "top-down" teaching environment. The four teachers interviewed in this study all commented individually on the benefits of having standards in place. One of the common themes was how beneficial the standards-inspired discussions about curriculum have been. Talking about curricular choices with colleagues may have taken place before, but not to the extent that they do now. Sara, Shane, Linda, and Ann all described, in some

way, the benefits they perceive coming from the implementation of the standards – these benefits coming in the form of both increased reflective practice and teacher collaboration. This is not to say that these perceived benefits of standards implementation outweigh the detriments, and one of these detriments may come in the form of teacher negotiation. Even if teachers are given full autonomy to “meet” the standards in their own ways, they still have to meet those standards. They still have to work together as a department in order to figure out how each expectation will be covered with the four years of high school.

In fact, if a department decides to (and a school district allows for them to) create their own curriculum that meets the 91 expectations, as CCHS has, then the teachers within that department have a greater task of communicating and collaborating with one another. And in this collaboration is where these four teachers have limited each other’s curricular freedom. They prioritized and fought for maintaining curricular autonomy (being able to meet the standards/expectations in their own ways) when the standards were implemented; however, they then imposed rules (in the form of pacing guides) upon one another so that only two of these four teachers truly enjoyed this curricular freedom. There is a sense of holding one another accountable, and therefore is little room for teachers to just “shut the door and teach,” as teachers are increasingly under the microscope from their peers about what goes on in the classroom. Not only is there an increased demand for curricular *discussions* because of the standards, there is also an increased need for personal reflection on curricular decisions; in the next section, I will outline my findings on this increased pedagogical reflection.

Standards as a Catalyst for Reflection

One possible positive consequence of these open, standards-inspired discussions is this sense of accessibility in knowing what the English teacher across the hall is doing in his/her classroom. Shane, Ann, Linda, and Sara all also commented the environment of increased awareness and scrutiny about what texts are read, how writing is taught, and if common assessments are implemented. One must ask whether this same scrutiny would exit if the department had simply adopted the prefabricated teaching units when they were given this option. Some of these teachers scrutinized the curricular choices of other teachers during our interviews, while other teachers described feeling scrutinized. A certain amount of policing takes place now that I do not remember happening when I taught there; it is difficult to ascertain what motivates this policing. Perhaps because there seems to be an increased reliance on one another now, a more outlined progression between the grade levels, these teachers more often look critically at not only what they are doing in the classroom, but at what their colleagues are doing. Sara points out that an important benefit of the standards is that they can help justify to colleagues, parents, and administrators the curricular choices a teacher makes. She says,

This [having standards in place] has a ripple effect on the respect you have from your colleagues because you can show what you've done in your classroom or where your colleague should pick up the following school year. You cannot show where you've left off if there aren't standards in place, and your colleagues won't know what work the students they've inherited from you have done.

But do these mandates, their byproducts, and the negotiation they force in teachers result in a *beneficial* change for students? While following the effects of standards on student outcomes is something that has thus far eluded educators, researchers, and academics, understanding that the changes teachers and school districts make in order to meet these mandates is, at times and at best, artificial. Much research has been done that measures student outcomes using standardized test scores, but I would argue that those studies have an added variable – the standardized test – that does not allow us to see the actual effects of the standards. There still does not exist adequate evidence that shows the changes teachers make in order to accommodate the standards lead toward positive outcomes for students. This study does, however, show some negative outcomes for the teachers undergoing this negotiation.

Just as Ann describes feeling like she is “cheating the system” by making her current lesson plans fit the criteria of the expectations, school districts everywhere have found ways to meet the mandates or standards without making many (if any) true changes to the way education happens in the classrooms. As David Berliner and Bruce Biddle explain in *The Manufactured Crisis*:

Those who urge that curricula be intensified argue that such actions will lead to higher levels of student achievement. Such arguments have rarely, if ever, been confirmed by evidence. This is hardly surprising, since most curricula-intensification programs have imposed extra requirements on schools but have provided no additional resources to help meet those requirements. As a result,

schools have adopted various strategies for superficial compliance but have avoided serious changes in their programs (1995, p. 183).

The greatest lacking resource at CCHS is time; all four of these teachers expressed concern at the lack of time they have been given as a department to work together on a plan for implementing these standards. The local ISD and curriculum coordinator dictated the time they were given with tasks (such as those described in chapter one) that proved to be very time consuming. The changes that are a result of the standards happen both internally (through the reflection they can inspire) and externally (through the various district and departmental mandates they force).

Presently, I will focus primarily on the critical appraisal that happens internally, or the reflective practicing that happens as a result of the standards; narrowing the scope of the study allows for a deeper investigation of this one aspect of standards-inspired change. How does each of these teachers navigate the standards in a way that satisfies all aspects of teacher knowledge (or the knowledge that informs a teacher's pedagogical decisions), including subject matter knowledge, general pedagogical knowledge, pedagogical content knowledge, as well as knowledge of context (where the standards fit)? Are there major gaps between what a teacher believes to be solid, effective pedagogical practices and what that teacher employs in his/her classroom in order to meet the standards (or a district-mandated, standards byproduct such as a pacing guide or sample unit)?

As I talked to Sara, Shane, Ann and Linda, I found it impossible not to make comparisons between their stories. Their experiences were so different in some ways,

especially when it came to discussing the pacing guides. I found it particularly interesting to compare Sara/Ann with Shane/Linda, mostly because Sara and Ann have been invested deeply in this English department much longer than Shane or Linda. Shane spent the last ten years in the media center, and Linda was forced to divide her time between the Spanish department (full time) and the English department (part time). Learning the intricacies of the English department requires one's full attention, and therefore Linda and Shane were in a somewhat compromised position during this study. However, Ann and Sara had been invested in the English department for years, and both had the opportunity to create their own pacing guides. Therefore, the pacing guides they created basically outlined the curriculum they were already doing, or at least the curriculum they wanted to implement. Sara describes this situation:

My pacing guide hasn't really changed much since I created it, mostly because the English 11 documents were all mine. The examples [in the pacing guide] were mine. I have found that new teachers who come into the department are confused. I find that I write way too much in code. It [the pacing guide] was very much selfishly composed, and that's starting to show.

This is a very different situation than Shane and Linda were facing; the comparisons, then, between Sara/Ann (the curriculum producers) and Linda/Shane (the curriculum consumers) are apparent.

Teacher Negotiation in Sara, Ann, Shane and Linda



Figure 11. Teacher Negotiation in Sara, Ann, Shane, and Linda

As figure 11 (above) shows, Sara and Ann experienced low negotiation, created their pacing guides, and were familiar with the original standards document. Linda and Shane both experienced some negotiation and did not create their pacing guides.

In the following section, I discuss the ways in which each of these four teachers came to his/her curricular decisions, and what influence the standards or a byproduct of the standards (i.e. the pacing guides) had on their curricular decisions. I focus first on Sara because of her confidence with the pacing guide, standards, and her own curricular

decisions; I then juxtapose her confidence with Shane's uncertainty with the pacing guide and his grade level's curriculum. While under different circumstances Shane may have the same pedagogical confidence that Sara exudes, he describes at times feeling like a "substitute teacher" in his own classroom because he is often following someone else's lesson plan. Likewise, Ann is similar to Sara in her confident pedagogical decisions. Again, the juxtaposition of discussing Ann followed by Linda is meant to highlight the differences in their experiences with the pacing guides and standards-based curriculum. Both Ann and Linda implement curriculum that they (mostly) feel will be beneficial for the students. Their level of negotiation is low; however, Ann's curricular decisions are backed by her grade level's pacing guide (because she created it), while Linda's curricular decisions are not (because she is supposed to follow a pacing guide created by another teacher). Ann's confidence in her pedagogical decisions resembles Sara's, while Linda's insecurity is in sharp contrast. In the upcoming section, I will outline the examples from my interview data that demonstrate each individual teacher's curricular changes due to standards implementation.

Sara: Curriculum Producer

I term Sara a "curriculum producer" because she prioritizes creating her own curriculum for her classes, and describes how creating lesson plans is sometimes her favorite aspect of teaching. Sara has a very strong sense of her pedagogical content knowledge; in other words, she knows what she believes are the best practices for her own classrooms and takes immense pride in the lessons she has created over the years

that incorporate those methods, ideas, and content knowledge. She believes that having a set of ELA standards in place is crucial because,

they should be the building block of what we do in the classroom, otherwise we risk selling kids short in testing (in the short term) and we endanger ourselves by relying solely on what we like to do in the classroom versus what will help students actually succeed in their academic lives.

Sara admits that this reflective nature of the standards has been especially important for her, as she is someone who can get carried away with overzealous lesson plans. She describes how she loves to lesson plan, to think up new ways to present material or engage students, but that sometimes she loves planning “more than actually teaching.” She also loves to integrate the different disciplines she teaches – primarily psychology and theatre. She often tries to make cross-curricular connections, and this makes her lessons unique. While she believes that teacher creativity and passion are important in the initial stages of planning a lesson, she does not believe they (especially the “stereotypical idea of passion in the classroom”) are essential in making a lesson come together: “Some of teaching is theatre, but it’s not only a teacher’s passion that is going to drive the motivation for students. Hopefully it comes organically from students, some sort of student interest that motivates them internally.”

While the standards are emphasized greatly in her professional life and during PD days, the standards have not necessarily changed her personal daily teaching methods or lesson plans. They have, though, influenced her to focus on *different* aspects of ELA (such as vocabulary) than those she already solidly covers (such as prewriting activities)

in her classroom. She describes how grammar and vocabulary, while they are both building blocks in language that are important, are two areas where she has always struggles with teaching. She cannot figure out how to “discreetly” fit them into her curriculum without the “nagging NCTE voice in my head saying, ‘If we’re doing this in isolation, then we’re not really doing this.’” She has been forced to focus directly on teaching grammar and vocabulary when she otherwise would not have done so. She describes feeling a “tension that the standards aren’t going away,” and that she needs to “get better at figuring out how to fit these [grammar and vocabulary] in.” NCTE and MCTE conferences/conventions, *English Journal*, and her continued graduate coursework play an important role in her current teaching, as she finds the “immediacy of them much more energizing and present” for her now, versus drawing on her teacher education undergraduate work. She relies especially on conferences, conventions and *English Journal* for inspiring, innovative new teaching ideas and for reminders about what sound pedagogical practices look like in the English classroom.

As she learned to do in her teacher education courses, Sara organizes her curriculum into thematic units. She explains how she “goes on autopilot” weekly, but often consults the standards or pacing guide before a unit begins, while she is creating a new unit, or at the end of a unit. The standards are like “bookends” for Sara, and she feels like she does not need to consult them more often because she is very familiar with them at this point. She has taught English 11 for many years, and has been invested in the English department from the beginning of the standards implementation process. She prides herself on meeting the standards, and values their existence in ELA and their

presence in her curriculum. She believes the standards should create a unified vision and a sense of collaboration, even if they are a bit vague or too flexible.

In fact, the flexibility of the standards is something Sara treasures most, and she values the ability to adapt curriculum so that “teachers feel empowered.” She adds, “This is what keeps teachers teaching. They will feel more inclined to carry the lessons/standards through.” This again speaks to the level of importance Sara places on creating innovative, creative lesson plans that will engage students. The standards, she argues, cannot be used like a checklist: “Here’s the standard, here’s Wednesday.” This does not demonstrate, she clarifies, that the teacher even understands what the standard is about, and therefore knows what to teach or implement: “Teaching is more complicated than that [a checklist], and requires a more complex way of looking at things.” She warns against the tendency of teachers to misuse the standards’ flexibility and incorporate the expectations in ways that are unrecognizable to the original meaning. She says, “If we are interpreting the standards so creatively that the skill gets lost, and therefore never gets taught or mastered, then creativity is not as helpful or important. We have to use caution when bending the standards and watch ourselves.” She also warns against only meeting the standards we “favor.” In other words, the standards that represent the activities and teaching methods we *like*. She explains, “I need to take a closer look at how often I meet certain standards. I often meet the same ones over and over – speaking and viewing stuff in particular in my classes. We need repetition and reviewing, and therefore we need to revisit some standards more often, and not just the ones we like.”

When it comes to teaching writing, Sara believes in incorporating all stages of the writing process in her classroom. She utilizes many different types of prewriting strategies (mostly with larger writing assignments and projects), all geared toward helping students make personal connections with the writing topics at hand. She tries to lessen the intimidation factor many students feel when they begin writing by having students do cooperative brainstorming sessions at the beginning of essay writing. Likewise, Sara does not focus, or make her students too concerned with, mechanics and editing early in the writing process. This is especially true, Sara explains, with narrative type writing because it can interfere with the flow of students' thoughts in the early stages of writing an essay like that. She states: "Students can become too concerned with censoring themselves or getting things just right, so they don't let the thoughts flow freely or say what they want to say." She believes in letting students get their ideas on paper first, especially with essays that have a personal component. Again, she adds, "If you're off to publish something, then of course it's necessary, but in the early stages it can detract." As for peer review, she sometimes engages students in it, but she tries to instead create an environment of continual revision and review instead of "just shifting gears to our editing voices." She tries to encourage a more critical eye on a daily basis, and not make editing feel like "a sacred place." She tries to make revision within the writing process more "organic, natural, not so jarring or strange to students." She incorporates small doses of revision and editing first, then helps students "determine author purpose, audience, etc. along the way. That's what works best for me."

Ideally, Sara sees portfolios as the preferable way to assess students, but there just is not the necessary “time, energy or staff” to make this happen. This would be “a much better way to assess students than a standardized writing test.” Unfortunately, because of limited resources, teachers are continually faced with preparing students to take standardized writing tests. Sarah tries to see the trends in individual writers, though, and to point these trends out to her students. She does not necessarily highlight every student’s writing trends in every class (not enough time for that), but more on a need basis, and this is where writing conferences come into play in Sara’s classes.

Many of her classes also have a portfolio component, and this was something she engaged in before the onset of state standards. She sees much of the responsibility to improve writing skills in being with the writer, and sees a need to proceed cautiously with portfolios because “many students aren’t ready to make those improvements. They can also be used wrongly, and can be a deterrent” because they can frustrate students to the point of shutting down (paralysis by analysis). Students have to be personally ready to look critically at their own work in order to improve that work, she explains. Some projects, Sara believes, lend themselves easily to portfolios, such as with professional writing pieces, and this is where she fits them into her classroom. She teaches both accelerated and regular English classes, and she sees “portfolios as largely, though not exclusively, an accelerated [AP] animal because of their emphasis on critical thinking and synthesis.” She describes how each Thursday her AP class meets in small groups and shares their writing with one another. She explains, “Most of the time these tend to be pretty major projects they’re working on. Many of them are novelists and share their

novels as they write them.” Students stay in these groups all year, so they get to know each other and their writing becomes very familiar to one another. Every six weeks, Sara collects the portfolios and “we have a coffee house atmosphere, and I essentially read twenty-three novels most of the time.” She explains how portfolios, when used like this, inspire students to write for audiences outside of herself: “these works are shared with their peers, they are not only written for me.” Inspiring students to write for a broader audience is how she sees portfolios helping writing becoming relevant for students, not just a “dead” transaction between teacher and student. Instead, writing becomes publishable, sharable. So far she has found this method “too time consuming for all of my classes,” so she currently only has her AP students write in these portfolios.

Of the four expectations that I asked these teachers to rate, the only expectation Sara rated as “very important” (meaning she met this expectation often in her classes) was expectation 1.1.7 (“precision of language” and “well-crafted sentences”) because she sees this skill as always being important, no matter what type of writing is taking place, “word choice is always important.” She believes word choice is important not only in writing, but in speaking activities, too. For example, an activity she has students do as she teaches the concept of satire and “A Modest Proposal” is to have students create “Satirical Panels.” Students create groups of three or four students and decide on a problem plaguing our world. Students then “do a little research on the problem, what causes it, etc. Then they come up with satirical solutions for this problem – a *contemporary* solution. Every group member comes up with possible ‘solutions,’ and they defend these particular solutions to the whole class via discussion panels using

visuals.” She rents out the auditorium for students to present. She then runs through the audience, “Oprah-style,” with a microphone and fields questions from the concerned “citizens” in the audience. She explains, “I love doing that sort of thing – it combines all the elements of ELA together (reading, writing, listening, speaking). People who are more prepared have more fun with it, so it motivates them to work hard and prepare. It has always been my style to have students engage in public speaking, even in literature-based classes, just because I feel like students need more exposure to that.” This activity helps to bring the notion of satire home, and focuses specifically on issues of word choice and meaning

Other expectations she finds are assignment-specific. She explains that a writer is “on the right track in terms of developing writing if you’re paying attention to the language you’re using to communicate a message.” Whether the class is writing research papers, literary essays, or narratives, each assignment needs to be “looked at critically as to the way words are constructed.” Sara believes words are the writer’s tools, and she holds this critical approach to language study high in her repertoire of teaching goals.

What Drives Sara’s Curricular Decisions?

The teacher negotiation Sara had undergone in order to accommodate the standards is low. She, like Ann, created her own pacing guide for her courses, and that has given her the freedom to continue teaching much as she did *before* the standards were introduced. She has a strong sense of teacher knowledge (based primarily on her involvement with professional organizations and ongoing graduate work) and

professional reflection that drive her curricular decision-making. She believes what she does in the classroom is effective and beneficial for students, and this gives her great confidence in her pedagogy (with the one exception being how to teach vocabulary or other conventions). She has, in many ways, taken back the power to be a *producer* of curriculum rather than a *consumer*. She has a solid set of pedagogical ideals that have originated from her ongoing interest in English education publications. More than any of the other teachers in this study, Sara exhibits the most interest in challenging herself pedagogically outside of the classroom as well as academically. Aside from taking ongoing graduate courses, Sara also has tried to publish articles in *English Journal* and pays great attention to the ongoing debates in English education. She respects the art of teaching and believes that good teaching does not happen accidentally, but rather happens because of thorough planning, professional reflection, a dedication to improving both her students and herself, and an interest in continually learning new pedagogical techniques and strategies; these characteristics make Sara a “curriculum producer,” as illustrated below in Figure 12. Sara has exhibited little teacher negotiation because of the standards, and has few examples to share of the curricular changes she has made with the implementation of the standards.

One example of an assignment she no longer does because of the standards is a poetry music video unit she used to have her students complete. The unit took two weeks, and was “an exciting project. Students would give them [the videos] as gifts. One student played his video at his dad’s funeral. Essentially it helped students see the connection between poetry and their lives. It was so cool!” She explains that she has not done that

project in four years, and “it breaks her heart because she knows it was meaningful to them. They’re absolutely engaged with it. They feel they used their own words to produce something really lovely. They were filled with literary techniques, and it was a lovely culmination of textbook connections.”

Analysis of Sara

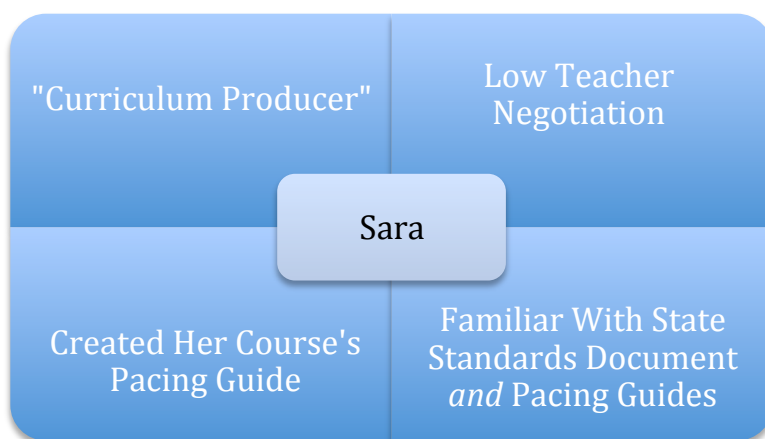


Figure 12. Analysis of Sara

The downside to this unit was that it required a lot of computer lab time, some photography lessons, and other time-consuming details. She instead replaced this unit with having students read independent novels, which is asked for explicitly by the (current) state standards.

Above all, Sara’s curricular decisions are inspired by her own innovative unit plan ideas and what she sees her students needing. Sara is known for taking a different approach to teaching everything from characterization in novels to theme identification. Sara’s unit plans are always organized according to theme, and she tries hard to help students relate to the reading material by connecting the themes to the students’ lives.

Additionally, Sara often includes role-playing or other theatric/kinetic lessons in her courses. She is a strong believer in the cross-curricular nature of humanities with many other disciplines (including, but not limited to, psychology, film, and drama), and this shows in the way she organizes her teaching units.

While Sara (and Ann) have enjoyed playing the role of curriculum producer (as opposed to curriculum consumer), the pacing guides the department has created have put her colleagues in a position of curriculum consumers, especially if those teachers who are teaching the same course as Sara. Rather than provide room for curricular freedom and autonomy, as was the purpose of creating individual pacing guides for each course, the pacing guides have instead tied the hands of the teachers who did not create the documents. Both Sara and Ann hold high expectations for their counterparts when it comes to meeting the material on the curriculum guides. More than holding each other accountable for meeting the standards and benchmarks, following the pacing guide for each grade level has become “best practice.”

Shane: Curriculum Consumer

Shane is termed a “curriculum consumer” here because he relies on outside sources (namely the pacing guides) to lead his curricular choices. Unfamiliar with the curricular demands of the standards, pacing guides, and common assessments, he follows the path laid out for him by his colleagues in the department. Shane finds himself in a very different place professionally than he was a year ago. Coming from the media center (where he served as the school’s media specialist for ten years) back into the high school

classroom, Shane felt like he had a lot of “catching up” to do in terms of learning about the standards, curriculum, and department expectations: hence the “veteran new teacher” label. Although he recollects a time when he had a solid concept of what and how he wanted to teach, his confidence in curriculum building has faltered because of the prescriptive guides he is forced to follow. He does, however, believe it is important to have a set of standards in place in order to be able to “look one another in the eye and say *we teach that*.” He sees the standards as a way to keep members of a department in line, to give a department a certain amount of quality control, rather than allowing for just anything (or nothing) to be taught. He states, “We should be assured that our colleagues are doing the same thing, assured that we don’t have teachers who are doing *anything*.” Shane sees the value in a standards-based system as being local, in having assurance that other teachers in the district are working hard to teach the same core values. This is not to say that he thinks the standards should dictate how a teacher teaches; “broad is good, so we can develop our own ways of teaching this stuff.” This is precisely where Shane has been struggling this school year; he has found himself following the pacing guides that his colleagues have created, and often not fully “buying into” the lesson. He would like to see the pacing guides become a “living, breathing, flexible document” as they were meant to function.

Often, though, the pacing guides only give one option for how to teach different skills (such as alliteration). The pacing guides are designed to help teachers new to the department, but Shane has felt limited this year when lesson planning. He explains, “We still have to be passionate about what we teach, and if we had more autonomy in what we

teach, then the passion is more likely to be there.” And while Shane consults the pacing guides often, he admits that his familiarity with the original standards document is limited. The pacing guides that he follows are built off from the curriculum binders that his colleagues have organized, and those are supposed to meet the “power standards” that have been identified by the department. So, currently, Shane’s curricular decisions are dominated by the pacing guides that his colleagues have created, and he actually is not sure how those lessons match up with the standards document because he is not familiar with it. He describes some confusion, too, about how the standards, power standards, and the pacing guides, are all related and has delegated much of his decision-making power to his more established colleagues in the department.

This is not to suggest that Shane’s system of making curricular decisions is deficient in any way; however, in a department that has prided itself on maintaining curricular autonomy in the face of standards-driven initiatives aimed at reducing that autonomy, Shane’s situation seems in stark contrast to the curricular freedom his colleagues have enjoyed. In some ways, though, Shane views these restrictions as helpful rather than limiting. He refers to the pacing guide as a source of guidance rather than curricular control, even though he highly values teacher passion and creativity in the classroom: “You have to feel it,” he says of the lessons, material, and texts teachers choose to utilize in the classroom. He admits not always “feeling” the lesson he is teaching because it is a lesson not created by him; he describes feeling like a substitute teacher in his own classroom, following the lesson plans someone else has prepared for him.

Above all else, Shane emphasizes the need for more time: more time in the classroom more time to meet as a department, and more time to grade papers. Presenters at PD meetings who push spending more time on different skills in the classroom (such as more vocabulary, or more reading, or more writing) routinely frustrate him. He argues that something must give, that there is simply not enough time to cover everything that needs to be covered. “The data-driven evidence may show to teach vocabulary in this way... but there’s not enough time! We [teachers] have to make decisions, and we can’t do it all.” This is true also with revision and editing; he has students peer review nearly all assignments that require multiple drafts, but admits that commenting on all assignments eats up precious time. He describes having a difficult time this year keeping up with all that is demanded of him, including figuring out the standards-based curricular requirements.

When it comes to teaching writing, Shane’s ultimate vision is to allow students complete freedom in choosing writing topics and genres. Although these types of assignments might be his favorite to assign because they allow for the greatest amount of student engagement, he does admit a myriad of problems exist with assignments that allow students to “choose their own adventure.” One potential problem with having loose guidelines on assignments is that some students will spend many hours working hard on the writing, whereas other students will spend very little time on the project. In the past this has caused him to create rubrics outlining *exactly* what is expected of students, which makes grading much more straightforward and easier. It does also, though, take away the students’ creativity, which is NOT what he wants to accomplish. This negates the original

reason for the assignment: to give ultimate freedom and autonomy to students for their own learning and writing. This paradox ironically resembles how Shane feels about standards; while he values having curricular freedom, he also values having a set of standards to hold rogue colleagues accountable. Likewise, Shane enjoys assigning and reading in-class journal writings. He thinks this genre offers students a place to answer honestly without the fear of harsh grading to interfere with communicating their thoughts, opinions, or creativity.

Free writing also takes the form of brainstorming in Shane's classroom, and he often has students respond to a writing prompt before a class discussion or before the class reads a particular section of text. This helps generate more in-depth comments during discussions because students have had time to formulate their thoughts before being asked to share, or before reading a text to help students relate to the story's theme. Shane admits he spends more time on the earlier stages of the writing process (such as using graphic organizers and cluster mapping) than the latter stages (revising and editing), especially when engaging students in five-paragraph essay writing (which Shane feels is important because of standardized testing). His daily lessons often concentrate on getting students engaged in the writing or reading material.

Ironically, none of the four specific expectations chosen for this study, Shane explains, are expectations chosen as "power standards" for English 9. Those expectations include:

CE 1.1.2: "Know and use a variety of prewriting strategies to generate, focus, and organize ideas (e.g. free writing, clustering/mapping, talking with others, brainstorming, outlining, developing graphic organizers, taking notes, summarizing, paraphrasing)."

CE 1.1.7: "Edit for style, tone, and word choice (specificity, variety, accuracy, appropriateness, conciseness) and for conventions of grammar, usage and mechanics that are appropriate for audience."

CE 1.2.4: "Assess strengths, weaknesses, and development as a writer by examining a collection of own writing."

CE 1.3.3: "Compose essays with well-crafted and varied sentences demonstrating a precise, flexible, and creative use of language."

Although I tried to choose expectations that would very broad and easily applicable in an English classroom, it seems my process of choosing "power standards" varied from the previous English 9 teachers. This does not necessarily mean, however, that those expectations were ignored entirely in the curriculum at CCHS, as they could be officially "met" in English 10, 11 or 12. When pushed to explain if/how he covers these expectations in his classes, he initially claims he doesn't cover them because they "aren't covered in the pacing guide" (because they are not English 9 "power standards"). Upon further questioning, though, it became evident that he does indeed cover three of them (prewriting, revising, and word choice). The fourth expectation that Shane does not cover is 1.1.7, which has to do with have students keep portfolios and/or look reflectively at their own writing. He explains how some of the expectations he really values, but he just does not have enough time to do it all in his classes. Having students keep portfolios is "a great idea, but I don't do it. We used to do it [as a school], but it's gone away. It should be more important, but it's not in the pacing guides, so I don't do it. I'd actually forgotten about doing it, but it is a valuable way to assess students." Again, this points to the

extreme reliance Shane places on the pacing guides, even placing them above following his instincts about what are effective pedagogical practices.

Shane emphasizes his desire for the department to continue to exercise their individuality to the state by jumping through the required “hoops,” which means continuing to organize the school’s ELA curriculum into grade level pacing guides that meet the “power standards” as dictated by the district. Rather than adopting prescribed unit plans, Shane really wants to see CCHS adhere steadfastly to maintaining the freedom to teach “how we like,” even in the face of continued restrictions from the state. Shane believes that the best way to reach students is to be personally invested in the lesson plans and to have the autonomy to alter those lesson plans when necessary. Altering lesson plans is especially important in the co-taught English 9 classes that he teaches with a special education teacher. He explains how he has had a hard time figuring out how to adapt his department’s pacing guide to meet the need of his special education students; this is particularly true with the specific texts that are listed on the pacing guide for students to read. He finds some of the novels too difficult for the majority of his co-taught students, and is not sure if he is supposed to teach other novels. Similarly, he believes in the value of allowing for choice in the texts read in each classroom, harkening back to his discussion of the importance of teacher passion in the classroom. He feels like too often the standards pigeonhole teachers into teaching a certain way. He explains:

Most people [who have written the standards/state mandates] who are not educators are probably not creative, they are more business-minded. They want us to move in a straight-arrow, information in information out, and move toward the

online courses. But that's not education; education is engaging students, getting the light bulb to go on for students. But you have to feel the subject in order to get students inspired.

He would like to see a balance between what he describes as a flexibility in the pacing guides that currently does not exist, and a structure that will help keep all teachers "on the same page" in terms common assessments and holding teachers accountable for teaching what they are asked to teach via the standards. He would like to see fewer common texts that all teachers at a specific grade level are supposed to teach, although he would like to see stricter adherence to common assessments for the texts that *are* commonly taught. He suggests that perhaps instead of requiring common texts for teachers to teach, that common assessments could instead "be theme-specific so that teaching styles or choices are not a factor."

For example, foreshadowing can be found in many different texts; teachers do not have to rely on one specific text in order to show students how foreshadowing works. Shane would also like to see more of an orchestrated effort to practice for standardized testing; practice timed writing in each classroom, teachers come together and grade the essays using an agreed upon rubric, and score the essays correspondingly. He admits that this vision for the future of CCHS's English department might provide less freedom for teachers in some ways, but the overall, everyday lesson planning he would like to see give teachers as much autonomy as possible while still maintaining some structure. Overall, he would like to see the department's expectations more organized so that it is outlined

exactly what is expected of teachers: how many common assessments they should employ, how many common texts (if any at all) they will have their students read, and, if so, what those common texts will be.

What Drives *Shane's* Curricular Decisions?

Shane's level of teacher negotiation is high; he has nearly completely given up the curricular decision making power within his classroom, and instead relies heavily on the pacing guides and common assessments created by his department colleagues to guide his curriculum. Shane sees this as adhering to the state's standards, and as "doing his job." He believes the freedom he has given up has been out of necessity. In actuality, the relationship between the pacing guides/common assessments and the standards is not clear-cut. "Power standards" are outlined in the pacing guides as being met, but the power standards do not include all of the standards. The teachers were directed to focus in on these power standards as a way of prioritizing the ninety-one expectations, but are these teachers still performing the task laid out by the authors of the standards? In other words, are they "still doing their job?" Who decides it is acceptable to focus only on expectations that are "important," and not on others? The teachers within this department did not decide to streamline the list of expectations, but they have obediently followed orders (from their ISD) to do so.

Being conscientious of what his colleagues expect, Shane places this above learning the standards and expectations for himself, as figure 13 (below) illustrates.

Analysis of Shane

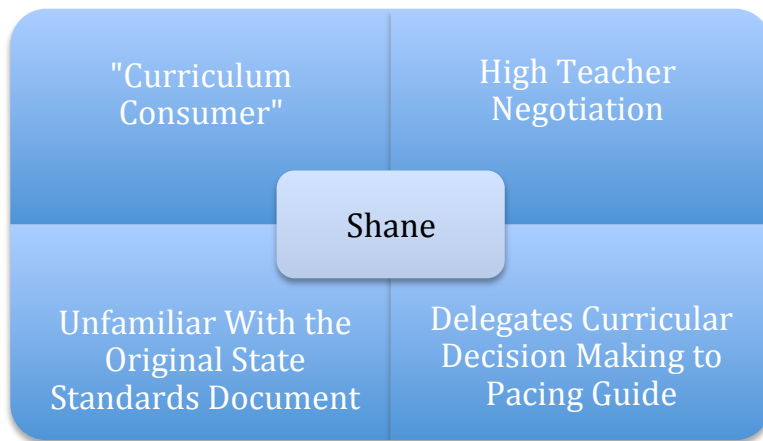


Figure 13. Analysis of Shane

Shane is concerned with the local governance of curriculum and is willing to negotiate his teacher knowledge and pedagogical practices to obey this governance; he does not exhibit the same interest in following the state governance, largely because he believes his colleagues have already done the work in unpacking what is expected of teachers in the district. He willingly alters his own teaching practices and principles without questioning the system much. When asked if he met a particular expectation in his classroom, he would answer, "If it's not on the pacing guide, then I don't do it," again highlighting the emphasis and importance he places on his colleague's lead. There were, however, a few examples of Shane altering an assignment from the pacing guide because he did not understand its significance or saw a better way to teach the specific skill (i.e. alliteration) at hand. He rarely took liberties with the assignments, though, and relied mainly on the pacing guide as a framework for his assignments. He repeatedly commented how "humbling" this process was, because, "When I was in the classroom before, you created your own 'stuff,' and you took pride in it [the lessons and unit

plans].” The pride he describes having felt in his previous classroom experience is the same pride that Ann and Sara experienced because they were part of the department when the pacing guides were created and built their own pacing guides for their courses. Shane (as well as Linda) has not had that same experience.

Shane does a lot of comparing of how he teaches *now* versus how he taught ten years ago; he recollects a time that was freer of mandates and prescribed curriculum. When pressed to answer if he feels the way he currently teaches versus how he taught ten years ago is more *beneficial* to his students, he replies that he feels there are benefits in both the current and the former ways of teaching. While he admits that the standards and pacing guides often give him grief, he does also see the potential benefit in his changed pedagogical decisions. He believes the content he teaches now is much broader, but he does not believe he going into as much detail in each lesson. The most discouraging aspect for Shane is the lack of passion he sometimes feels now versus before when he taught. He describes feeling more flexibility to be creative with his lesson plans before in the classroom. For example, he used to spend time on involving students in an elaborate anticipatory set activity for *A Day In the Life Of Ivan Denisovich* in which Shane would have students eat an example meal like Denisovich eats in the prison camp. Shane would also have students carry around a spoon that they could not lose or have stolen, again simulating the Denisovich’s situation. Activities like this seemed to draw students in, make the story come alive for students who might otherwise not relate to it. Shane sometimes now cuts activities like this out, though, because they do demand time, and there is rarely enough time to meet the expectations outlined in the pacing guide.

Ann: Curriculum Comparer

I've dubbed Ann the "curriculum comparer" because of the way she describes her initial (and ongoing) approach to "meeting" the standards; that is, she looks at what she currently does in the classroom and compares it to what the standards/expectations ask her to do. She, like Sara, had the benefit of creating the pacing guide for the class that she teaches (English 10). She realized, as she was comparing what she already did in her classes and what the standards required, that she was already meeting most of the expectations in which she needed to meet. She explains, "The standards were more of a confirmation that I was doing what I should be doing and not some nutty, off the wall stuff. There were not many moments when I saw that I needed to change in order to meet certain expectations." This is not to say that Ann does not rethink and revamp what she does in the classroom from year to year, but essentially her own curriculum already met the majority of what the standards call for. In some ways she feels like she is "cheating the system" by doing it this way, rather than creating all new lessons or adopting a prefabricated unit plan. Ann explains that she spent most of her time thinking about the standards and how to meet the required expectations when she created the pacing guide for her class, and therefore does not spend much time looking at the standards document now. Her personal process of implementing the standards reflects the work she put into creating the pacing guides; she rarely consults the actual standards documents because "I know that the assignments/assessments built into the pacing guide intrinsically meet the power standards for English 10." She makes daily assumptions that she is meeting the standards, although she does not think directly about *which* standards she is meeting.

Ann considers, though, if she was just “bending” what she was doing in her classes to meet what the standards were asking for, or “making a square peg fit the circle.” She admits that perhaps there were other teachers who were doing “junk” all the time, but she doubts it. She has thrown out a couple assignments that could be considered “fluff,” most notably a poetry unit that students always really enjoyed, in which students both read and wrote poetry. Overall, though, her lesson plans have not changed much in the face of standards implementation. She has noticed areas in the curriculum where she could focus more intently, especially when it comes to reading literature. The standards have made her realize that the specific novel or text students read is not as important as what skills they take away from the reading. Plot recollection is not as important, and is not emphasized in the expectations, as recognizing irony, foreshadowing, characterization, or other literary devices. Ann explains, “It’s not about being able to recite a plot or a cast of characters that makes a good reading of a novel.”

What then are the practices that Ann adhered to before, and now after, the implementation of the standards? She values a high level of student engagement and likes to read any kind of writing that “goes beyond the canned introduction, thesis, supporting paragraphs, conclusion.” She agrees that students do need to learn the five-paragraph organizational strategy, but says that it can also be limiting. She enjoys seeing the satisfaction and sense of accomplishment that students get by completing a research paper. While students generally choose their topics for the research papers, topics often connect to or are inspired by the themes of the literature they are reading in class. She explains, “those [research papers] are rewarding to read if students really worked hard,

and are sometimes painful to read if students don't." She also values allowing students the freedom of choice in writing topics, and especially appreciates the opportunities when her students write about "more contemporary topics that they are interested in." She works hard to incorporate all stages of the writing process into classroom time, beginning with brainstorming.

Similarly, Ann has found ways to help students learn the art of summarizing or paraphrasing as the first step toward writing an argumentative or persuasive piece. For example, she has students read "The Twitter Trap," an editorial about "what we're losing because of social networking sites." Ann describes what students do next: "They read the article, summarize the article, and comment meaningfully on the article. They do not necessarily take a side, but they look at the points the author made and use their personal experiences to comment on it in a meaningful way." She sees this as building toward the point where they eventually take a stance, as they are expected to do in persuasive or argumentative writing. This is how Ann incorporates all stages of the writing process, rather than just focusing on the end product.

Ann believes that prewriting and brainstorming in an ELA classroom are important for students, and that students produce better writing and engage in deeper discussions when they have a chance to let "their ideas marinate and see where their thoughts will take them before they commit to writing a paper." Ann uses brainstorming techniques such as journaling, outlining, and "think/pair/sharing" in order to help students "get their thoughts flowing." Ann believes in teaching students an organized way of compiling information for a research paper or other writing in order to help

students develop the tools they need to be successful writers. They may move away from outlining once they have more writing experience, but it is an important skill set to learn. She admits that she rarely ever outlines papers that she writes for her own professional and graduate work, but that she wants her students to have this skill in their arsenals until “they don’t need to [outline] anymore.”

Editing often takes the form of peer review in Ann’s classroom, and she makes sure students engage in some type of peer review for most all major writing projects. She makes a concerted effort to shift toward revision, rather than just circle what is wrong. She tries to put more of the impetus to change on the student by having them keep running lists of “the things they need to check before they turn in a paper.” Ann hopes that by requiring this checklist of important grammar/conventions items, that students catch many of the recurring problems (no thesis sentence, no transitions, or insufficient conclusions being three of these problems) and revise them before the paper is submitted. This, ideally, helps Ann spend time focusing on other issues within a paper rather than these recurring problems. She admits she does not read through rough drafts, make comments and pass the papers back to students, as is the routine of many teachers. Instead, Ann relies on peer review and this self-check system for the revision stage, and reads only the final draft. She does, however, try and read sections of students’ papers as they are writing them; for example, she might have students work specifically on introductions in class, and then roam around the classroom and have mini-conferences with students who most need the extra attention. She tries to conference with all students, but finds she does not always have time to make it around to all students, and the

atmosphere during conferencing can be chaotic. Students sometimes do not always stay on task while the teacher is busy with another student.

Ann values the potential of portfolios to help students analyze their own writing, and she utilizes this assessment technique in most of her classes. She has students write what they think their strengths and weaknesses are within a certain piece of writing, and this seems to help students become critical self-examiners. She believes the benefits of this self-examination are that students are often very truthful in this self-criticism, and the idea of metacognition – to help students think about what they are writing – is an important skill to have when learning how to improve one's writing. If a writer knows what was successful last time, then that writer is more likely to use that skill the next time. Ann describes how having students look critically at their own work helps them see that “English is not totally subjective,” especially when it comes to grading. There are certain characteristics of writing that can be more objectively graded/evaluated, and Ann tries to draw students' attention to those characteristics through self-evaluation via portfolios. The more power or control students feel they have over the grade given to their writing, the more likely, Ann believes, they will be to make the necessary improvements. The grade a student receives on his/her paper “becomes less of a guessing game” for students, and this often motivates them to try harder to improve.

Reading and grading student papers is a task that Ann rarely looks forward to. She describes looking for writing that will inspire or impress her, but that she rarely finds that in her students' writing. She states, “It's important for students to write with creativity, and not spit out a formulaic essay. I would like to read good writing.” She often has her

students look at examples of good writing, writing that is “at their level, is fluent, and has good qualities.” She has read this example writing aloud to her students and helped them discuss what the writer is doing that works. Modeling good writing for students is a tactic that Ann relies on in order to help students develop an ear for good writing or “what works.” She also applies this principle to reading students’ own work aloud: “Making students read their own writing aloud, they start to notice where their writing is choppy, repetitive words, etc.” She organizes this as part of the peer review process by having one student read another student’s work to him/her. The student is not allowed to make any corrections as he/she reads the paper, which helps the writer see any possible errors or areas of miscommunication within his/her writing.

What Drives *Ann*’s Curricular Decisions?

Ann’s level of negotiation in the face of the state standards is relatively low. She is committed to meeting the standards required of her, but has found ways to meet those standards that do not require much (if any) curricular change on her part. She describes the assignments and lessons she created and employed before the implementation of the standards, and she made few changes to that curriculum because of the standards. Figure 14 (below) illustrates Ann’s relationship with the standards, the pacing guide for her course, and the resulting low negotiation.

Analysis of Ann

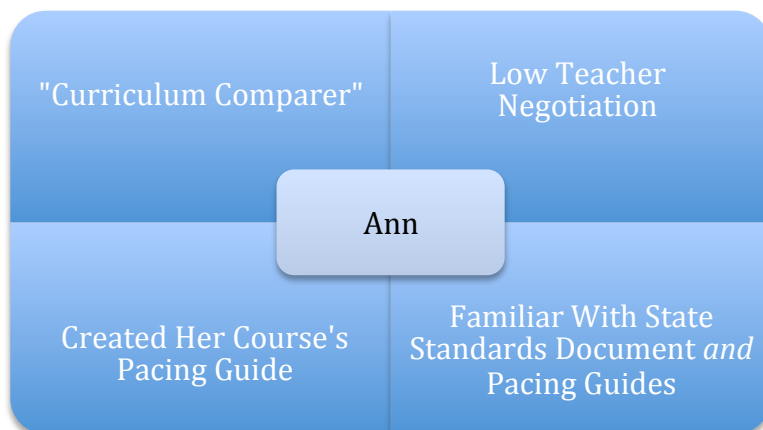


Figure 14. Analysis of Ann

The changes she has made have been in reply to her students' needs – an assignment that did not engage students or did not have the outcome she envisioned. She admits that as she looked over the expectations, she found she already “met” many of them with the lesson plans she already used. She was then able to “plug in” her assignments and unit plans to the pacing guide, and it was not necessary to change her curriculum. If anything, Ann explains how she scrapped a few assignments that could be considered “fluff” (a poetry and fiction writing unit). Again, because the pacing guide focused on only a few “power standards,” and because the teachers themselves *chose* the “power standards,” Ann did not have to stretch her teacher knowledge or pedagogical philosophy much at all to satisfy the district's requirements for “meeting” the standards. Similarly, Ann plugged in her own assignments as the common assessments for her courses. She admits that this sometimes feels like she is “cheating,” but is confident that her curriculum was engaging and effective before the standards and remains effective now.

Confidence in her pedagogical decisions is a major difference between Ann and Shane. Ann rarely questions what she should be doing in the English classroom (as opposed to Shane and Linda who regularly question their pedagogical decisions), and only shows minor vulnerability when it comes to revision and editing practices. She otherwise describes her activities as effective and important in helping students learn to read and write in preparation for college. Ann has a strong sense of what should happen in the English classroom, and is fairly solidified in her ways. She is inspired to alter her lessons by current events that she might include in her writing prompts/discussions, but is otherwise uninspired to change her pedagogy to meet standards or other mandates. She has, hitherto, managed to fit the standards to what she is already doing.

The values that Ann holds high in the classroom include hard work from her students, both creative and formal genres of writing that are college preparatory in nature, and a strong emphasis on classic novels. One difference Ann notices in her teaching because of the standards is that she places less emphasis, though, on what novel students read. Because the majority of standards and expectations do not focus on recall or plot summary, she has come to realize that the specific novel or story read does not make much difference. This realization, however, dismays Ann because she knows eventually this can lead to little appreciation for the “classics.” She says, “If students don’t read them [the classics] in English class, when will they read them?” She recognizes the move away from text-specific writing assignments/tests/projects, but she does not describe any notable changes she has made to the texts she includes in her course’s curriculum.

Linda: Curriculum Questioner

I've termed Linda the "curriculum questioner" because of her consistent insecurity with what she teaches, what she feels she *should* teach, and how to best engage students in the English classroom. This is not the way she feels when she teaches Spanish, mostly because she feels there is less guesswork about the curriculum. Linda relies little on her grade level pacing guide when she creates lesson plans. Her personal process for implementing the standards consists of consulting the standards after she has conducted her lessons; this usually happens midway through or toward the end of a unit plan or lesson. She explains, "I usually check [the standards] after a lesson and say, 'I did this, I still need to do this,'" which happens two or three times each semester. She does, though, find the standards too vague to provide enough guidance in her daily curricular decisions, and she struggles to see the connection between the pacing guides and the standards. In Linda's opinion, the standards would be much easier to follow if they were worded more tangibly, so that a concrete goal was defined with each expectation. Currently, Linda believes the meaning is often lost in the verbosity of the individual expectation, and this overwhelms her to the point of frustration. She sees the value in having standards in place, although she believes her colleagues in the department think the standards are more important than she does. She hears the importance placed on the standards during department meetings, although her frustration with the standards often overrides any importance she might acknowledge.

Similarly, the common assessments that her colleagues created for her grade level (English 9) "scare" her because they force her to teach certain texts (such as *The*

Odyssey) that she is not comfortable teaching and not enthusiastic or motivated to teach. She explains that although this is sometimes viewed as her trying to subvert the department's curriculum, she is only trying to teach to her own personal strengths by utilizing classroom texts that she is enthused to teach. She states, "This does not mean that he [Linda's colleague] is a better teacher than me, or vice versa; we simply have different tastes and interests in reading preferences." She sees the limitations that the pacing guides place on teachers within the department, and she believes this is the wrong direction for their department to go. Teachers' rights should not be diminished because of department protocols, although this is what has happened. She explains, "Teachers have the training, the background knowledge, they are professionals and should make those decisions [such as choosing classroom texts] for their own classrooms." Unfortunately, the department's pacing guides delineate what texts teachers should use with their students. The standards should provide a backbone for teachers, but teachers should be able to fill in the blanks of how to teach their own students. Linda feels like she is at the mercy of others when it comes to what she is supposed to teach; the pacing guide and common assessments all limit what texts she can teach, and how she can teach those texts. Because her department time has always been divided between the Spanish and English departments, her collaboration with her colleagues in creating the pacing guides was limited. She has major reservations about following the lessons plans and unit ideas that other teachers have created, mostly because she feels like her own passion, creativity, and enthusiasm are squelched when she teaches this way. She admits that she rarely follows the pacing guide because she would rather teach lessons and texts she is

passionate about. She does, however, still feel like she is meeting the standards she is supposed to meet (she consults the document two or three times each semester), but in different ways than her colleagues.

When asked what her favorite writing assignments to assign are, Linda makes the distinction between what is probably her favorite to grade or read for her versus what she feels good about challenging her students with. There are two different ways she can feel good about assigning a writing task, she explains. She likes engaging students in persuasive/argumentative essays about topics that mean a lot to students, especially when the topics are important to the school's wellbeing (such as paying to play sports, paying to park, or adding minutes on to the school day). Linda likes assigning those writing projects because she feels her students are being challenged to use the persuasive writing skills they have learned in class. "But, to read fifty papers about paying to play sports or park is not so fun!" she disclaims. The type of writing she loves to read is personal writing because it is not so repetitive and "they tell you things on paper that they'd never tell you in person," Linda explains.

She believes she does a better job with the earlier stages of helping students in the writing process. Her students engage often in prewriting or brainstorming activities, probably because she thinks "it's really important [for students] to get thoughts down on paper in order to organize their thoughts." She introduces her classes to the four-square brainstorming graphic organizer, which she says some students continue to use on their own. The four-square outlining method is organized into five boxes (one in the middle, and four surrounding the central box). The main idea is written in the central box, the

supporting ideas are written in three of the four outside boxes, and the conclusion is summarized in the final outside box. Linda admits that she meticulously outlined all of her papers in college, including in her graduate classes. Additionally, having students complete outlining or brainstorming activities seems to lessen the intimidation factor with increased emphasis on building ideas rather than having to flawlessly write about them immediately. Linda believes the more ways she can offer students in terms of organizing their ideas/information for papers, then the more likely those writers will be successful.

Linda also values revision and editing activities that help students see their mistakes and correct them; however, she admits having difficulty knowing how to deeply engage students in the revision/editing. Her classes have also not had much luck with peer review activities, as she cannot seem to motivate her students to move beyond canned phrases: “Peer editing is somewhat of a joke, because kids just say ‘Oh, it looks good.’” She feels like students do not have enough personal investment in peer reviewing for it to be worthwhile. If a student is popular, Linda explains, other students sometimes have a hard time telling him/her what is “wrong” with his/her paper. As a teacher, Linda says she has no problem pointing out problem areas in a student’s writing, but there are not the same social implications at stake for a teacher. Linda does, when students are working on larger writing projects, sometimes make comments on rough drafts and return the drafts to students for revisions, although she does this only one or two times per semester. Finding the time to make comments on rough drafts and return the drafts for revisions more often is difficult. She agrees with the expectation that points to the goal of students writing a “well-crafted, fluent, composed essay,” although she again laments the

time restraints that she feels in all of her classes. “It is hard to keep up with grading and reading it all,” she explains.

Rather than focus solely on writing longer essays, she tries to engage students more often in smaller, in-class writing. Barry Lane’s *Why We Must Run With Scissors* sits on Linda’s desk and is dog-eared in many places. She points to this book as a major source of inspiration when she feels otherwise uninspired. She describes the success she has had with some of the writing activities from this book; her students have responded positively to many of the ideas Lane puts forth. Other than an ongoing lack of time, there are two problems Linda describes having when teaching students writing: how to “teach” creativity, and incorporating writing and reading in the same hour. Linda finds a fifty-five minute class period is not enough time to transition between reading and writing. She admits she needs to work on smoothly transitioning between the two. Secondly, Linda describes not knowing how to teach creativity, other than saying to students “Think about your personality and use your voice!” She knows when she sees creativity in her students’ writing, but she is not sure how (or if it is possible) to “teach” originality, inventiveness or imagination.

What Drives *Linda*’s Curricular Decisions?

Linda’s level of teacher negotiation when implementing the standards is complicated. At first glance, she seems to not have negotiated her own teaching philosophy because she subverts many of the department’s self-created, self-mandated devices, such as the pacing guides and common assessments. Upon further investigation,

however, it becomes obvious that Linda both desires to become a more confident, self-directed teacher and one who meets what is required of her. She does not ignore the state standards; she does, however, tend to ignore her department's way of implementing the standards, haphazard as it may be. Her confusion of how the standards are being met through the pacing guides and common assessments is not entirely unfounded. There does seem to exist a large gap between meeting the specific expectations and adhering to the pacing guides/common assessments. The pacing guides only meet a select few of the overall expectations; these "power standards" that were identified and distributed by her colleagues are the standards that are focused on within the pacing guides. It is feasible to question whether the pacing guides are an adequate way to "meet" the state standards, although it must also be remembered that Linda's colleagues are not the ones who initiated implementing pacing guides or common assessments; Shane, Ann, and Sara are simply following the directives of their school district. Linda seems unwilling to give up her curricular autonomy to her colleagues; however, she *is* willing to make curricular concessions in order to meet the state standards. She describes how she regularly (two-three times per semester) compares her lesson plans to the state standards, and keeps track of what she still needs to cover. One potential problem with this system, though, is that all ninety-one expectations never need to be covered at any one grade level. Instead, her colleagues have tediously divided the expectations between all four years (although only the power standards are outlined in the pacing guides). Linda's subversion of the department's pacing guide is also a subversion of knowing the "power standards" for which her grade level is responsible.

Although Linda is completely willing to negotiate her teacher autonomy and knowledge if she can see the end to the means, she currently is reluctant to relinquish her teacher “rights” because she does not believe in the purpose behind this surrender. She is not willing to negotiate her autonomy or knowledge if she believes the directives are an attempt by her colleagues to streamline the department’s curriculum. She is also not willing to give up her curricular autonomy if she feels her passion or inspiration is limited by the imposed curriculum (which is the case with many of the mandated classroom texts in her department).

Analysis of Linda

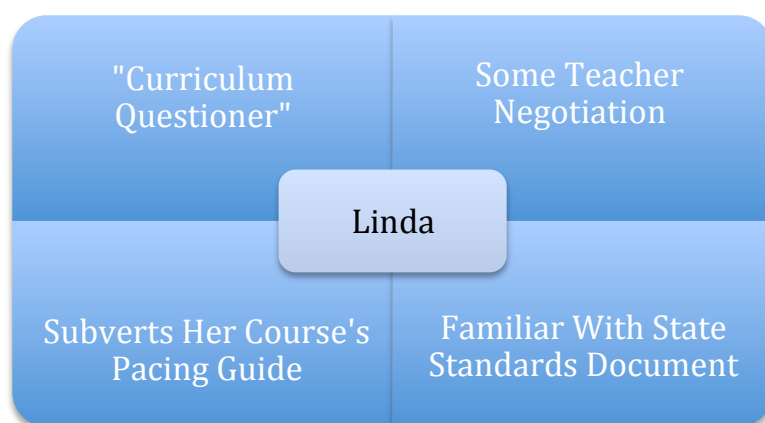


Figure 15. Analysis of Linda

Figure 15 (above) illustrates how Linda subverts the department’s pacing guides, yet reflects on the standards as she creates her units and lessons. Linda regularly exhibits a desire to improve her teaching, and laments her lack of confidence in the English classroom. She does not desire a limiting, divisive set of directives, but rather a helpful guideline in which she has some input. Linda wants to learn teaching strategies that are

useful and engaging for students, but she does not want to be forced to teach texts she is not knowledgeable or enthused about. She describes the feeling she has gotten during PD days or department meetings; she feels like the curricular decisions have been made without her giving any input. She blames this, to some extent, on her divided schedule, and therefore her divided time between the Spanish and English departments. She wishes she could have a more collaborative relationship with her department, one in which she could “feel comfortable asking questions.” Instead, she fights the systems of standardization in her own, quiet way: by not following the pacing guide, by consulting the standards on her own terms, and by focusing on what she knows is emphasized on the ACT (argumentative/persuasive writing).

It is also important to note that Linda does not subvert the department’s system of standards implementation out of a strong sense of teaching philosophy or teacher knowledge. In fact, quite the opposite is true of Linda; she is riddled with insecurity about her teaching skills in the English classroom, although she attributes much of that insecurity to the ongoing mandates that confuse what she believes is an otherwise straightforward task: to engage students in reading and writing. Instead her reluctance to negotiate her personal teaching style, methods, beliefs, and lessons is a direct result of the distance she feels the mandates take her from engaging students in reading and writing. She says she is willing to change the content of what she teaches, and even how she teaches, if she can still help students become excited about reading and writing like she feels she can, at times, successfully accomplish now.

Concluding Thoughts

This study has shown that there is a great variance in the ways teachers respond to and implement the standards in their own classrooms. The process of implementation for the four teachers in this study consists of two main groups: the group who created the pacing guides (Ann and Sara) and the group who is supposed to follow the pacing guides other teachers made (Shane and Linda). A striking characteristic separating these two groups is the confidence each has in the pedagogical decisions they make. The curriculum producers (Ann and Sara) both exude great confidence in their pedagogy, citing the standards as a way to reflect professionally and broaden what they already do well. The curriculum consumers (Shane and Linda) both have insecurities when it comes to implementing curriculum. Both question what they should be doing, and often rely on outside curricular materials to supplement their lessons. Shane, however, relies primarily on the pacing guides (following the “rules” of his department), while Linda relies primarily on published curriculum material (such as Barry Lane’s *Why We Must Run With Scissors*) therefore breaking her department’s rules. It is unclear whether the insecurity that both Shane and Linda describe is a direct result of not creating the pacing guides; nevertheless, having less control and power over their curricular choices affects them. Likewise, Sara and Ann have had nearly complete curricular autonomy, and this reinforces the curricular confidence that they exude.

Another interesting detail revealed in this study is how each teacher relates to the actual, or original, standards documents. The fundamental question this study asked was how teachers were affected by the standards implementation process. Somewhere in this

process, teachers have been distanced from the original standards document. Only two of these four teachers report consulting the actual standards document on any sort of regular basis: Sara and Linda. Sara “bookends” her semesters by consulting the standards to see what she has covered and what still needs to be covered. Linda similarly consults the standards after completing a teaching unit to see what she has covered. The department as a whole has been encouraged by the local ISD to create these pacing guides that meet the “power standards,” and therefore prioritize some standards over others. According to the ISD’s plan, it is probable that some standards will be overlooked. The focus is completely off the original standards document and instead on a standards “byproduct.”

The implications of this study extend from teachers, principals, and other administrators to English education academics, curriculum coordinators, and legislators. More should be understood about how a teacher’s pedagogy is affected by standards implementation, as this ultimately affects our students’ education. In chapter five, I will further discuss the implications of the standards implementation process, as it is applicable to other sets of standards. This is an especially pertinent time to pay attention to standards interpretation and implementation as the CCSS (or another set of state mandates) loom and the standards movement in education continues to gain momentum.

CHAPTER V

IMPLICATIONS: MAKING NEGOTIATION VISIBLE

This Study in Review

I set out to investigate the way(s) that state standards were affecting, influencing and motivating classroom ELA teachers to teach. This is a complex situation as it involves many facets of a teacher's decision-making process, including existing teacher knowledge, personal experiences with learning and writing, and attitudes about state standards. My original motivation for this study was based on my own experiences as a teacher; I noticed a change in the dialogue about curriculum that ultimately changed what our department spent time talking about in meetings and during PD days where the tedious interpretation and implementation tasks at took us further from the goal of serving students, and took years to complete. We were coerced to think about curriculum as a vehicle for "meeting" state standards and there was often little talk about curriculum being student-centered. What was best for our students often took a back seat to discussions about how to fit as many expectations into a unit as possible.

As this study concludes, I would like to wrap up by summarizing some key findings and making some recommendations for future state standards implementation endeavors. These recommendations are especially important for the stakeholders in this situation: the curriculum coordinators, ISDs, and administrators who control the way teachers experience the standards during professional development.

What This Study Shows

Because of the limited size of this intrinsic case study, no generalizations about teachers, standards, or education can be made here. This is an inherent limitation of this study, and a place where further studies can provide more information. However, the findings from this study are important in igniting the discussion about the role of teachers in standards implementation, and are especially important as the standards movement continues to gain momentum.

First, this study shows the importance these teachers place on constructing their own ways of implementing the state standards. From the beginning, Sara and Ann rejected the notion of adopting a foreign curriculum. I was involved in this English department when these initial decisions were made (such as the decision not to adopt the ISD's suggested unit plans as mandatory curriculum at our school). I remember many lengthy conversations in which we, the teachers in the department, discussed the pros and cons of adopting the sample units. Ultimately, we decided not to succumb to the prefabricated, ready-made units that were available to our department. We knew that by rejecting those units, though, we were volunteering ourselves to work much harder and spend much more time learning the standards/expectations and with curriculum building. We believed, however, that the payoff of maintaining curricular decision-making power was well worth any such sacrifice. We then spent the next two years working on interpreting and implementing the standards, taking part in the interpretive and curricular building activities as described in chapter one. When I left the department to return to graduate school, we were working on creating pacing guides for each grade level. At that

time, however, the pacing guides were meant to help us keep track individually of what expectations we were covering with our specific lessons. There was also greater emphasis on teacher freedom in choosing which texts to teach.

Soon after I began interviewing Sara, Ann, Shane and Linda for this study, I realized that the purpose of the pacing guides had changed in the two years since I taught there. No longer were they simply a document aimed at keeping us individually organized, rather they had become a bible of what was to be taught at each grade level. Specific assignments were described and specific texts were named on the pacing guide, and both were expected, for the most part, to be followed by fellow teachers. The years spent preserving our curricular freedom had been reduced to a prescriptive document, albeit a document that was crafted by teachers in the department. The only difference, it seems, between the rejected “sample units” and the pacing guides was that the pacing guides were a product of *some* of the teachers in the department. Both the sample units and the pacing guides, however, are restrictive in nature if teachers *who did not craft the document are expected to follow it*. Of course the pacing guide is not restrictive if it reflects the curriculum you’ve created, as is the case with Ann and Sara. And it follows that it would feel restrictive and prescriptive (“like I’m a substitute teacher in my own class,” as Shane described) if you are one of the teachers following someone else’s ideas, as Shane and Linda are doing.

Shane’s statement that he “feels like I’m a substitute teacher in my own class” points to the increased dissatisfaction in the department and frustration exhibited by three of these four teachers. *Increased* means that the teachers report having an increase in

these reactions at some point during this study. Ann describes the most *frustration* out of the group (mostly directed at her colleagues), followed by Linda (directed at the curriculum restraints and her colleagues), followed by Shane (directed mostly at the curriculum restraints), and then Sara. Likewise, Ann describes the most dissatisfaction in the department, especially in terms of lack of curricular accountability and her colleagues' perceived dismissal of the pacing guides. She explains, "I don't feel like there's any accountability: there *isn't* any! We're not turning in lesson plans to anybody. I know there are teachers who don't follow the pacing guides; they don't even look at them." Linda also exhibits a great deal of dissatisfaction in the department, mainly because she feels she is forced to teach texts she does not want to teach. This is an ongoing debate within this department: whether to teach common texts or individually chosen texts. Linda feels strongly that she should have the choice of which books to read, whereas Ann believes there should be common texts read. Shane also describes an increased level of frustration; however, Shane's frustration is less with his colleagues than with the changes that have occurred since he was last in the classroom. His concern with meeting his colleagues' expectations about what to teach also leads to some frustration directed at Linda because of Linda's dismissal of the department's pacing guides and curricular guidelines. The levels of frustration and dissatisfaction described to me during the interviews with these teachers, coupled with their levels of teacher negotiation, are illustrated below in Figure 16.

Dissatisfaction in the Department, Frustration, and Negotiation Exhibited by Sara, Ann, Shane and Linda

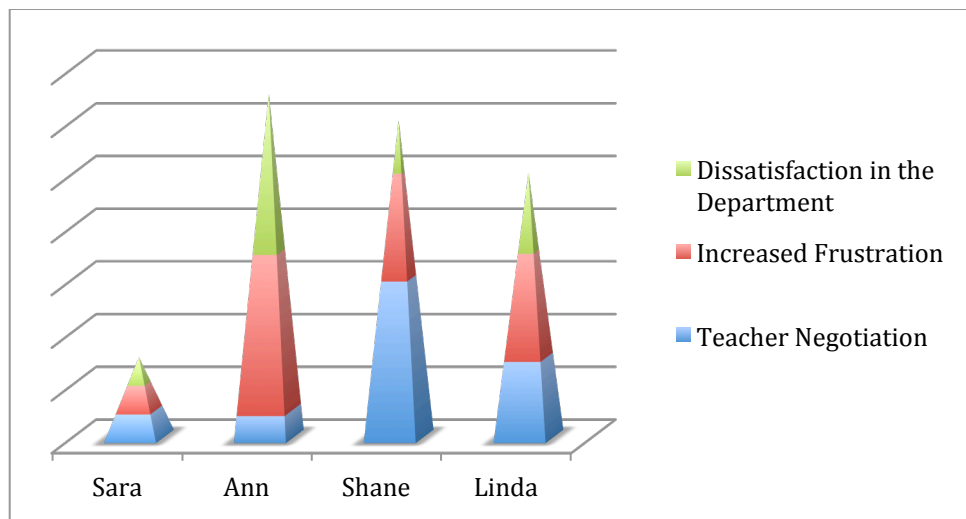


Figure 16. Characteristics Exhibited by Sara, Ann, Shane and Linda

I had the unique position in this study to recognize the inconsistencies with how the pacing guides were created and how they are currently being used. Having last been involved with this department when the pacing guides had first been established as a means of organizing the department's curriculum while maintaining teachers' autonomy, the pacing guides' general use now (as a means of standardizing the curriculum and the teachers) conflicts with that original intent. It was surprising how contrasting the situations of Sara/Ann and Linda/Shane were, and none of the teachers seemed to notice the disparity. Sara and Ann were enjoying, for the most part, the curricular freedom the department had worked so hard to preserve, while Shane and Linda were struggling to meet prescribed curriculum. Sara and Ann, however, are not to be blamed for narrowing the scope of curricular decision-making; they are simply carrying out the directions given

to them by the district's curriculum leaders (ISD and PD presenters). It is an unfortunate consequence of the district's implementation process that, regardless of a district's decision to preserve curricular autonomy by rejecting "sample units," standards implementation still leads to curricular standardization.

Another difference in the current department from when I was teaching at CCHS, is the call for "common assessments," an attempt to have teachers give all students a common writing assignment so that results can be compared "universally" within the department. These common assessments are built into the pacing guides, and are the main reason the teachers (especially Sara, Shane, and Ann) take the pacing guides so seriously. Common assessments, another state mandate (although described in a separate document than the standards), prompt students to write about a general theme, idea, or subject. They do not have to revolve around a specific text – this choice is left open for teachers to decide how to craft the prompts. Sara, Ann and the other teachers who wrote the common assessments wrote the majority of them as text-specific writing prompts. Again, this ties the hands of teachers who are following the pacing guide because then the reading list is decided upon for each class. Choosing a novel, short story, or poem based on its pertinence to students' interests, or based on a teacher's area of expertise are no longer considerations, as Shane and Linda were quick to point out. Both of them wanted to see more freedom of text choice in the curriculum; however, Shane saw benefits in having some common assessments reflect common texts so that the writing prompts could potentially have more depth in their reflection. If common assessments (and all standards-based curriculum) are meant to prepare students to succeed on standardized

tests, then there should be an emphasis on writing prompts that are *not* text-specific. The writing prompts students will see on standardized tests (currently, the ACT) do not require students to have previously read a common text; instead, students are often asked to write about a common theme, idea, problem, or opinion: topics which can be related to *many* texts.

The Audience: Who Should Care?

Administrators, ISDs, curriculum coordinators and educational policy-makers are some of the potential audiences for this study because of the power these groups hold in what teachers are asked to do. If the current state standards interpretation and implementation processes showed to have a strong, positive influence on teacher curricular decision-making, then perhaps we could agree that current implementation strategies were adequate. However, this study showed teachers having increased frustration with their careers (Sara, Shane, Ann, and Linda), increased professional self-doubt (Shane and Linda), increased confusion about “how to teach” (Shane and Linda), and increased frustration with time constraints (Sara, Shane, Ann and Linda). If this is the outcome of implementing a system of curricular checks and balances aimed at reducing the guesswork involved in building curriculum, then reevaluation is imminent. As administrators, ISDs, curriculum coordinators, and policy-makers begin to plan and carry out the implementation of the CCSS, now is the perfect time to reassess what teachers are asked to do in a short amount of time. These four teachers have a hard time throwing out the hours of work they have done in order to “meet” the current state standards; however,

they are soon going to be asked, not only to throw that work out, but to begin afresh with a new set of state standards. If the past decade is any indication, teachers can plan to have two-three more sets of “new” standards introduced in the next ten years. The goals of “progress” and “change,” which are the tenets of the standards movement, instead lead to constant curricular transition and teacher work overload.

ISDs and curriculum coordinators should pay special attention to chapter one when I describe how important *misinformation* was passed along to teachers in the implementation of the 2006 standards. These district and ISD leaders are some of the first people who decide what to do with the standards documents, and their decisions will ultimately affect the experiences teachers have with implementing the standards in their classrooms, as shown in this study. They will be the individuals who introduce teachers to the next set of standards (perhaps the CCSS) and the set after that. They have much control in this situation; it would likely be more productive if teachers were given the freedom and time to reflect on the standards without being told *what* to do with them or *how* to implement them, especially when that information is contingent on individual interpretations of the standards text. If teachers were *coached* rather than *directed* then perhaps they would feel more empowered when it came time to build curriculum, and perhaps major mistakes in interpretation would be less likely. We need representatives from both sides (teachers and curriculum administrators) to read, interpret and make decisions about not only the actual standards, but about the directions for how to best implement these standards – i.e. the introduction section of the standards document.

Teachers should be encouraged to read and interpret the mandate language for themselves, and not fall victim to the misinterpretations of other readers.

Instead, the teachers at CCHS now follow pacing guides that are so far removed from the actual standards document, it is unclear whether all standards (standards other than the “power standards”) are being met in this department, even though countless hours have been spent creating a restrictive implementation system. So many steps, activities, and processes were required of these teachers that, over the course of three-four years, the list of ninety-one expectations has been slashed, diced, divided, simplified, and reduced to an unrecognizable form of itself: pacing guides. The connection between meeting the ninety-one expectations over the four years of high school and the pacing guides is not as clear as it perhaps should be, especially when these facts are considered:

- The ninety-one expectations have been reduced to a limited number of “power standards,” and so some expectations are, by design, never met.
- At least one of the practicing teachers (Shane) admits having never studied the standards/expectations because he is too busy translating the pacing guides.
- There is no master list outlining which expectations are met over the four years of English at CCHS, thereby leaving each course to decide for itself which expectations to cover.

This original goal of the standards/expectations – to have all ninety-one expectations met over the course of a student’s four-year high school career – has been lost in the translation and implementation of the standards.

Teacher Negotiation and Teacher Standardization

What this study also shows is that there is always a *negotiation* on the part of teachers. Teachers are constantly balancing what they believe will be best for their students (based on their teacher knowledge) in the context of their schools; Grossman establishes this in her work (1990). While we already knew that teachers have always been in a negotiation with their specific situations, and while we knew that teacher knowledge, context of school, unique students, and district requirements were variables in this equation, we have not before taken into account the affect of standards on teachers' curricular negotiations and decision making. This study builds on that previous knowledge to show that teachers are also negotiating their curricular decisions based on the way standards are implemented in their departments. While the original goal of standards might not have been the "standardization" of teachers, the implementation of the standards in this school district has pushed teachers in that direction. The pacing guides that these teachers are expected to follow (that they created themselves) persuade teachers to use the same lesson plans to meet specific expectations in each specific grade level. The local ISD guided them to create these documents to ensure that all the expectations were being met over the four years of high school ELA curriculum. A strange phenomenon happened then: teachers began narrowing the scope of curricular freedom for their colleagues in the department. The "veteran" teachers in this department (i.e. the teachers who were present when the pacing guides were first created) had become the curriculum police, advocating for the use of the pacing guides but to what end? When Shane admitted that he could not remember even seeing the original

standards document, that he had only ever followed the pacing guide that his department had given him, this moment should have been a red flag to the entire department.

Teachers should not be relying on the interpretation (and implementation) of another teacher; this was the autonomy I had seen this department fight so strongly for just three years prior, but now little remains of that freedom.

Regardless of the steps taken toward teacher standardization, another important factor this study showed was the individuality that will *always* be present in classroom instruction. The teachers in this study have moved away from being passively acted upon – they have instead moved toward taking the initiative with their curricular decisions. This was especially evident with Linda who most overtly disregarded the pacing guides and instead studied the expectations on her own, and “met” those expectations in the ways she wanted to with her classes. Hers was the most extreme example of subversion in this study, but she was not subverting the standards; rather, Linda was subverting the curricular limitations her colleagues had inadvertently placed on her through the pacing guides. Her level of negotiation was high, but it was increased more so because of her awareness of the actual standards than of her awareness of meeting the expectations of her colleagues in the department.

Shane, though, had a high level of negotiation due to his desire to meet his colleagues’ expectations and the pacing guides they created. Although he and Linda were both using documents that other English teachers had created, they reacted in very different ways. Linda’s desire to protect her autonomy, and to not teach a book she “wasn’t excited about,” was to protect her students’ experience in her classroom. During

my interviews with Linda, she would often refer to how her students would be affected if her own lack of enthusiasm shone through. As a teacher who relies heavily on her energy and enthusiasm, she felt that she could not risk losing her students because of her own misgivings about the curriculum. Her overall concern with following the pacing guides was having to teach a text that she either was not familiar with or did not enjoy. Her enthusiasm for books that she does enjoy is often, as her students often attest to, infectious. She is aware of this pedagogical strength and she was not willing to compromise it. If the standards are meant to provide a framework for teachers to follow, and if the expectations are meant to leave room for teachers to showcase their expertise, then perhaps Linda's approach is most appropriate.

Similarly, highlighting their own pedagogical strengths and expertise in content knowledge are approaches both Ann and Sara have taken in implementing the standards and expectations. This is an outlined belief, as written in the standards document introduction, that is meant to ground the implementation of the standards: "Classroom teachers have extensive content knowledge, an ability to make on-going, data-driven curriculum decisions, and the ability to adapt curriculum to student needs. Teacher passion and creativity is essential to learning." While both Ann and Sara exhibited low negotiation in their implementation of the standards, this was primarily a result of them having the opportunity to create their own pacing guides for their courses. As Ann stated, she felt sometimes like she was "cheating" because implementing the standards had caused her so little change. The standards had, instead, provided her with the opportunity to reflect on what she already taught and what were already effective practices in her

classroom. The changes she made to her curriculum, she believed, strengthened what she was already doing. This should be the goal for all teachers, and should therefore be the goal of all stakeholders in standards implementation: to allow teachers the ability to use the standards as a means of strengthening their curriculum. The freedom they were granted upon the initial implementation of these standards is indicative of the type of curricular freedom cited as the goal in the introduction of the standards document. What happened, though, to this freedom as the pacing guides were created and common assessments were introduced? It is important to remember that pacing guides are *secondary* documents to the standards, derivatives of the main component. Nowhere in the standards document are teachers asked to create pacing guides. Likewise, common assessments have been implemented in a restrictive way that distracts teachers from helping students prepare for standardized tests, mostly because common assessments are equated with set reading lists for their courses. And, as previously stated, standardized tests are not reliant on specific texts, so it can be argued that the goal of common assessments has been lost in translation, too. Both mandates have been implemented with the district and local ISD's guidance, and both mandates have lost their potential as a tool of curricular enrichment. Teachers have instead become disempowered. What was most shocking to me as I interviewed Sara, Ann, Linda and Shane was that their curricular focus was often concentrated on one or more of the following:

1. Following the pacing guides for each course
2. Making sure their colleagues were following the pacing guides for their courses

3. Implementing the “common assessments” for each course (as outlined in the pacing guides)
4. Making sure their colleagues were implementing the “common assessments” for each course (as outlined in the pacing guides)

Ironically, concerns about meeting the expectations or consulting the standards document were rarely mentioned. The original goals of the standards and expectations – both in their scope of curricular freedom and in their curricular ambition – were lost in the translation from document to teacher. The results have not been increased rigor in this English department. Instead these teachers all reported increased confusion about what they *should* be teaching, and about what to prioritize (common, text-specific assessments; or meaningful, specialized assessments). They are unaware of their rights as English educators, but not because they are not dedicated to their profession. Rather, they are trusting professionals who are following their leadership, and that leadership is guiding them away from the original goals of the standards and toward a standardized curriculum. One of the loudest complaints about the standards movement is that it leads toward standardization; it seems even when the best of intentions are articulated (“Classroom teachers have [...] the ability to adapt curriculum to student needs”), standardization is inescapable.

Currently, there is a “new” set of standards taking the place of the content expectations I’ve reported on in this study. This should come as no surprise since a continual flow of “new standards” has historically been the norm of the standards movement in education. The CCSS are being implemented in schools all across the

nation; Central City High School is no exception. The teachers there, although I'm no longer interviewing them, have reported to me that they are undergoing PD meetings in which the CCSSs are being "rolled out and unpacked." Already we see some of the same moves happening toward teachers being put in the role of *passive* recipient of the standards. An important point this study highlights is the increased need to place teachers in the role of active participant as these standards, and any other upcoming educational mandate, are implemented. What does that look like? It would require school districts and ISDs to give teachers the time, trust, and support they need to interpret the standards for themselves (this means both the individual standards, and any introductory documents that accompany the discipline-specific standards). Such were the suggestions in the introduction to the 2006 state standards, written as questions for "stakeholders" to consider as they "work with these standards:"

- "How are these content standards and expectations reflected in our curriculum and instruction already?
- Where do we need to strengthen our curriculum and instruction to more fully realize the intent of these standards and expectations?
- What opportunities do these standards and expectation present to develop new and strengthen existing curriculum, leading to instructional excellence and college/workplace readiness?" (Michigan Department of Education, 2006, p. 3).

Ironically, the standards document calls for the exact curricular support that this study shows teachers are lacking in the implementation stage. Ideally, administrators,

curriculum coordinators, and ISDs would provide teachers with support and guidance during the interpretation and implementation phases, but this study shows that the guidance provided has been *misguidance* in at least two occasions:

1. In the early stages, as the department was directed to create unit plans that incorporated all 91 expectations, and
2. Currently, as the department focuses almost solely on pacing guides (that are far removed from the actual expectations) and common assessments.

Further research needs to be done to figure out *why* this misguidance occurs, but until that research takes place, those placed in roles of curricular leadership and administrative power can help teachers implement standards more smoothly, effectively, and correctly by providing a framework for teachers to learn the standards for themselves, rather than rely on the interpretations of other teachers, their administrators, or curriculum coordinators. This process will take time, *much* time, and that time should be allotted for teachers aside from their everyday responsibilities. If the state is going to set forth new priorities for teachers to master and implement, then teachers must be given adequate time to master those mandates. Adequate resources must be given to teachers in order to figure out how to best implement the standards into their own classrooms for their own students. The number one lacking resource Anne, Sara, Linda and Shane complained about was *time*. Teachers are already pressed to find the time to balance lesson planning, professional development, conferencing with students, reading papers and attending to other district requirements (such as staff meetings). To think that teachers can carve more time out of their already packed schedules to read, interpret, and find ways to effectively

build curriculum that meets state mandates (in the form of both standards and common assessments) points to yet another disconnect between the individuals creating these mandates and the environments in which classroom teachers teach.

The frustration that Linda and Shane exhibited during our interviews is an indication of the harm that standards implementation, when it is used as a means of curricular standardization, can have on otherwise effective, confident teachers. Both of these teachers exhibit great excitement about teaching, especially when they are given the freedom to choose their own texts, create their own lessons, and connect with their students in their own authentic ways that reflect the students they have in the classroom rather than reflect a document that is meant to “equalize” all classrooms. Linda and Shane both taught the same course (English 9), and therefore they both had the same pacing guide. Their classrooms, however, looked very different, especially in terms of the texts they chose to have students read. Shane, the former media specialist, put a strong emphasis on *rigorous* texts being introduced to students and was vocal about what he considered a *lack* of rigor in some of the texts Linda chose to incorporate in her classroom. Their differences often stemmed from a disagreement over whether to read a young adult novel called *Painting the Black* or Homer’s *The Odyssey*. Linda saw great importance in *Painting the Black*, as she believed it touched upon important topics (such as date rape) for teenage readers, was more relatable for students than *The Odyssey*, and provided students with a contemporary text (the rest of the literature in her class could be considered “classic”). Shane, on the other hand, believed *Painting the Black* was not rigorous enough for ninth graders and parents might question the appropriateness of some

content. (Note: This book was approved by the school board before classroom copies were purchased.) Shane, though, was a strong proponent of *The Odyssey*. This disagreement is real and common among high school ELA teachers; both sides have been well documented for years, and there is no one, correct answer. This disagreement is also important and necessary in the development of rich, engaging lesson plans for both teachers – the harder each fought for the inclusion of his/her chosen text, the more important the teaching around that text became, and the more passion and creativity Shane and Linda showed.

The differences evident between Linda's and Shane's classes, as exposed by this study, also suggest that one classroom will *never* look like another, even when there is a document with the explicit purpose of making classrooms look very much alike. This document is not, however, the standards document, but the pacing guides. It seems that the secondary standards documents (i.e. the standards byproducts) have much more influence over teachers after the initial interpretation phase. During the first year or two of interpretation, department meetings and PD days focused generally on the original standards document. The original standards document was at least studied to some degree as teachers participated in translation activities and interpretation workshops. Once the initial interpretation period was over, however, the standards document was all but abandoned, and in its place were the pacing guides and checklists generated by teachers in those earlier sessions. These documents were often based on the personal curriculum of the teachers who had been teaching the courses when the pacing guides were written; rather than becoming flexible, livable documents, though, the first version became the

final version. The replacement of the standards document by the interpretive documents teachers created is one example this study uncovers of how teachers are encouraged to move away from the original goals of the standards (curricular autonomy and flexibility of application) and toward standardization (as evident in the pacing guides' stated purpose – to align teachers' curriculum with one another).

Regardless of the intent to have teachers create standardized versions of their classrooms, some amount of variation occurs. Despite the attempts at “teacher proofing” the curriculum in this school (albeit these attempts were not as inflexible as attempts documented in other districts), there was still a great amount of individualized curriculum. The curricular decisions teachers made reflected their personal strengths and expertise, as well as their comfort areas. Sara found ways to incorporate elements of drama – another facet of her teaching degree – into her lessons by having students role play and act out scenes. Ann had students read and write “journey texts,” something that she learned about and created in graduate school. Shane brings *A Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* to life by having students carry their own hidden spoon around with them (points are lost if the spoon is lost or stolen); he also has them taste a concoction that resembles the gruel described by Ivan (Shane's version contains oatmeal and is fishless). Linda inspires her students to write about local issues (i.e. paying to park at school) in an argumentative genre; this reflects both her attention to student engagement and to what the standards (and standardized tests) require for her students to produce.

Where To Go From Here

What does this mean for how the major power players talk with teachers as the standards movement opens its next chapter as the “new” standards (the CCSS) are implemented? As the next standards are implemented, our curriculum coordinators, ISD leaders, and administrators should keep one eye on the goals of this standards document while helping our teachers negotiate these standards for themselves. If this study shows, as has been argued here, that negotiation will happen with standards implementation and that this negotiation will inevitably lead to classrooms that look very unique from one another even as a move toward standardization is made, then perhaps the negotiation should be embraced and utilized. Instead, teacher negotiation is viewed now as a deviation from the plan.

One question this study raises is why teacher negotiation has to be something that is fought against. In other words, perhaps we should embrace the personal characteristics our teachers have instead of trying to downplay, change, or standardize them. Many years of research supports the notion that it is the *teacher*, more than programs or standards, that make the difference in student achievement, as Richard Allington points out here with research on reading achievement: “There is a long history of research that indicates that teachers, and teacher expertise, matter much more than which reading series a school district might choose” (2002, p. 6). However, as discussed in chapter one, politicians often put political ideology before giving teachers the support they need. Again, Allington explains: “[Politicians] seem to be fully capable of ignoring scientific research that violates their political ideologies” (2002, p. 237). Teachers, and students, are affected

by each decision policy makers compose, including how much autonomy over the curriculum they maintain and how they work within the inevitable restrictions of incorporating standards. Teacher *negotiation* should be viewed as a balancing act that *strengthens* our school's curriculum because it reveals the time teachers put into reflecting on what our students need. Rather than blindly following the script of a premade teaching unit, teachers reflect on what they know, what their students know, and what the mandates require them to do. The PD experiences that guide teachers into creating restrictive documents like pacing guides are constructed on the belief that teachers are not doing all they should or can be doing for students. If there is any validity to that assumption, having teachers create a standardizing document is not the answer. We ought to try and meet teachers where they are. We often hear the phrase "meet the students where they are," but never "meet the teachers where they are." I would argue that the necessity for both exists; teachers cannot be expected to adopt new curriculum every few years and ever make any progress pedagogically. Constant transition detracts from any sort of extended focus, concentration, and reflection on pedagogical methods. I'm not advocating for teachers to become stagnant in the same lessons year after year; I am, however, advocating for fewer demands on teachers to ignore their inner voices and pedagogical instincts in favor of following the checklists and unit guides created by someone else.

As standards are discussed and implemented during upcoming PD days and standards "roll-out" seminars, whether it is the CCSS being introduced or another set of "new" standards, bring the negotiation to the forefront of our discussions about

curriculum. Rather than attempt to subvert the personality, expertise, individual experience and teacher knowledge that each teacher brings with him/her, the power players involved in standards implementation should work *with* teachers and embrace those differences. The differences are not going away; no amount of “teacher-proofing” a curriculum will ever result in the robotic planning and presentation of our school’s curriculum, reminiscent of a Ray Bradbury or George Orwell futuristic tale. The standards movement continues to be a movement toward teacher standardization, but the results (as shown in this study) are a teacher population with a decreased sense of professionalism, increased confusion, and increased motivation to subvert the standards altogether. Teachers often want *some* direction; this is evident here as well in all four teachers. Sara and Ann rely on a combination of their knowledge about the standards and their pacing guides to direct their instruction. Shane relies on the department’s pacing guides as his directives, and Linda uses a combination of her knowledge of the standards and activities she reads about in Barry Lane’s book. Wouldn’t it be most helpful if that direction came in the form of workshops that highlighted teacher’s successes, and helped teachers bridge the gap between the effective practices they use in the classroom already that work with the students they have and meeting the standards? Continual change in the name of “progress” is a tenement of the standards movement, and it continues to deskill teachers by offering them “sample” unit plans and suggesting their current practices are not good enough. Much of what teachers are already doing *is* good enough; in fact, it’s better than the rote, scripted lessons that are often prescribed in the sample units or pacing guides simply because teachers have ownership of them. To be fair, the lessons in

the sample units are not necessarily ineffective lessons; the argument I make here is that any lesson that is forced on a teacher will not be as effective as one that the teacher has more control over in its planning and execution. Prescribed lessons move us toward, as Shane said, feeling “like a substitute teacher in my own classroom.” Teachers should instead be given the time to use the standards as a catalyst for discussion within the department and personal curricular reflection; these are the two benefits this study shows coming from standards implementation, and in the face of more change and new standards, these are the tenets of effective teacher support as we move forward.

Future Studies in the Standards Movement

There are certain limitations of this study that have left doors open for future studies in the standards movement. One such limitation is the size of this study; case studies are necessary as they can help researchers investigate deeply the details of an organization, institution, or situation; their results, however, cannot be generalized to the whole. For this reason, it is important to look ahead to more comprehensive studies of larger regions. A study which included teachers from an entire district or state, rather than from only one high school’s department, would paint a more complete (albeit less complex) picture of how teachers are experiencing standards interpretation and implementation. A study of such proportions would likely include mixed methodology, perhaps intermingling interviews, surveys, observation, and questionnaires. This study shows the importance of paying attention to the influence of standards on the curricular

decisions teachers make; therefore it should be more widely known how teachers are negotiating the standards.

While teachers are the mediators of the standards, students are the final recipients. Little research thus far has been conducted that looks critically at how student performance is affected by standards implementation. Because heretofore this research has relied heavily on standardized testing results, a study looking at student performance without the extra variable of standardized testing is essential. For too long, *standards* and *standardized testing* have become almost synonymous, but without good reason. Fundamentally, standards are supposed to provide a foundation of what students should learn in the English classroom; this was the idea in the 1880s and it is the idea to which the standards documents of today pay lip service. Standards are supposed to answer the question *what does an English classroom look like?* This is separate from the tenets of standardized testing, which aims to test all students in a universal way. To create a study that looks critically at the effects of state standards on students, without relying on the scores from standardized tests, would be the next logical step in determining the best way to move forward with standards implementation. After all, for a movement whose founding principle is *progress*, we should make certain that all the changes teachers make in their classrooms because of the standards are progressing toward *improvement* in our classrooms, schools, and for our students, and are not changes made in vain.

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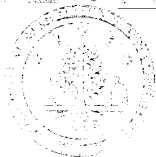
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APPENDIX

HSIRB: Human Subjects Institutional Review Board Approval

WESTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY



Human Subjects Institutional Review Board

Date: January 3, 2011

To: Jonathan Bush, Principal Investigator
Amanda Sterns-Pfeiffer, Student Investigator for dissertation

From: Amy Naugle, Ph.D., Chair

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Amy Naugle".

Re: HSIRB Project Number: 10-12-03

This letter will serve as confirmation that your research project titled "Michigan English Language Arts State Standards/Benchmarks and Classroom Implementation" has been **approved** under the **expedited** category of review by the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board. The conditions and duration of this approval are specified in the Policies of Western Michigan University. You may now begin to implement the research as described in the application.

Please note that you may **only** conduct this research exactly in the form it was approved. You must seek specific board approval for any changes in this project. You must also seek reapproval if the project extends beyond the termination date noted below. In addition if there are any unanticipated adverse reactions or unanticipated events associated with the conduct of this research, you should immediately suspend the project and contact the Chair of the HSIRB for consultation.

The Board wishes you success in the pursuit of your research goals.

Approval Termination: January 3, 2012