

FINAL MA PORTFOLIO

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A Final Portfolio

Submitted to the English Department of
Bowling Green State University
in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts in the field of English

July 12, 2014

Professor Sheri Wells-Jensen, First Reader
Professor Bill Albertini, Second Reader

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Brooke E. Kukay

Personal Narrative

Never Stop Questioning

“The important thing is not to stop questioning.” Although I have numerous posters with inspirational quotes hanging on my classroom walls, this quote made famous by Albert Einstein is displayed prominently on the front door of my classroom. As an educator, I never want to become stagnant or inflexible. “Is this what is best for our students?” is a question I have asked myself time and time again. I make it a practice to reflect on my lessons and find areas of improvement on a daily basis. I also make it a priority to stay up-to-date on the newest educational policies; consequently, I serve on numerous committees regarding education reform. And I’m not afraid to represent my fellow teachers and voice our concerns or ask questions when emerging policies and reform do not best serve our students. Over time, this quote has served me well. I have grown and changed (and I hope vastly improved) during my twelve years of teaching, but if I were not willing to ask the tough questions, or question certain educational policies as they were in their infant stages of implementation—I’ve often wondered, where would I be?

My ability to ask questions combined with a progressive principal has allowed me to make significant personal strides in my profession. For example, as a young teacher I was honored to teach AP English Language, but I did not find it personally fulfilling, nor did I think it best fit the needs of our students. By asking questions, I realized my principal was open to other options for our honors students, and he also found the AP courses somewhat antiquated. With my principal’s support I took the teacher training and began teaching through the University of Findlay (UF), which allowed our students to receive college credit upon successful

completion of the course. But I wasn't satisfied. Colleges and universities in and out of state were regularly declining the course credits earned in the UF course. When I questioned this at a UF department meeting, I was shocked to find out that even though I was altering the assignments to meet the honors criteria, the common course description never wavered, hence my students were enrolled in the equivalent of BGSU's GSW 1100 course, an intensive introduction to academic writing course that did not grant credit to students upon completion.

At this point I knew I no longer wanted to be a part of the program, but I felt stuck in limbo. I did not want to go back to AP, but my options were limited. I had been informed by our school's guidance counselor numerous times that BGSU Firelands College would not allow me to teach post secondary or dual enrollment courses because I lacked a master's in my discipline. Yet, I was still questioning what was best for my students, so I took it upon myself to call my former advisor and professor at BGSU Firelands College. At the time he was serving as both the Humanities Chair and Interim Associate Dean, and after I voiced my concerns, he approved me immediately. I was ecstatic. I had reached a personal milestone and secured a position that would best serve our students.

This position opened doors for me (allowing me to teach both on and off campus) and made me a better educator. I was able to gauge firsthand the prevalent English rhetoric, literature, and writing deficiencies of the incoming college freshmen, which allowed to me to amend my own areas of instruction in the high school setting. My unique perspective was eye-opening, and after I shared my concerns for our graduating seniors with my principal, we were able to collaborate with several professors at BGSU Firelands College and create the "College Readiness Program," which allows our students to take more writing intensive courses, and provides new, engaging course options that were aligned to better prepare students for life after

graduation in all subject areas. The program has created a worthwhile curriculum for students who are unable to qualify for the college courses taught at the high school. So, when the Ohio Board of Regents announced a policy proposal that would restrict any instructors who did not have a master's in their discipline from teaching college level courses, I immediately enrolled in this master's of English program in order to continue teaching college level courses. The students who enroll in my college courses at the high school are able to graduate with six to twelve college credits, free of charge. I find it incredibly rewarding watch my students grow and develop as writers and I wholeheartedly feel teaching through BGSU Firelands College has provided my students with the best possible educational opportunities available. My goal is to utilize the language and literature knowledge I have gained from my coursework, in addition to numerous valuable instructional tools and strategies, and apply this knowledge in my classroom, and possibly in a future position as a curriculum specialist.

Prior to this program, I was eager to teach, but feared my educational background was hindering me from providing my students with the best possible education. I have always questioned my lessons because I want to do what is best for the students, but teaching in a new environment provided me a unique perspective and my master's program has influenced the way I approach education. For that reason, the first essay I have chosen for my portfolio focuses on the challenges and rewards of educating students who were outside of my comfort zone. ENG 6150, Introduction to Linguistics was only the second class of my degree program, but it left a lasting impact throughout the classes I've taken, especially Sociolinguistics. The valuable knowledge that no dialect or language should be deemed better or more correct has influenced my instructional strategies in the classroom, as reflected in my essay. This simple concept is beneficial because it has shaped the way I have grown to appreciate and understand the

importance of language and identity. For this essay, I used the feedback provided and focused my revisions on expanding the reasons why I continue to teach; what motivates me and why the benefits outweigh the negatives.

The second selection chosen for the portfolio is a teaching project that focuses on a poetry unit I currently use in the ENG 1500, Introduction to Literary Genres I teach through BGSU Firelands College. ENG 6090, Teaching of Literature was a course I was looking forward to taking because I feel literature has taken a back seat to writing in my classroom and I was eager to learn new teaching strategies. Additionally, as reflected in my teaching based project, my ENG 1500 course focuses on the same genres that we covered in class, so the course provided ample opportunities for growth. Poetry is typically difficult to teach because a large majority of students typically do not enjoy it, so engaging students can be a struggle. I did not have feedback for this project, but I expanded the project by adding more components in order to better demonstrate the bigger picture, and to provide documents that expand upon the original version that was focused solely on the sample poetry lesson.

As I was completing my coursework over the past two years, my passion for education has gradually shifted outside of the classroom. Previously, I earned a master's degree in curriculum and instruction through BGSU, but I never anticipated using the degree—until recently. A common thread on the discussion boards in so many of my classes has been the fear and misunderstanding surrounding the common core standards, the new teacher evaluation system, and a slew of other unfunded mandates that have left educators frustrated and fearful of the future of education. As an executive member of several committees regarding the new reforms, I found myself sharing what I knew with educators time and time again; additionally, many of my professors were equally inquisitive. I realized helping fellow educators (both on the

discussion boards and in my own district) wade through the complicated and ever evolving education reforms renewed my interest in my profession, but for the first time I found myself drawn in a new direction.

As my interests and career goals gradually changed, my coursework and research began to focus on the politics of education reform. My final two essays reflect this professional growth and transformation. The third essay for the portfolio focuses on the corruption at the state level of legislation, as evidenced through my research on electronic schools, or e schools. What I discovered was shocking, the deeper I looked the more disheartened I became. My revisions for this essay were minimal. I changed some of the wording as I combed through the essay, and fixed some of the mistakes, but the majority of the essay remains intact, as reflected by my feedback. This essay motivated me to remain actively aware of education reform, and was incredibly enlightening.

The new education reform has left many veteran teachers disgruntled, and good educators are fleeing the classroom. I must admit—I've become disillusioned as well, and I've contemplated leaving the classroom for a position as a curriculum specialist. Rather than ignore the reform, I embraced the process in order to find out the motivation behind the changes. When I became a teacher, I promised myself I would never become a cynical, obstinate educator, but the information I've unearthed during the past year has challenged the agreement I made to myself many years ago.

My fourth and final essay for the portfolio was incredibly enlightening. The biggest concern among English teachers regarding the new English language arts common core standards is the switch to informational texts. Sadly, I've realized that teachers across the country have been misinformed, or remain uninformed as to how to implement the changes. I

sought to uncover the meaning of informational texts, and gauge how the standards would be handled under the common core. The common core standards, approved as part of the Race to the Top (RttT) initiative, create a nearly unmanageable essay topic choice due to the layers of complexities and duplicitous motivation behind its inception. Because federal guidelines mandate that RttT be fully implemented next year, teachers are scrambling to prepare, yet the RttT's reform criteria continues to rapidly change, creating a hostile education environment. Sadly, those leading the reform, and its numerous variations since it was proposed do not consider what is best for our nation's students. Instead, the reform has been stunted by an endless political power struggle, and a covetous need for certain individuals and businesses to profit from the reform. For my revision, I focused on updating some of the changes to the policy that have occurred since I originally wrote the essay, as well as integrating an example of a teacher who sees the new standards as favorable, in order to illustrate the other side of the argument, as advised in my feedback.

The four pieces in this portfolio best reflect the way my interests have grown and diversified since I entered this program two years ago. I've been challenged in every class to learn new concepts and strategies that I will be able to apply in my own classroom. If my path takes me outside of the classroom within the next year or so, I will be able to utilize what I have learned in this program, and help teachers create curriculum that integrates English and informational texts across the disciplines. I've never stopped asking questions, and those questions brought me to this program, and helped me grow as an educator and individual.

Brooke E. Kukay

ENG 6150

Dr. Sheri Wells-Jensen

7 July 2014 (Revised)

Confessions of a Linguistically Uninformed Educator

How will I get through this without inadvertently offending someone's culture and heritage? How will I teach standard grammar without asking students to abandon their own language and culture? How will I reach my students? All of these questions and more raced through my mind several years ago, during my first week teaching GSW 1100, an intensive introduction to academic writing course. I felt ill equipped to teach the students in my classroom. I wish I had read the enlightening book, *Out of the Mouths of Slaves: African American Language and Educational Malpractice* prior to instructing my first semester of GSW 1100, as I was floundering in my initial attempts to connect to and educate my students.

The book, written by Professor John Baugh, who is a lifelong educator, and a well-known African American Linguist, will remain on my bookshelf for many years to come. As I read, I was annotating, highlighting, and adding post-it notes all over the place. I found this book to be incredibly beneficial, but overwhelming at the same time. And when I was done, my head was swimming with new ideas and perspectives. I wish I had more time to absorb the information I read, but I am grateful that I now know it is available for me to utilize as a reference text. In the book, Baugh tackles the late 1990s reignited debate over language, race, and culture regarding African American English or "Ebonics" as it was termed by an Oakland, California school board. John Baugh dissects the origins of African American English and brings to light and challenges the many myths surrounding African American language in our society. He discusses

many important topics regarding the aforementioned issue, including linguistic discrimination, cultural influences, and practices and malpractices for educating students who are considered to be among the language minority.

Although I was not well educated in language variation and the factors that influence variation, I believed I was ready to teach GSW 1100. I spent the summer eagerly preparing for my new course, picking out the book that would best fit my students' needs, perfecting my course syllabus and major assignments. It was my first time teaching an introductory level course, and I was ready for the challenge...or so I thought. The opening week of my first semester instructing of GSW 1100 was an eye opening experience for me. I assigned their first homework assignment, and maybe twenty percent of them turned it in. I quickly grasped that I was going to have to adapt my teaching style in order to motivate my students and meet their needs. I was cognizant that I would not be successful unless I could relate to my students, but their level of prior knowledge, goals, and expectations were difficult to comprehend. They had followed an educational path that differed greatly from my own. Growing up, I was part of a high school class that was full of competitive overachievers. I did my homework, I studied (well, for the most part), and I enjoyed English. I expected my students' to have the same self-motivation. I was wrong. Students willingly shared their prior aversion for education with me, and I quickly learned that the majority of my GSW 1100 students were not high school graduates (and later earned their GED) or they graduated, but barely due to chronic absences and a general indifference for education.

However, the stakes were higher at the college level. These students were paying for their education, and they wanted a knowledgeable educator to guide them in their studies. I quickly realized my naivety. I had spent my educational career in a predominantly Caucasian,

middle-to-upper middle class school district in a small community and I was eager to teach a class with cultural and socio-economic diversity, yet I was unprepared for the new challenges I faced. Unfortunately, we quite literally did not speak the same language. I was unsure of how to tackle the divide without offending my students, and I was treading water in an area of education I had not previously encountered. According to Language Files, “linguistically speaking, no one dialect or language is better, more correct, more systematic, or more logical than any other” (412). Yet, I needed to teach students how to write academically, which meant teaching Standard American English. I knew I had to take it slow, but I also needed to assess their prior knowledge.

I jumped into a lesson on avoiding colloquial language; a lesson I always cover in the beginning of the semester, and hastily realized it would be a learning experience for me as well. Immediately, I had to start the lesson over because my vocabulary was frustrating a few of the students. Colloquial became slang; vernacular was replaced with everyday language, and suddenly their frightened expressions began to soften. As the weeks progressed, the students who stuck it out seemed eager to learn, and they had many questions. I was utterly stunned by their lack of prior knowledge of concepts I considered common knowledge. Also, I was overwhelmed. I underestimated the amount of work entailed in teaching this class. For example, I initially assumed my students’ use of slang was restricted to a spoken dialect, but that was not the case, and the writing samples I began to collect reflected the immense challenges I faced as their instructor. I realized I had to start with the basics. During the first month, I genuinely wondered if an academic essay was an attainable goal and constantly worried that I was failing my students. For the first time in my life I fulfilled my mother’s wish—I became a cheerleader. My voice softened, I smiled more as I spoke in order to put my students at ease, and welcomed

all of their questions, recognizing the initial apprehension on their faces began to swiftly fade as I adapted my instructional strategies in order to further cultivate a welcoming environment for learning.

As the semester progressed, I was silently, but increasingly perturbed and wondered (and still do) how the education system had failed these students in such a spectacular fashion. Who was to blame? As I was reading *Out of the Mouths of Slaves*, a particular case, *Donohue v. Coplague Union Free School*, seemed relatable. The case “represented the paradigmatic ‘functional illiteracy’ case, in which a student alleges [sic] that the education was deficient in a wholesale way” (qtd. in Baugh 51). The plaintiff in the case placed the blame squarely on the shoulders of his prior, negligent educators. Disappointingly, the judges sided with the defendant school district, stating “It is simply not realistic to argue that schools ‘hold themselves out’ as able to deliver graduating classes of students equipped with skills necessary to succeed beyond the classroom” (qtd. in Baugh 52). If this is not the goal of an educator...what is? As educators, it is our job to provide our students with the tools necessary to succeed in college and beyond, and as I realized how eager so many of my students were to learn, I found it increasingly difficult not to resent the educators who failed to meet their needs.

Regardless of their prior classroom experience, it is my job to educate my students. I read Baugh’s chapter “Come Again” eagerly hoping to find new ways to connect to many of my students by further understanding African American Vernacular English. The clarity of understanding that “come is used to convey personal observations or opinions” and “although come occurs most frequently in narratives that discuss a past episode, it may also occur in the present or future tense” (111) allows me to understand their issues in the writing process more clearly. Furthermore, *Language Files* discussed several morphosyntactic processes that

distinguish AAVE from SAE or Standard American English. Multiple negation, copula absence, and the absence of third-person singular inflectional suffix -s are all issues I encounter in my GSW 1100 sections. It helps to understand the origin of conflict with SAE, or as I refer to it in class, as writing in the proper tone for academic achievement. This new understanding will allow me to appreciate and understand that there is a place where the language variations I previously perceived as mistakes are appreciated and tied to identity and culture. I now realize that in order to properly educate my students I must embrace this knowledge in order to appropriately convey when it is appropriate to use SAE rather than AAVE in the writing process, rather than expect them to disregard a dialect that is intrinsic to my students' heritage and individuality.

My first semester teaching GSW 1100 turned into an opportunity for professional growth. I find my sections of GSW 1100 to be both the most frustrating and rewarding writing course I teach. Frustrating because the dropout rate in GSW 1100 is high, across the board. As hard as I try to keep my students entertained and engaged during the learning process, I cannot keep all of them enrolled each semester, not even close. I've also had some precarious moments that I've never experienced in any more advanced levels of GSW or in my high school teaching experience. In my first semester, two students were shot in separate incidents before we even reached the midpoint of the semester. And, in that same semester, a student jumped out of her seat, cornered me and physically threatened me for asking her to please end her call and turn off her cell phone. In the end, she was removed from campus and our class continued.

Yet, I keep coming back because the rewards outweigh everything else. I enjoy the "aha moments" my students have during the semester when a concept (no matter how insignificant) finally clicks, or when they begin to feel confident in their writing abilities. The smiles that

break out on their faces when they grasp something that once seemed insurmountable energize me. The majority of students in this class are eager to better themselves, but lack self-esteem and confidence in their abilities. Many are older than me, the majority have children and families to support, and some are rebuilding their lives after a stint in the military or too many years working an unsatisfying, low paying job. Personally, I find the amount of growth an 1100 student can achieve in a mere four months incredibly rewarding. Knowing that I've influenced positive change in a student's life is what keeps me coming back, class after class, and semester after semester.

The classroom participation in this course is usually high as well, which is welcoming in any classroom. The students love to share their knowledge, and when they understand a lesson or assignment, they want to make sure the entire class is aware of what they have achieved. And as I've learned from my students, my vernacular has expanded as well. I have inadvertently picked up certain phrases and terms from African American Vernacular English that amuse my students and me. Last spring, I walked over to a student to help him with his essay, and noticed he had Facebook open and was chatting with a friend. I saw his chat feed and read from it. "De'Jawn, what is white girl wasted?" I asked, clearly amused. The class found my question highly entertaining. And as they explained the term to me and I jokingly used it in my so-called "white-girl speak" I could feel our class bond tightening. I was not shunning them; I was celebrating and accepting their culture. It's only fair, right? If I am going to ask so much of them, shouldn't it be my obligation to learn from my students as well?

Works Cited

- Baugh, John. *Out of the Mouths of Slaves: African American Language and Educational Malpractice*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1999. Print.
- Mihalicek, Vedrana and Christin Wilson, eds. *Language Files*, 11th ed. Columbus: The Ohio State University Press, 2011. Print.

ENG 6150 AAVE Essay Notes:

**I've said this before, but again this is also good: you are a good and thoughtful writer. OK, so this is fine as is, an insightful reaction.... but it's my job to think up ways in which this could turn around or expand. And integrate more material.

The part that is glossed over is how you cope with the differences you find yourself in: not just the linguistic differences, but how your dream of what a teacher would be like has been remolded by these experiences. What has this done to you and where do you find the personal resources to make the transitions? It's a serious disappointment to be required to discard or dramatically reshape the dream of how your career you have chosen had to be changed. Why aren't you bitter? Why not blame somebody and walk away... not just why... but how have you not blamed somebody else and walked away?

I think these are more person/spiritual/emotional than intellectual questions, but answering them for yourself might bring you to a new understanding of what you're doing and how you're changing ... because maybe your students are having the same shock experience: that education is not what they thought it would be. I wonder ... not just what it's like for them... I think we've seen writings about that... but how personal insights they gain which give them the energy they need to change what they need to change to succeed.

Maybe, that all makes no sense! But, if there's a piece missing here it's the why and how you create the classrooms you create. I'd love to read that, if you ever choose to write it!

Sheri

Hi Sheri, thank you for your notes and insight. Do you need me to expand and write about the questions you asked me in order to complete the essay? I don't mind tackling the question you posed at the end, it just might take me a bit.

Brooke

Hi, Brooke. No changes are needed for this essay: it's a terrific piece of work. If you choose to include it in a portfolio, that's a direction you might go. I honestly think, also, that this piece expanded would be publishable.

I don't know quite where, but you are such a careful and honest writer that I suspect it'd find a published home somewhere.

Sheri

Brooke E. Kukay

ENG 6150

Dr. Sheri Wells-Jensen

12 Nov. 2012

Confessions of a Linguistically Uninformed Educator

How will I get through this without inadvertently offending someone's culture and heritage? How will I teach standard grammar without asking them to give up their language and culture? How will I reach my students? All of these questions and more raced through my mind three years ago, during my first week teaching GSW 1100, an intensive introduction to academic writing course. I felt ill equipped to teach the students in my classroom. I wish I had read the enlightening book, *Out of the Mouths of Slaves: African American Language and Educational Malpractice* during my first semester instructing GSW 1100, as I was floundering in my initial attempts to connect to and educate my students.

The book, written by Professor John Baugh, who is a lifelong educator, and a well-known African American Linguist, will remain on my bookshelf for many years to come. As I read, I was annotating, highlighting, and adding post-it notes all over the place. I found this book to be incredibly beneficial, but overwhelming at the same time. And when I was done, my head was swimming with new ideas and perspectives. I wish I had more time to absorb the information I read, but I am grateful that I now know it is available for me as a reference text. In the book, Baugh tackles the late 1990s reignited debate over language, race, and culture regarding African American English or "Ebonics" as it was termed by an Oakland, California school board. John Baugh dissects the origins of African American English and brings to light and challenges the many myths surrounding African American language in our society. He discusses many

important topics regarding the aforementioned issue, including linguistic discrimination, cultural influences, and practices and malpractices for educating students who are considered to be among the language minority.

Although I was not well educated in language variation and the factors that influence variation, I believed I was ready to teach GSW 1100. I spent the summer eagerly preparing for my new course, picking out the book that would best fit my students' needs, perfecting my course syllabus and major assignments. It was my first time teaching an introductory level course, and I was ready for the challenge...or so I thought. My "fish out of water" experience during the opening week of my first GSW 1100 section was reminiscent of my student teaching experience. I was out of my comfort zone, and knew I would not be successful unless I could relate to my students, but their level of prior knowledge, goals, and expectations were difficult to comprehend. Growing up, I was part of a high school class that was full of competitive overachievers. I did my homework, I studied (well, for the most part), and I enjoyed English. I expected my student teaching students to have the same self-motivation. I was wrong. I handed out their first homework assignment, and maybe twenty percent of them turned it in. Later, I realized the vast majority of their parents' skipped college for a secure job at the local factory. Many of my students just wanted to get a diploma and move on to a job at the local factory—just like their parents. I quickly grasped that I was going to have to adapt my teaching style in order to motivate my students and meet their needs, just as I realized I would need to do the same for my GSW 1100 students many years later.

However, the stakes were higher at the college level. These students were paying for their education, and they wanted a knowledgeable educator to guide them in their studies. I quickly realized my naivety. I had spent my educational career in a predominantly Caucasian,

middle-to-upper middle class school district in a small community and I was eager to teach a class with cultural and socio-economic diversity, yet I was unprepared for the new challenges I faced. Unfortunately, we quite literally did not speak the same language. I was unsure of how to tackle the divide without offending my students, and I was treading water in an area of education I had not previously encountered. According to Language Files, “linguistically speaking, no one dialect or language is better, more correct, more systematic, or more logical than any other” (412). Yet, I needed to teach students how to write academically, which meant teaching Standard American English. I knew I had to take it slow, but I also needed to assess their prior knowledge.

I jumped into a lesson on avoiding colloquial language; a lesson that I always cover in the beginning of the semester, and hastily realized it would be a learning experience for me as well. Immediately, I had to start the lesson over because my vocabulary was frustrating a few of the students. Colloquial became slang, and vernacular was replaced with everyday language, and quickly their frightened expressions began to soften. The students seemed eager to learn, but they had many questions. I was utterly stunned by their lack of prior knowledge of concepts I considered common knowledge. Also, I was overwhelmed. I assumed my students’ use of slang was restricted to a spoken dialect, but that was not the case and the writing samples I initially collected reflected the immense challenges I faced as the instructor. And, as the semester progressed, I was silently, but increasingly perturbed by their lack of knowledge regarding the writing process and wondered (and still do) how many of my students were able to graduate from high school. Who was to blame?

As I was reading *Out of the Mouths of Slaves*, a particular case, *Donohue v. Coplague Union Free School*, seemed relatable. The case “represented the paradigmatic ‘functional

illiteracy' case, in which a student alleges [sic] that the education was deficient in a wholesale way" (qtd. in Baugh 51). The plaintiff in the case placed the blame squarely on the shoulders of his prior, negligent educators. Disappointingly, the judges sided with the defendant school district, stating "It is simply not realistic to argue that schools 'hold themselves out' as able to deliver graduating classes of students equipped with skills necessary to succeed beyond the classroom" (qtd. in Baugh 52). If this is not the goal of an educator...what is? As a teacher who is proudly part of creating and implementing our school's "College Readiness Program", which was developed in partnership with BGSU Firelands College in order to prepare our outgoing senior classes with the tools necessary to succeed in college and beyond, I find it deplorable that educators were not held to a higher standard. And from my personal experience teaching GSW 1100, the issue of accountability appears to be ongoing.

Regardless of their prior classroom experience, it is my job to educate my students. I read Baugh's chapter "Come Again" eagerly hoping to find new ways to connect to my students by further understanding African American Vernacular English. The clarity of understanding that "come is used to convey personal observations or opinions" and "although come occurs most frequently in narratives that discuss a past episode, it may also occur in the present or future tense" (111) allows me to understand their issues in the writing process more clearly. Furthermore, Language Files discussed several morphosyntactic processes that distinguish AAVE from SAE or Standard American English. Multiple negation, copula absence, and the absence of third-person singular inflectional suffix -s are all issues I encounter in my GSW 1100 sections. It helps to understand the origin of conflict with SAE, or as I refer to it in class, as writing in the proper tone for academic achievement. This new understanding will allow me to appreciate and understand that there is a place where the language variations I

perceive as mistakes are appreciated. And in order to properly educate my students I need to embrace this and better explain when it is appropriate to use SAE rather than AAVE in the writing process.

Over the past few years, I have learned a lot from my students as well. I find my sections of GSW 1100 to be both the most frustrating and rewarding writing level course I teach. Frustrating because the drop-out rate in GSW 1100 is high, across the board. And as hard as I try to keep my students entertained and engaged, I can't keep all of them enrolled each semester. I've also had some precarious moments that I've never experienced in any other section of GSW or in my high school experience. In my first semester, two students were shot in separate incidents before we even reached the midpoint of the semester. And, in that same semester, a student jumped out of her seat, cornered me and physically threatened me for asking her to please turn end her call and turn off her cell phone. In the end, she was removed from campus and our class continued.

Yet I keep coming back because the rewards outweigh everything else. I enjoy the "aha moment" my students have during the semester when a concept finally clicks or when they begin to feel confident in their writing abilities. The classroom participation in this course is usually high as well. The students love to share their knowledge, and when they understand a lesson or assignment, they want to make sure the entire class is aware of what they have achieved. And my vernacular has expanded as well. I have inadvertently picked up certain phrases and terms from African American Vernacular English that amuse my students and me. Last spring, I walked over to a student to help him with his essay, and noticed he had Facebook open and was chatting with a friend. I saw his chat feed and read from it. "De'Jawn, what is white girl wasted?", I asked, clearly amused. The class found my question highly entertaining. And as

they explained the term to me and I jokingly used it in my so-called “white-girl speak”, I could feel our class bond tightening. I was not shunning them; I was celebrating and accepting their culture. It’s only fair, right? If I am going to ask so much of them, shouldn’t it be my obligation to learn from them as well?

Works Cited

Baugh, John. *Out of the Mouths of Slaves: African American Language and Educational*

Malpractice. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1999. Print.

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State University Press, 2011. Print.

Syllabus - ENG 1500: Responding to Literature-(REVISED PROJECT)

Spring 2013

M/W/F 7:25-8:20

9:18-10:08

T/R Office Hours

Instructor: Brooke E. Kukay

E-mail: bkukay@bgsu.edu

Required Course Texts and Materials

Literature: Reading Fiction, Poetry, and Drama, 6th Edition: Robert DiYanni

The Glass Castle: Jeannette Walls

Notebook

**To take notes on class material.

3-ring binder

**You will use the binder to retain the materials (response reports, journaling assignments, etc.) that you will generate in this class, as well as the handouts that you will be given.

USB Drive or Google Docs

Access to MyBGSU

Course Description

Response to literature is a general education course emphasizing discussion of humanistic themes based on student responses to readings in fiction, drama, poetry, and nonfiction. Not accepted toward English major or minor. Applicable to the BG Perspective: (general education) humanities and arts requirement. Prerequisite: completion of GSW 1120.

Course Focus

This introductory level literature class is designed to help students acquire the tools for understanding, appreciating, and critically analyzing four genres of literature: fiction, poetry, drama, and nonfiction. This semester you will learn various basic concepts about literary technique and innovation. You'll also be expected to develop and exercise your critical thinking skills as you read, analyze, and discuss a variety of stories, poems, plays, and essays.

Course Requirements

Students are expected to carefully read and analyze all assigned work **PRIOR** to class, and to actively participate in all class exercises and discussions. Participation in class is a significant portion of your semester grade. Students will be expected to complete four major assignments (including the final exam) as well as several quizzes, class exercises, and in-class response papers.

**If students come to class unprepared and/or unwilling to participate in class discussion the entire class will receive zero participation points for that class.

Preparation

Response papers, in-class work, and homework assignments will be assigned throughout the semester to assess preparation or to jump-start discussion. Response papers may be assigned at

the start of a class period or for homework. In that way, even if you hate to speak up in class, I can get your individual reaction to the works we are studying. This is not a free pass to stay silent in class. I still expect you to be an active participant in class discussions. A fairly typical kind of response paper prompt might be a question similar to “If you could ask X why X did ____ what would you say?” In-class work, homework, and response papers are checked but not letter-graded and will go toward your participation grade. Very poorly executed or missing assignments will hurt your average. Late work will not be accepted. Homework is due at the beginning of every class.

Attendance

Students are permitted three excused absences during the semester. After the third absence, two points will be deducted from the overall total points earned for the semester for every additional day missed. There will be no exceptions to this. You must be present to fully participate in this course.

Conferences

Conferences must be called by the student and attended by the student. Parents may attend the conference at the discretion of the instructor.

Grade Record

Drama Unit:	100 points	(Character Analysis)
Fiction Unit:	100 points	(Exam)
Poetry Unit:	100 points	(Presentation Project)
Nonfiction Unit:	100 points	(Social Issues Project)
Participation:	100 points	2 points per class = 96+4 (gift)
Final Exam:	100 points	
Total:	600 points possible	

****You must complete every major unit assignment in order to pass this course.**

Assignments

All reading and writing assignments are due the day they appear on the syllabus. **Late work will not be accepted.**

Plagiarism and Academic Honesty

All students are expected to be familiar with and to follow the University Academic Honesty Code. Be aware that plagiarism is a serious offense and has serious consequences. Passing off any work that is not your own is dishonest. If you have any questions/concerns regarding plagiarism or the academic honesty code, please consult the student handbook or confer with me. Additionally, understand that all written assignments for this course must follow MLA citation style. If you are not familiar with the format, see me, or a tutor in the writing lab, located in the back corner of the library.

ENG 1500 Reading Selections

Spring 2013

****The Glass Castle MUST be completed prior to class March 26th.**

January-Drama

9-Intro to Drama Unit <i>A Doll's House</i>	11- <i>Trifles</i>	13- <i>Trifles</i>
16-MLK Jr. Day/No School <i>Oedipus Rex</i>	18- <i>Oedipus Rex</i>	20- <i>Oedipus Rex</i>
23- <i>A Raisin in the Sun</i> -dvd	25- <i>A Raisin in the Sun</i> -dvd	27- Drama Essay
30- Drama Essay		

February-Fiction

	1-"A&P" "A Worn Path"	3-"The Cask of Amontillado"
6-"Good Country People"	8-"A Good Man is Hard to Find"	10-"Eleven" "Barbie-Q" "Girl" **Assign Poetry Presentation Due Dates
13-"Marriage is a Private Affair"	15-"Battle Royal" "The Lottery"	17-Comp Day/No School
20-President's Day/No School	22-"Why I Live at the P.O." Fiction Wrap-Up	24- Fiction Exam
27- Fiction Exam Intro to Poetry Unit	29-"We Real Cool" "A Song in the Front Yard"	

March-Poetry

		2-"War is Kind" "I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud" "It is a Beauteous Evening" "Delight in Disorder"
5-"The Lake Isle of Innisfree" "Meeting at Night" "A Poison Tree" "The Road Not Taken"	7-"The Waking" "Reflections in Black & Blue" "Symptoms of Love" "Mirror"	9-"This is Just to Say" "Variations on a Theme" "Shall I Compare Thee to a Summer's Day" (Both)
12-"Turn! Turn! Turn" "Dream Deferred" "Same in Blues" "No Mo' Blues" "Blues" "Vincent"	14-"This is a Photograph of Me" "Spelling" "Anorexic"	16-"How do I Love Thee? Let me count the ways" "There Is a Garden in Her Face" "Marriage" "To My Dear and Loving Husband"
19-"Photograph of My Father in His Twenty-second Year" "Pumpkin Eater" "Homage to My Hips" "Waiting Table"	21-"Dust of Snow" "Snow on Frost" "A Red, Red Rose" "Stopping by the Woods on a Snowy Evening"	23- "Towhomitmayconcern" "Fast Break" "To an Athlete Dying Young"

26-Intro to Fiction Unit	28-The Glass Castle	30-The Glass Castle

*****Please note that ENG 1500 will be in session March 5-9. We will follow HHS Spring Break calendar.***

April-Drama

2- <u>The Glass Castle</u>	4-"Growing Up" "Against Work"	6-No School—Spring Break
9-No School—Spring Break	11-No School—Spring Break	13-No School—Spring Break
16-"And Ain't I a Woman" "Just Walk on By: Black Men & Public Space"	18-"Cat People vs. Dog People" "A Woman's Beauty: Put Down or Power Source"	20-Marrying Absurd" "I Want a Wife" Nonfiction Wrap-Up
23- Nonfiction Project Presentations (Social Issue)	25-Nonfiction Project Presentations (Social Issue)	27-Nonfiction Project Presentations (Social Issue)
30-Final Exam Review		

May

	2-Final Exam	4-Final Exam
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LESSON PLANS

Spring 2013

English 1500 Introduction to Literary Genres

Instructor: Brooke E. Kukay

E-mail: bkukay@bgsu.edu

Required Course Texts and Materials*Literature: Reading Fiction, Poetry, and Drama*, 6th Edition: Robert Di Yanni

Notebook

**To take notes on class material.

3-ring binder

**You will use the binder to retain the materials (response reports, journaling assignments, etc.) that you will generate in this class, as well as the hand-outs that you will be given.

Access to MyBGSU

USB Drive or Google Docs

Date: February 27 and 29th**Lesson Topic:**

Introduction to poetry unit; then introductory lesson which will focus on Gwendolyn Brooks and her poetry, including “We Real Cool” and “A Song in the Front Yard”.

Common Core State Standards:

RL. 11-12.4

Interpret words and phrases as they are used in the text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone, including words with multiple meanings or language that is particularly fresh, engaging, or beautiful.

RL. 11-12.7

Analyze multiple interpretations of a story, drama, or poem (e.g. recorded or live), evaluating how each version interprets the source text.

**Because I actually teach this lesson (although in my classroom it is broken up into two days to meet the time constraints) I am including the CCSS I would apply to this lesson. I know this is hypothetically a college course, but I teach a college course (ENG 1500 Introduction to Literary Genres) at the high school and must include the CCSS in each lesson.

Background Information:On February 10th, students were given instructions for the March Poetry Unit. Each group is in charge of leading the class instruction and discussion on an assigned date. The unit will begin on March 2nd and last through March 23rd.

**Attached document provided below with detailed instruction. I will give the first presentation of the unit, in order to allow students to model my format, if necessary.

Goals and Objectives:

In my experiences, poetry is the hardest genre to instruct because the bulk of students have decided long ago that poetry cannot be enjoyed. I will tackle many of the myths of poetry, such as “It’s pointless” or “I didn’t like it then so why will I like it now?”

I aim to engage them in meaningful discussion and analysis of poetry over the next month. The goal of my lesson is to teach students that poetry:

- Sharpens our perception of the world around us, and reveals things we didn’t know we knew.
- Makes us feel more acutely and increases our receptiveness to beauty.
- Stimulates our imagination.
- Improves our ability to understand and use language since poems are made of words.

Furthermore, I aim to clarify to students that the process of interpreting a poem is recursive, and not linear, as a list of questions may imply. We move around a poetic text the way we move around a new space: we consider and reconsider as lines or stanzas respond to or clarify earlier lines or stanzas, ultimately to form an overall impression.

I want students to learn how to read poetry well and to savor its pleasures. This involves learning to ask questions about how we experience, interpret, and evaluate them. I hope to teach students to read poetry and ask themselves questions such as the following, in order to foster comprehension.

1. What feelings does the poem evoke? What sensations, associations, and memories does it give rise to?
2. What ideas does the poem express, either directly or indirectly?
3. What view of the world does the poet present? What do you think of the poet's view?

**In regards to the poetry by Gwendolyn Brooks, my goals for understanding are stated above in the CCSS. But the basis of the instructional goal will be to recall basic information and facts during the presentation, think and develop understanding during the discussion, apply knowledge and reasoning while working through the questions and subsequent discussion, and achieve an understanding of the texts and concepts.

Lesson Delivery:

On February 27th, I will begin the poetry unit by delivering a presentation that delves into the pleasures and myths of poetry. The first part of the presentation should take about 30 minutes. Students will take notes, but I will also ask questions periodically, asking students to pull from what they already know about poetry, as I work through my presentation.

After I complete the background information I want to discuss, I will move into a brief biography of the life of Gwendolyn Brooks. I think it is important to cover her background because I have always made the strongest connections with texts when I am can make connections to the author’s background. Additionally, because Gwendolyn Brooks was the first

African American woman to receive a Pulitzer Prize I believe this honor should be recognized. The brief biography should take about 10 minutes.

As I move into the assigned poetry, I will ask students for their initial reactions and ask them if any of the biographical information has changed their initial reaction to the poems. I will make sure to make connections to the information I covered in the presentation, in order to reinforce what I instructed earlier. 5 minutes

After the initial discussion, I plan to show two clips from YouTube: one is a short video of the author reading the poem and the other is a young man reading the poem for a class assignment. Each delivery brings the orator's personal experience into the fold, and the boy who read the poem gave a 5-minute background of his own life and experiences and connections to the poem. This reinforces my ongoing theme that each individual experience shapes our interpretation of a text, which in turn shapes the way we evaluate the text. We will go over the Experience, Interpretation, and Evaluation connection and discuss the differences between our reading of the poem vs. the author and the young man in the video. I will also ask students to read aloud their interpretation of the poem and I will share my own to add to the discussion. 20 minutes

Next, I will pass out the worksheet over "We Real Cool" and give students time to closely investigate the poem in order to come up with their own conclusions. 15 minutes

After they complete the questions, I will collect them before I go over their answers so I can accurately assess their work after class. Once I collect their work, I plan to use the remaining 5 minutes for any additional questions or comments they might have and I will discuss what we will cover in the next class.

We Real Cool Recall and Discussion Questions

Where does this poem take place?

Who makes up the “we” in the poem?

How would you describe the “we” and what are they doing throughout the poem (consider their age and attitude)?

How would you describe the voices, or identities, of the “we”? What three adjectives best describe the pool players?

Was it difficult to pause after each “we” (where the line breaks)? Why or why not?

What was different about your reading and John Ulrich’s reading of the poem? What was similar?

What about the poem stood out as you were reading the poem?

What is the mood or tone of the poem? How would you describe the sound of the poem – like a song, a chant, or some other sound?

Poetry Unit Assignment

Poetry Presentation

For this presentation you and a partner will be assigned a specific date when you will present your “lesson” to the class. Partners will be assigned at random by your instructor.

It will be up to your group to design a lesson and lead an engaging discussion with your classmates. As required in the syllabus, all assigned reading must be completed **prior** to class. Your classmates will come to class prepared to discuss the poetry assigned on that day.

****Reminder:** As members of the class you must engage in class discussion in order to earn participation points.

Due dates will be distributed in class, and begin on March 2nd.

****Late work will not be accepted.** If you fail to present to your class on your assigned date you cannot make up the presentation at a later date. If your partner is absent on the day you are assigned to present your lesson to the class you will be expected to deliver the following day during office hours.

Requirements:

Plan a 45-minute poetry lesson. If you do not meet the time requirements your grade will be impacted significantly. Be creative, it is your job to inform your classmates and engage your classmates in a successful class discussion.

You are expected to lead a class discussion that includes each assigned poem. You will need to come up with your own discussion questions.

Be prepared. You may be asked questions from your classmates or your instructor and you will be expected to be able to answer the questions posed to you correctly.

Many of the poems are grouped in an order that relates to a certain literary element, etc. If so, you must address this in your discussion. (Your Reading Selection handout specifies the focus for each date.)

You must supply background information for each author. Additionally, if the author’s poetry connects to their life you must make and discuss those connections.

If you assign in-class questions for discussions you may give the class a maximum of 15 minutes to complete the questions before discussion. Plan your time wisely.

You may use a power point if you wish, but it is not required.

Please note:

If your lesson is incomplete/incorrect and your instructor must take over/correct your lesson your grade will be impacted significantly.

Also, many successful past presentations have included a game to wrap-up the lesson. This has helped keep the audience engaged, and I would recommend doing something similar. I will show you an example of a stellar lesson from a previous class that includes a fun, informative and interactive game.

Remember; please see me with any questions and concerns. ☺

LESSON PLANS

Spring 2013

English 101: Introduction to Literature
 Monday/Wednesday 2:00-3:15

Instructor: Brooke E. Kukay
 E-mail: bkukay@bgsu.edu

Required Course Texts and Materials

Literature: Reading Fiction, Poetry, and Drama, 6th Edition: Robert Di Yanni

Notebook

**To take notes on class material.

3-ring binder

**You will use the binder to retain the materials (response reports, journaling assignments, etc.) that you will generate in this class, as well as the hand-outs that you will be given.

USB Drive

Date: February 27th

Lesson Topic:

Introduction to poetry unit; will focus on Gwendolyn Brooks and her poetry, including “We Real Cool” and “A Song in the Front Yard”.

Common Core State Standards:

RL. 11-12.4

Interpret words and phrases as they are used in the text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone, including words with multiple meanings or language that is particularly fresh, engaging, or beautiful.

RL. 11-12.7

Analyze multiple interpretations of a story, drama, or poem (e.g. recorded or live), evaluating how each version interprets the source text.

**Because I actually teach this lesson (although in my classroom it is broken up into two days to meet the time constraints) I am including the CCSS I would apply to this lesson. I know this is hypothetically a college course, but I teach a college course (ENG 1500 Introduction to Literary Genres) at the high school and must include the CCSS in each lesson.

Background Information:

On February 20th, students were given instructions for the March Poetry Unit. Each group is in charge of leading the class instruction and discussion on an assigned date. The unit will begin on March 4th and last through March 27th.

**Attached document provided with detailed instruction. I will give the first presentation of the unit, in order to allow students to model my format, if necessary.

Goals and Objectives:

In my experiences, poetry is the hardest genre to instruct because the bulk of students have decided long ago that poetry cannot be enjoyed. I will tackle many of the myths of poetry, such as “It’s pointless” or “I didn’t like it then so why will I like it now?”

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Lesson Delivery:

On February 27th, I will begin the poetry unit by delivering a presentation that delves into the pleasures and myths of poetry. The first part of the presentation should take about 20 minutes. Students will take notes, but I will also ask questions periodically, asking students to pull from what they already know about poetry, as I work through my presentation.

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Be prepared. You may be asked questions from your classmates or your instructor and you will be expected to be able to answer the questions posed to you correctly.

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I will show you an example of a stellar lesson with a fun, informative and interactive game.

Education as Big Business:

Where are Ohio's Priorities?

Brooke E. Kukay

Bowling Green State University

Online schools offer a diverse population of students with different backgrounds and ambitions an alternative to the traditional brick and mortar classroom. It gives the struggling student who is prone to drop out of school a different option, with more flexibility. Crate Price is an eleven year old from Hilliard, Ohio who is set to graduate from ECOT at the age of sixteen. He is an advanced student who enrolled at the age of ten because he failed to fit in among his peers in the traditional classroom; consequently, his classmates teased him when he talked about things they could not understand. Crate is an inquisitive young man who enjoys building computer programs with his father, and immerses himself in anything science related. After high school, he plans to attend a four-year school in a technology related field. Sadly, talented students like Crate are the exception, rather than the majority of students who attend e schools. Graduation rates are very low, never topping 40 percent, and less than one in 10 students goes on to attend a postsecondary school (Bloom and O'Donnell, 2012, para. 2). Ohio is home to the second largest online education population, yet the priority seems to be less focused on student success and more focused on how to make a profit. The Electronic Classroom of Tomorrow (ECOT), is a well funded, money making machine for its founders, who created a school that has been no stranger to controversy during the 12 years since it was created. "I became a teacher for the money" or "I went into education for the financial freedom it would provide" are statements rarely, if ever, uttered by educators, so how have ECOT's founders enjoyed such wealth when their school is failing at every turn?

William Lager founded ECOT, regarded as a public community school, in 2000 under an agreement with the Lucas County Educational Service Center (ESC). The State Board of Education initially rejected it, until the e school gained a sponsorship through the Lucas County ESC because the board questioned ECOT's ability to account for its students. Although there is

no direct mention of him on the district website, the school is managed by Lager's company, Altair Learning Management, and it has enjoyed steadily increasing funding during the 12 years it has been in operation, despite its consistent rating as a poorly performing school district. Furthermore, the school employs Lager's daughter as its director, also not mentioned on the website, and his company reaps the financial benefits funded by Ohio taxpayers.

ECOT is the largest online school in Ohio, the state with the second highest online enrollment in the nation ("ecotnews," 2013). Although William Lager, a former office supply company executive, has no previous educational background, his company secures nearly 12 million dollars annually from ECOT for providing curriculum and other services. This is on top of the nearly 64 million dollars ECOT receives each year in state funding (Mencimer, 2011, para. 31-33). Currently, the enrollment in community schools is growing at twice the rate of brick and mortar schools, despite the lack of accountability, and ECOT sits comfortably at the top of e school enrollment with little competition because no new e schools have been founded in Ohio since 2005. Although enrollment is high, the lack of accountability has caused ECOT (and other community schools) to be marred in several controversies since its inception.

Starting in 2005, the state imposed a moratorium on any new e schools (community schools) until the state board passed accountability measures and standards. However, according to a study by Innovation Ohio (2011), the State Board of Education has been attempting to pass the completed measures since 2003, two years prior to the moratorium. For roughly ten years, they have been awaiting adoption by the general assembly ("Funding Failure, p. 2). Although Gov. Kasich initially attempted to repeal the moratorium, state Republicans restored it to the 2010 budget bill (p. 4). The logic would seem befuddling to an outsider, but Republicans and a few Ohio Democrats have been receiving hefty campaign contributions from Lager since 2001,

totally over two million dollars, which has led to a continued moratorium, ensuring his school's high enrollment numbers, which garners Lager's school increased funding from the state.

If the general assembly continues to ignore the approval of the state board accountability measures and standards, no new e schools can operate in Ohio, thus funneling more money into the pockets of Lager and other ECOT directors, who in turn contribute heavily to the campaigns of politicians who are keeping the bill from coming to a vote in the general assembly. This type of political maneuvering was characterized by Tom Mooney in 2002, the president of the American Federation of Teachers, as "really being run by Bozo and Clarabell. [Mooney claimed that management company] Altair Learning Management had no background in education or technology" (Trotter, para. 4). However, Mooney also stated that they were "shrewd enough to smell a really good opportunity" (Trotter, para. 5). Mooney has been opposed to charter schools since their inception, and although his position is subjective, it is accurate. ECOT was created as an opportunity to make money—and they will blur the lines between what is right and wrong time and time again in order to make it.

In 2001, just one year after ECOT was founded, Ohio Auditor Jim Petro revealed that ECOT had "received \$1.7 million in state payments for students who may not have met enrollment requirements in September and October of 2000" (Trotter, para. 1). The audit found "that while the state had paid to educate more than 2,000 students during one month, a mere seven kids had actually logged on to ECOT's computer system; state auditors couldn't verify that the rest of its student body even existed" (Mencimer, 2011, para. 9). This was a pattern that continued for several years, even after they were forced to repay the \$1.7 million dollars in inflated funding payments over three years. From 2003-2006, ECOT reported perfect attendance to the state, thus granting the school inflated tax dollars for student enrollment.

The peculiar attendance rate prompted another investigation in 2006; consequently the Ohio Department of Education intervened and changed the way charter schools could take attendance. Nine of the charter schools affected were cyber schools, “including the state largest, the Electronic Classroom of Tomorrow. ECOT, which had 6,664 students last year [in 2005-06], reported 100 percent attendance to the state, but expelled 1,946 chronically truant students; 29 percent of its enrollment” (Bush, 2006, para. 3). Calculating student attendance at cyber schools is much different from brick and mortar schools. In order for a student to have perfect attendance at a cyber school they must perform 920 hours of work per year (Bush, para. 9). But even this is hard to prove, unless all work is being performed on the school platform learning management system. ECOT Superintendent Jeffrey Forster called the Ohio Department of Education (ODE) disingenuous and stood behind their attendance calculations. ECOT claimed to employ three regionally based part time police officers “who cover the entire state for the school, checking up on truant students who miss more than 15 days of logging on for classes” (Bush, para. 11). However, with such high enrollment, how can three part time officers feasibly keep track of every truant student across the state of Ohio? According to Bush (2006), this is not possible. “If those officers worked five days a week, 52 weeks a year, they would have needed to visit 2.5 students a day, on average, just to cover the 1,946 whom ECOT expelled for truancy” (para. 13). ECOT seems less interested in the wellbeing and success of its students than it does reaping financial benefits of high attendance.

Under ECOT’s charter with the state of Ohio, they are prohibited from opening physical classrooms, which they believe restricts their ability to grow because most parents cannot afford to be stay at home parents in today’s economy. In order to make a heftier profit, the school has found ways around the restrictions set in their charter. In order to fetch higher school

reimbursement “it has enrolled students in places that serve at risk kids, such as homes for pregnant teens and residential treatment centers” (Mencimer, 2011, para. 18). This allows students to “supplement their home learning by using an ECOT computer at a designated location ... ECOT even set up a computer lab at an old gas station” (para. 19) for student use, and company profit. In 2006, the state again investigated ECOT and focused on three labs that violated a host of laws and were ultimately shut down. ECOT continues to find new ways to secure states funds and there is no boundary they will not cross. In 2007, another company filed a lawsuit against the school because “one of the people helping ECOT broaden its student body was its head of “alternative learning communities,” Alex Kadenyi” (para. 20). This man had a lengthy arrest record, which included several convictions for drunk driving offenses and resisting arrest. Kadenyi was caught supplementing his own income in 2007, when he was caught smuggling drugs into the Medina County jail. Later, when he was out on probation, he violated his terms of probation by testing positive for cocaine (para. 21). If ECOT is willing to hire men like Kadenyi, with a past riddled with arrests, where will ECOT’s directors draw the line in their quest to make money?

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ECOT, teachers comprise just 17 percent of the school's budget" (para. 37), which is higher than the Ohio Virtual Academy—an oft compared school, where the salaries make up only 11 percent of the budget (para. 37). In Ohio public schools, the average teacher salary is \$56,000, but at ECOT the average teacher salary is roughly \$34,000 (para. 37). There is a huge gap between the educators, and their directors, who according to Buckeye Data Institute all made well over \$100,000 dollars last year. Additionally, charter schools do not have a union, and a teacher can be fired at any time, without any notice. The student to teacher ratio is high as well. Some online schools have as many as 100 students to one teacher, but the Ohio Virtual Academy averages one teacher to every 51 students and ECOT averages one teacher to every 35 students (para. 34-35), a number that is still very high compared to public schools. ECOT is not willing to pay a competitive salary in order to recruit quality educators because their main focus is making money for those at the top, most notably, William Lager, who in turn returns the favor to the politicians who are helping him profit from the business of education.

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Research Paper Feedback

Research Paper Rubric			
Criteria	Ratings		Pts
Well developed thesis that sets up paper Instructor Comments Excellent thesis and intro!	Full Marks 10 pts	No Marks 0 pts	10 / 10 pts
Gives relevant information about the subject from various perspectives; excludes extraneous details and inappropriate information Instructor Comments Excellent information given. I think I actually gasped several times while reading what you uncovered.	Full Marks 10 pts	No Marks 0 pts	10 / 10 pts
Records important ideas, concepts, and direct quotations from a variety of reliable and appropriate information sources Instructor Comments Source information was used nicely throughout the paper.	Full Marks 10 pts	No Marks 0 pts	10 / 10 pts
Paraphrases and summarizes various perspectives on the topic Instructor Comments	Full Marks 10 pts	No Marks 0 pts	10 / 10 pts
Ideas are logically grouped and sequenced within paragraphs and across parts of the paper Instructor Comments Great organization throughout the paper.	Full Marks 15 pts	No Marks 0 pts	15 / 15 pts
Documents resources (e.g., bibliography, in-text citations) and avoids plagiarism Instructor Comments Good use of APA format.	Full Marks 15 pts	No Marks 0 pts	15 / 15 pts
Engages the reader and develops reader interest by establishing context Instructor Comments Very interesting material presented.	Full Marks 10 pts	No Marks 0 pts	10 / 10 pts
The writer's voice is distinctive; word choice is varied and precise throughout; reflects graduate-level ability Instructor Comments	Full Marks 10 pts	No Marks 0 pts	10 / 10 pts
Sentences are varied in structure and length; errors are minor and infrequent Instructor Comments	Full Marks 10 pts	No Marks 0 pts	10 / 10 pts
			Total Points: 100

Education as Big Business:

Where are Ohio's Priorities?

Brooke E. Kukay

Bowling Green State University

Online schools offer a diverse population of students with different backgrounds and ambitions an alternative to the traditional brick and mortar classroom. It gives the struggling student who is prone to drop out of school a different option, with more flexibility. Crate Price is an eleven year old from Hilliard, Ohio who is set to graduate from ECOT at the age of sixteen. He is an advanced student who enrolled at the age of ten because he didn't fit in among his peers in the traditional classroom, and his classmates teased him when he talked about things they didn't understand. Crate enjoys building computer programs with his father, and anything science related. After high school, he plans to attend a four year school in a tech related field. Sadly, students like Crate are the exception, rather than the majority of students who attend e schools. Graduation rates are very low, never topping 40 percent, and less than one in ten students goes on to attend a postsecondary school (Bloom and O'Donnell, 2012, par. 2). Ohio is home to the second largest online education population, yet the priority seems to be less focused on student success and more focused on how to make a profit. The Electronic Classroom of Tomorrow (ECOT), is a well funded, money making machine for its founders, who created a school that has been no stranger to controversy during the 12 since it was created. "I became a teacher for the money" or "I went into education for the financial freedom it would provide" are statements rarely, if ever, uttered by educators, so how have ECOT's founders enjoyed such wealth when their school is failing at every turn?

ECOT, regarded as a public community school, was founded by William Lager in 2000 under an agreement with the Lucas County Educational Service Center (ESC). It was initially rejected by the State Board of Education, until it gained a sponsorship through the Lucas County ESC because the board questioned ECOT's ability to account for its students. Although there is no direct mention of him on the district website, the school is managed by Lager's company,

Altair Learning Management, and it has enjoyed steadily increasing funding during the 12 years it has been in operation, despite being a poorly performing school district. The school employs Lager's daughter as its director, also not mentioned on the website, and his company reaps the financial benefits funded by Ohio taxpayers.

ECOT is the largest online school in Ohio, the state with the second highest online enrollment in the nation ("ecotnews," 2013). Although William Lager, a former office supply company executive, has no previous educational background, his company secures nearly 12 million dollars annually from ECOT for providing curriculum and other services. This is on top of the nearly 64 million dollars ECOT receives each year in state funding (Mencimer, 2011, par. 31-33). Currently, the enrollment in community schools is growing at twice the rate of brick and mortar schools, despite the lack of accountability, and ECOT sits comfortably at the top of e school enrollment with little competition because no new e schools have been founded in Ohio since 2005. Although enrollment is high, the lack of accountability has caused ECOT (and other community schools) to be marred in several controversies since its inception.

Starting in 2005, the state imposed a moratorium on any new e schools (community schools) until the state board passed accountability measures and standards. However, according to a study by Innovation Ohio (2011), the State Board of Education has been attempting to pass the completed measures since 2003, two years prior to the moratorium. For roughly ten years, they have been awaiting adoption by the general assembly ("Funding Failure, pg. 2). Although Gov. Kasich initially attempted to repeal the moratorium, state Republicans restored it to the 2010 budget bill (pg. 4). The logic would seem befuddling to an outsider, but Republicans and a few Ohio Democrats have been receiving hefty campaign contributions from Lager since 2001, totally over two million dollars, which has lead to the continued moratorium.

If the general assembly continues to ignore the approval of the state board accountability measures and standards, no new e schools can operate in Ohio, thus funneling more money into the pockets of Lager and other ECOT directors, who in turn contribute heavily to the campaigns of politicians who are keeping the bill from coming to a vote in the general assembly. This type of political maneuvering was characterized by Tom Mooney in 2002, the president of the American Federation of Teachers, as “really being run by Bozo and Clarabell. [And claiming that management company] Altair Learning Management had no background in education or technology” (Trotter, par. 4). Yet, Mooney also stated that they were “shrewd enough to smell a really good opportunity” (Trotter, par. 5). Mooney has been opposed to charter schools since their inception, and his position is biased, yet accurate. ECOT was created as an opportunity to make money—and they will blur the lines between what is right and wrong time and time again in order to make it.

In 2001, just one year after ECOT was founded, Ohio Auditor Jim Petro revealed that ECOT had “received \$1.7 million in state payments for students who may not have met enrollment requirements in September and October of 2000” (Trotter, par. 1). The audit found “that while the state had paid to educate more than 2,000 students during one month, a mere seven kids had actually logged on to ECOT’s computer system; state auditors couldn’t verify that the rest of its student body even existed” (Mencimer, 2011, par. 9). This was a pattern that continued for several years, even after they were forced to repay the \$1.7 million dollars in inflated funding costs over three years. From 2003-2006, ECOT reported perfect attendance, thus granting the school inflated tax dollars for student enrollment.

This prompted another investigation in 2006; consequently the Ohio Department of Education intervened and changed the way charter schools could take attendance. Nine of the

charter schools affected were cyber schools, “including the state largest, the Electronic Classroom of Tomorrow. ECOT, which had 6,664 students last year [in 2005-06], reported 100 percent attendance to the state, but expelled 1,946 chronically truant students; 29 percent of its enrollment” (Bush, 2006, par. 3). Calculating student attendance at cyber schools is much different from brick and mortar schools. In order for a student to have perfect attendance at a cyber school they must perform 920 hours of work per year (Bush, par. 9). But even this is hard to prove, unless all work is being performed on the school platform. ECOT Superintendent Jeffrey Forster called the ODE disingenuous and stood behind their attendance calculations. ECOT claimed to employ three regionally based part time police officers “who cover the entire state for the school, checking up on truant students who miss more than 15 days of logging on for classes” (Bush, par. 11). However, with such high enrollment, how can three part time officers feasibly keep track of every truant student across the state of Ohio? According to Bush (2006), this isn’t possible. “If those officers worked five days a week, 52 weeks a year, they would have needed to visit 2.5 students a day, on average, just to cover the 1,946 whom ECOT expelled for truancy” (par. 13). ECOT seems less interested in the well being and success of its students than it does reaping financial benefits of high attendance.

Under ECOT’s charter with the state of Ohio, they are prohibited from opening physical classrooms, which they believe restricts their ability to grow because most parents cannot afford to be stay at home parents in today’s economy. In order to make a heftier profit, the school has found ways around the restrictions set in their charter. In order to fetch higher school reimbursement “it has enrolled students in places that serve at risk kids, such as homes for pregnant teens and residential treatment centers” (Mencimer, 2011, par. 18). This allows students to “supplement their home learning by using an ECOT computer at a designated

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Brooke E. Kukay

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ENG 6040

7 July 2014 (Revised)

The American Education System—Big Business for Billionaires

“Oh, by the way, the Ohio standards for English are changing dramatically. Everything is going to be nonfiction, and informational texts. You can throw out all that old stuff—Shakespeare, Thoreau, Salinger—they’re all gone.” When my Curriculum Director relayed this information to me three years ago, I was stunned. The notion of eliminating the very works that stirred within me an indescribable, insatiable appetite for literature, and later inspired me to become an English teacher was appalling. Did my college education, steeped in rich literature courses, suddenly mean nothing? Who was implementing this drastic change? Seeking answers, I was dismayed at the realization the switch to informational texts was part of Ohio’s mandated education reform.

In June 2010, Ohio’s state Board of Education entered the Race to the Top (RttT) competition, and consequently agreed to a bevy of reforms. To be eligible for the \$4.35 billion available in funding, states were required to adopt the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) in English language arts (ELA) and mathematics, implement the aligned standardized assessments (known as PARCC), and require a value added teacher evaluation system (OTES), designed to evaluate educators by their students’ academic progress. Teachers and administrators across Ohio and the nation were baffled and overwhelmed by the swift and immense changes, but one thing was clear—educators were widely viewed as the source of America’s perceived education woes. Although the standards were implemented to improve education, empirical and rhetorical

evidence indicate the new English language arts standards—a result of the United States subpar international education rankings from 2009—ultimately widen the achievement gap. The 2009 rankings prompted a comprehensive reform of education, erroneously influenced by private sector billionaires and government officials, whose motivation for change was not dedicated to improving education for students, rather a desire to profit financially and politically from the U.S. education system.

1. A (Misguided) Call to Action

Although the newest wave of education reform launched in 2009, the ideology of tying the standards to college and career readiness began in 2004, during the years of No Child Left Behind, when a multi year report conducted by Achieve, Inc. was released. The report, titled “Ready or Not: Creating a High School Diploma that Counts” declared: “The diploma has lost its value because what it takes to earn one is disconnected from what it takes for graduates to compete successfully beyond high school—either in the classroom or in the workplace” (1). The report brought the supposed deficiencies and inequality of America’s state-by-state education standards to light, and lead both state and national leaders on a quest to reform the standards in order to better prepare students for college and careers post high school graduation.

Several years later, scores from the 2009 Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), considered by some, as the most comprehensive of all exams that compare educational levels across nations, appeared to further justify the need for national reform. The results “show 15-year-old students in the U.S. performing about average in reading and science, and below average in math. Out of 34 [developed] countries, the U.S. ranked 14th in reading, 17th in science and 25th in math” (“In Ranking” par. 2). Although the results were an improvement over the 2003 and 2006 reports, they were still far behind the highest performing countries. It

was the subpar PISA ranking that prompted swift action among lawmakers. Upon release of the results, U.S. Education Secretary Arne Duncan declared, “This is an absolute wake-up call for America. The results are extraordinarily challenging to us and we have to deal with the brutal truth. We have to get much more serious about investing in education” (qtd. in “In Ranking” par. 4). Duncan’s announcement relayed a sense of urgency, and reformers quickly answered the call to action.

However, PISA, the assessment tool that initiated an education revolution was deemed disingenuous by numerous education scholars. In late January 2013, Martin Carnoy and Richard Rothstein released a comprehensive analysis of international tests by Stanford and the Economic Policy Institute, which asserts that U.S. schools are not being outpaced by the international competition. The report, published in January of 2013, titled “What Do International Tests Really Show About U.S. Student Performance?” focused on the oversimplifications and inaccuracies relayed in the 2009 PISA results. The scores, “Ignore the complexity of test results and . . . lead policymakers to pursue inappropriate and even harmful reforms” (Carnoy and Rothstein 2). The report speculates the ulterior motives behind releasing the average national scores five weeks before publishing the disaggregated scores, which focus on students’ social and economic characteristics, their school composition, and other informative criteria that allows analysts to draw conclusions with more extreme care and accuracy (Carnoy and Rothstein 2).

Upon examination of the disaggregated data, “the U.S. rankings on the 2009 PISA test in reading and math would rise, respectively, to sixth from 14th and to 13th from 25th after controlling for social class differences and a sampling error by PISA and after eliminating between-country differences that are statistically too small to meaningfully affect a country’s ranking” (Carnoy and Rothstein 3-4). Among many inaccuracies, the report discovered a

sampling error that allowed for an over representation of students from the most disadvantaged schools in the U.S., which further depressed the average test scores. According to the Stanford Report, the rush to release the scores:

Is a puzzling strategy, which ensured that policymakers and commentators would draw quick and perhaps misleading interpretations from the results. This is especially the case because analysis of the international database takes time, and headlines from the initial release are likely to be sealed in conventional wisdom by the time scholars have had the opportunity to complete a careful study.

(Carnoy and Rothstein 3)

Arne Duncan did not wait for the release of the comprehensive report before calling for a major overhaul in the education system. On February 17, 2009 President Barack Obama signed into law the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, which, among other things, set aside roughly \$4.35 billion for states to compete for funding under the RttT Initiative.

According to the U.S. Department of Education (ED), the new education reform initiative “marks a historic moment in American education. This initiative offers bold incentives to states willing to spur systemic reform to improve teaching and learning in America’s schools”

(“Knowledge and Skills” par. 1). The Department of Education concludes that a commitment to the RttT initiative embraces a reform of the following four key areas:

- Development of rigorous standards and better assessments
- Adoption of better data systems to provide schools, teachers, and parents with information about student progress
- Support for teachers and school leaders to become more effective
- Increased emphasis and resources for the rigorous interventions needed to

turn around the lowest-performing schools. (par. 3)

The initiative was well under way by the time the appropriately adjusted and more accurate PISA international ranking was released. The improved ranking was scarcely publicized because it did not fit the reform that policy makers and their like-minded generous donors wanted to portray in the media. Although there is always room for improvement, the success rate of American students was not nearly as dire as initially reported; yet the criticism of public educators and their curriculum was brutal and unrelenting. The criticism opened the door for private foundations to influence educational policy at unprecedented levels.

Michelle Rhee, an outspoken and polarizing figure in education, is the founder and head of the organization, StudentsFirst. Private donors have provided her a mindboggling amount of financial contributions necessary to rail against teachers, and our current education system. Rhee's brief time in education was mired in scandal; nevertheless, her unrelenting focus on education reform and anti union stance attracts funding from high-powered donors such as the Gates Foundation, Rupert Murdoch, the Walton Foundation, and the Koch brothers, among others. Rhee has frequently propagandized her audiences at speaking engagements and used the incomplete data provided in the initial release of the 2009 PISA scores as ammunition in her attack on the state of education in our economy. As Valerie Strauss describes:

Rhee has been given a platform to misinform. She doesn't explain that, at the insistence of policymakers, and unlike other countries, America tests every kid—the mentally disabled, the sick, the hungry, the homeless, the transient, the troubled, those for whom English is a second language. That done, the scores are lumped together. She doesn't even hint that when the scores of the disadvantaged aren't counted, American students are at the top. (Strauss par 18-19)

Rhee is a compelling and energizing speaker, who earns \$50,000 per appearance, plus first class travel and accommodations to misinform her audiences regarding issues in America's schools. She has an immeasurable amount of influence, despite her lack of classroom experience, and her brief tenure as Chancellor of D.C.'s public schools that was marred with controversy and deceit.

In an article titled "Michelle Rhee is Shameless," Former U.S. Assistant Secretary of Education, Diane Ravitch, condemned Rhee's attacks on education. One example of her agenda driven and audacious tactics against educators was a thirty-second ad created by Rhee's organization StudentsFirst. The commercial showed an overweight U.S. Olympian rolling around, struggling to stand and compete, and compared the Olympian to the inaccurate 2009 PISA scores as evidence failing education system in America. Ravitch was outraged by the commercial and described it as a disgusting lie that smeared America, our teachers, and our students (par. 1-4). Ravitch responded to the deceptive ad with a few facts:

- 1) The US was never first on international tests. When the first test was given in 1964 (a test of math), our students came in 11th out of 12.
- 2) On the latest international tests, students in American schools with low poverty (10% or less) came in FIRST in the world.
- 3) As poverty goes up in American schools, test scores go down.
- 4) The U.S. has the highest child poverty rate—23%— of any advanced nation in the world. Michelle Rhee says nothing about poverty, which is the most direct correlate of low-test scores. (par. 9-14)

Unfortunately, the facts were overshadowed by well-funded and high-powered voices who voiced a more attention inducing, although dishonest tale of the education woes in America. Regardless of the flawed data, plans for a complete overhaul of the education system were well

underway, and Obama's RttT Initiative was creating a highly contentious atmosphere in the education community.

2. The Development and Adoption of the CCSS

In 2009, the National Governors Association (NGA) and the Council of Chief State School Officers, lucratively financed by the Gates Foundation, spearheaded the movement for education reform. Their goal was to create standards that would allow American students to compete globally—both academically and in the work place—and they hired the organization Achieve the Core (also funded by the Gates Foundation) to create new education standards for college and career readiness. Many have questioned how an “unelected, unrepresentative networking forum quickly became a serious driver of education policy changes for the nation” (Pullman par. 5). The answer is quite simple: educators cannot compete with politically motivated big businesses and billionaires who seek power and fortune through education reform, most notably the Gates Foundation, which has poured nearly \$500 million and counting into the reform effort.

In 2010, the well-funded team at Achieve the Core, lead by “architect” of the standards David Coleman (who also served as Treasurer of Michelle Rhee's organization StudentsFirst during this time), released the Common Core State Standards in English language arts and mathematics. Achieve the Core describes the new standards as follows:

The Common Core State Standards Initiative is a state-led effort that established a single set of clear educational standards for kindergarten through 12th grade in English language arts and mathematics that states voluntarily adopt. The standards are designed to ensure that students graduating from high school are prepared to enter credit bearing entry courses in two or four-year college

programs or enter the workforce. The standards are clear and concise to ensure that parents, teachers, and students have a clear understanding of the expectations in reading, writing, speaking and listening, language and mathematics in school. (CCSS “FAQ”)

More specifically, the three key shifts in the CCSS English language arts and literacy standards are as follows:

1. Informational Text: *Building knowledge through content-rich nonfiction and informational texts.*

At the elementary level, the standards call for a 50-50 balance between informational texts and literature. They shift the emphasis to 55 percent informational by middle school, and 70 percent by high school. Such reading includes content-rich nonfiction in history/social studies, science, and the arts. Informational text is seen as a way for students to build coherent general knowledge, as well as reading and writing skills.

2. Citing Evidence: *Reading and writing grounded in evidence from text.*

The standards place a premium on students’ use of evidence from texts to present careful analyses and well-defended claims. Rather than asking students questions they can answer solely from their prior knowledge or experience, the standards envision students’ answering questions that depend on reading texts with care. The standards also require the cultivation of narrative writing throughout the grades. The reading standards focus on students’ ability to read carefully and grasp information, arguments, ideas, and details based on evidence.

3. Complex Text: *Regular practice with complex text and its academic vocabulary.*

The standards build a “staircase” of increasing text complexity to prepare students for the types of texts they must read to be ready for the demands of college and careers. Closely related to text complexity, and inextricably connected to reading comprehension, is a focus on academic vocabulary: words that appear in a variety of content areas (such as “ignite” and “commit”). (CCSS “FAQ”)

Because adoption of the CCSS was a requirement for states vying for RttT funding, the majority of states quickly adopted the standards. Unfortunately, the rush for funding outweighed a careful consideration of quality of the new standards—prior to adoption.

Although a federal law prohibits the ED from mandating national curriculum standards, Duncan and Obama skirted the law by using Race to the Top funds as incentive for state adoption. “It was well understood by states that they would not be eligible for RttT funding (\$4.35 billion) unless they adopted the Common Core State Standards” (“Why I Cannot” par. 13). Even though congress, the ED, or state and local governments never voted on the CCSS, they were initially adopted by forty-six states and the District of Columbia, despite evidence that some state standards were superior to the CCSS because every state wanted their share of the federal funds. In an article by Diane Ravitch, educational historian and policy analyst, Ravitch affirms: “The former Texas State Commissioner of Education, Robert Scott, has stated for the record that he was urged to adopt the Common Core standards before they were written” (“Why I Cannot” par. 14). Some states already enforced existing state standards that were indeed superior to the CCSS, and well tested, but they were nonetheless replaced with the Common Core in a frantic effort to expand educational funding.

In 2010, the right leaning Fordham Institute released a study, financed by a one million dollar grant from the Gates Foundation. Unsurprisingly, the report found thirty-nine states across the union with existing standards deemed inferior to the CCSS. The researchers listed only California, Indiana, and the District of Columbia as clearly superior to the CCSS. The handful of remaining states were listed as “too close to call” (Carmichael, et al 302). Texas, among the states considered too close to call, was first ranked as clearly superior, and had their 2008 English language arts/reading standards compared to the CCSS. Fordham initially gave Texas an A-, and the CCSS a B+ (Carmichael, et al 304), but later reversed the scores when Texas refused to adopt the CCSS. The initial judgment reveals the Fordham Institute’s overall conclusion, prior to the reversal:

Texas’s ELA standards are more clearly written, better presented, and logically organized than the Common Core standards. The Texas standards include expectations that more thoroughly address the comprehension and analysis of literary and non-literary text than Common Core, including helpful, detailed standards that outline genre-specific content and rhetorical techniques. In addition, Texas has prioritized writing genres by grade level. Grade: A-.

(Carmichael, et al 304)

There was no reasoning given for the Texas state standard downgrade, but speculation cites their refusal to sign onto the CCSS, as well as pressure from the Gates Foundation. If their standards were superior, why would they need to adopt inferior education standards? The question that should be asked by the Fordham Institute and the Gates Foundation is—how do we best serve our students? Not, how do we pressure all states to adopt the Common Core?

Today, the lone holdouts are Minnesota, Alaska, Texas, Nebraska, and Virginia.

Minnesota made the unique decision to adopt only the English language arts standards because state officials believe the new benchmarks for mathematics lack the rigor of their own state standards. Indiana initially adopted the standards in 2010, but followed in the steps of Georgia and Oklahoma last fall when they dropped out of their commitment to the CCSS and the adopted standardized achievement tests, PARCC, which stands for the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers. Currently, state officials nationwide are in a rush to repeal the standards and mandated achievement tests in multiple states, claiming a multitude of reasons why the education reform is failing in their states.

3. Common Core Criticism

The CCSS lead writers, who controlled the CCSS Initiative were David Coleman and Susan Pimentel in English language arts, and Jason Zimba, Phil Daro, and William McCallum in mathematics. Of the five lead writers', Coleman and Zimba had no previous experience writing standards. Furthermore, the lead writers for the grade level ELA standards never taught reading or English in K-12 or the college level (Pullman par. 19). Sandra Stotsky, a committee member during the creation of the standards, reveals her reservations toward the ELA writers. "Neither has had a doctorate in English, nor had either or them ever published serious work on K-12 curriculum or instruction. Neither had a reputation for literary scholarship or research in education; they were virtually unknown to English language arts educators and to higher education faculty in rhetoric, speech, composition, or literary study" (Stotsky 2). Moreover, Coleman and Pimentel have left educators in the dark by failing to publicly define college and career readiness in ELA, or how specific texts constitute college and career readiness.

With the exception of the lead writers, the identity of the other CCSS writers has been shrouded in secrecy since their inception. There were two working committees (one each for

math and English language arts), each held roughly a dozen members, and both committees were separate from the Validation Committee. According to a report by Joy Pullman, a research fellow of The Heartland Institute, “While many people sat on these various committees, only one in 60 was a classroom teacher. All of the standards writing and discussions were sealed by confidentiality agreements, and held in private” (par. 14). The members of the committees had no idea what happened to their comments once they were submitted. They claimed, “the ‘facilitators’ for the Validation Committee (VC) were virtually impossible to work with” (par. 17) and just wanted the members to sign a final approval letter. This was in direct opposition of the charter, which stated the committee had final say over the quality of the standards and could revise as necessary. Although a handful of committee members ultimately refused to sign off on the Common Core, the opposition is conspicuously missing from the Validation Committee’s final report.

Sandra Stotsky, who is nationally known for her in depth analyses of the Common Core English language arts standards, was one of only five members of the twenty-nine appointed to the Validation Committee of the CCSS, who refused to sign off on the standards. It is unclear how or why certain individuals were chosen for the VC as no rationale was ever provided. “Similar to the composition of the Standards Development Work Group and the standards-writing teams, the VC contained almost no academic experts on ELA and mathematics standards; most were education professors or associated with testing companies, from here and abroad” (Stotsky 2). Stotsky was appalled by the lack of content experts on the VC, considering the CCSS was poised to initiate a sweeping reform across the nation.

Today, Sandra Stotsky is an outspoken advocate for a repeal of the CCSS. On November 20, 2013, Sandra Stotsky testified in front of the Ohio Education Committee, and delivered a

speech titled “Fatal Flaws in Common Core’s English Language Arts Standards.” Her testimony was a scathing and eye opening insider’s perspective on the creation of the CCSS. She claimed “The people who wrote the standards . . . were not qualified to draft standards intended to “transform instruction for every child” (Stotsky 3). And the Validation Committee that was created to put the seal of approval on the drafters’ work was useless if not misleading, both in its membership and in the procedures it had to follow” (Stotsky 1).

Sandra Stotsky, along with Professor James Milgram of Stanford University determined the Validation Committee was nothing more than a rubber stamp, despite the charge to validate the standards. Both Stotsky and Milgram repeatedly requested and were denied “the names of high achieving countries whose standards were supposedly used as benchmarks for the CCSS chiefly because CCSS were (intentionally) not internationally benchmarked (or made comparable to the most demanding sets of standards elsewhere); now the CCSS claims that it was “informed by” documents in other countries” (Stotsky 3). After being confronted, the lead writers changed the verbiage from “internationally benchmarked” to “internationally informed” (Bauerlein and Stotsky 5). They were offered no research evidence to support the emphasis on writing over reading, its division of informational texts and literature, or its claim regarding the value of reading informational texts in English classes. Stotsky claims, “It couldn’t because there is not evidence to support the Common Core’s revision of the K-12 curriculum. Nor did Common Core offer evidence that its standards meet entrance requirements for *most colleges and universities* in this country or elsewhere—or for a high school diploma in many states” (Bauerlein and Stotsky 4). Due to the lack of empirical evidence to validate the Common Core’s supposed college readiness standards, the changes adopted by state boards or commissioners had no legal basis.

4. English Language Arts Standards and Informational Texts

Among the three key shifts in the ELA standards is the shift to informational texts. The momentum behind the reform to transition to increased informational texts—50% in elementary and an increase to 70% in middle and high school—has baffled educators. The emphasis on informational texts addressed a need that stemmed from the 2004 report by Achieve, Inc. and the American Diploma Project. The report suggested “employers and college instructors found students weak at comprehending technical manuals, scientific and historical journals, and other texts pivotal to their work in those arenas” (“Districts Gird” 14). What the report lacked was evidence to back up their claim. An additional influence on the standards was the framework for the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) in reading, “which reflect an increasing emphasis on informational texts as students get older” (“Districts Gird” 14). Diane Ravitch disputed the legitimacy of aligning the ratios to NAEP, “which gives specifications to test-developers, not to classroom teachers . . . [therefore], the arbitrary ratios make no sense” (Ravitch par. 14). The question remains—why were educators left in the dark? And why have all attempts to justify the shift to informational texts through viable research been ignored?

Diane Ravitch has declared, “The flap over fiction vs. informational text further undermined my confidence in the standards. There is no reason for national standards to tell teachers what percentage of their time should be devoted to literature or information. Both can develop the ability to think critically” (par. 14). There are no studies to prove the validity of the ratios, and the new standards have caused many teachers to doubt their craft. Ethan Young, is a Tennessee high school senior who lives in a state that has been awarded \$500 million in RttT funds, largely due to Michelle Rhee’s personal commitment to reforming education in the state where her children attend school. The students and teachers in Tennessee are exasperated and

finally speaking out, and student Ethan Young delivered a stunningly eloquent speech regarding the Common Core at his school's monthly board meeting November 15, 2013. He stated, "Creativity, appreciation, inquisitiveness, these are impossible to scale. But they are the *purpose* of education, why our teachers teach, why I choose to learn" (Young). Many teachers feel stifled by the new reform and frustrated by the constant references to the need for increased rigor, as the reasoning behind the new standards. Yet the question remains, how have the new standards created more rigor?

Educators see the word rigor as nothing more than the newest buzz word in education. The standards are not more rigorous; they are just different. Sandra Stotsky and Mark Bauerlein agree. After analyzing examples of complexity in high school texts, Stotsky determined "the average reading level of the passages on the common tests now being developed to determine 'college readiness' may be at about the grade seven level" (Bauerlein and Stotsky 3). After their time on the CCSS Validation Committee was completed, Bauerlein and Stotsky penned *A Pioneer Institute White Paper* titled "How Common Core's ELA Standards Place College Readiness at Risk." In the paper, Stotsky criticizes the ELA standards as "empty skill sets that cannot lead to even a meaningful high school diploma" (2). As the empirical data against the CCSS continues to come to light, it is becoming increasingly difficult to support the mandated education reform.

Furthering the frustration is the lack of adequate guidance provided in many states and across local districts. Even worse is the constant stream of misinformation, or a misinterpretation of the guidance offered from local, regional, and state leaders. In Ohio, the policies are shifting month-to-month, week-to-week—even day-to-day. At virtually every professional development training seminar teachers and administrators from our district have

attended over the past two years, we have learned information that differs from previous training seminars. Additionally, Governor Kasich's deep funding cuts to public education have made it impossible for the majority of teachers in most districts to receive the appropriate training because districts cannot afford to pay the costly workshop fees, nor do districts want to pay for increasingly inaccurate training. The varied understandings of the policies have caused unnecessary and bitter disputes over who is misinterpreting the standards or policies being released at the state level.

The misunderstandings continue inside the classrooms, as teachers are wary of how to properly implement the standards. Various English teachers have reported that the shift to informational texts has changed the way they approach education, and strengthened their instruction while enriching their curriculum by blending fiction and nonfiction. Kathy Powers, a twenty-year veteran fifth/sixth grade English teacher from Arkansas has embraced the blend of the two genres. "In the past, I would teach fiction and explore more narrative writing, and leave it to the social studies teachers to teach nonfiction, but doing both makes my instruction stronger. It's a stretch for me, but it's more beneficial for my students" ("Teachers Differ" 13). Powers also admits that in order to make this transition she had to cut out many of her beloved fiction texts. However, if implemented correctly, English teachers should not have to cut a large portion of their fiction texts, as informational texts should be taught in every classroom. So, why are English teachers being forced to restructure their curriculum while other subject areas remain unchanged?

Ideally, students should be encountering all types of texts throughout the school day, but nationwide, there appears to be a disconnect—a lack of accountability regarding implementation of informational texts across the curriculum. Jamie Highfill is an 8th grade English teacher who

“found no room this year for her cherished nine-week unit on poetry. Ditto for her unit on comedy and parody” (“Teachers Differ” 11). Instead, she sprinkles pieces of her old poetry unit into the new curriculum whenever she can manage to make meaningful connections to new units, which focus primarily on informational texts. However, “she is dogged by concerns that students have lost something important, and much of what displaced it . . . is not a good match developmentally for her 8th graders” (“Teachers Differ” 11). She found the concepts too challenging and abstract for her students. One of her new texts is Malcolm Gladwell’s *Tipping Point*, and students struggled to comprehend and make meaningful connections to the text. Highfill, the 2011 Arkansas ELA Middle School Teacher of the Year, found herself dragging them through the book, just to get through it.

Dana Breitweiser, the head of the English language arts department for the Arkansas state department of education, believes as long as teachers are dedicated to cross curricular educational practices, the shift toward informational texts should be seamless and English teachers will not bear the burden. Breitweiser challenges the naysayers: “I would ask why you are cutting those chunks of literature if you've got a rich curriculum. Students should be reading from all types of text. It involves all the teachers a student encounters during the school day” (“Teachers Differ” 12). Dana Breitweiser presents a scenario that is ideal in theory, but unattainable in most districts due to misinformation, distrust, and a lack of satisfactory professional development necessary to properly implement the curriculum changes. Jamie Highfill resents Breitweiser’s statement and does not believe teachers are misinterpreting the standards as they have been presented. “I'm offended by that. It feels like a blame game. If it were that clear, why is there such a disconnect on a nationwide basis?” (“Teachers Differ” 12) Highfill echoes the unified concern of teachers across the country that feel rushed to make

widespread changes, while they remain unprepared for the 2014-15 full implementation of the new standards, achievement tests, and teacher evaluation system.

Jamie Highfill is not alone when she admits that in her district “there still seems to be more of a focus on English teachers’ using nonfiction in classrooms than the other content areas stepping up to the plate” (“Teachers Differ” 13). Susan Pimentel and David Coleman, lead authors of the ELA standards recognize the “mistaken belief” that literature and fiction “should take a backseat” in order to make room for informational texts in the high school ELA classroom (“Teachers Differ” 14). The inventors of the CCSS further state that critics and educators have misinterpreted the ratio between literature and informational texts. “The percentages . . . reflect the sum of student reading, not just reading in ELA settings. Teachers of senior English classes, for example, are not required to devote 70 percent of reading to informational texts. Rather, 70 percent of student reading across the grade should be informational” (Shanahan 14). Thus, according to the CCSS, English teachers will still be able to spend the majority of their time on literature. But who will enforce it? The reading of informational texts across the disciplines is a mandate, but teachers in other subjects see it as a more of a polite request.

The vast majority of ELA teachers are wary teachers in other subjects will fail to alter their curriculum to include informational texts. William Maniotis, a high school English teacher, interpreted the CCSS, and “he doesn’t conclude that he must drop a lot of fiction from his classroom, but upcoming assessments for the common standards, due to roll out in 2014-15, could exert a powerful influence on that” (“Teachers Differ” 15). Maniotis, a 17-year veteran teacher, foresees a struggle to maintain a balance between literature and informational texts once students begin taking assessments that are closely aligned to informational texts. “When the new test scores come out, and the focus is more on nonfiction, and the test scores go down, who are

they going to look to fix that? The English teachers” (qtd. in “Teachers Differ” 15) If you take into account the plummeting test scores and lack of proficient students who were assessed last year using a vendor assessment that was aligned to the CCSS in pilot states, it is inevitable the scores will tumble nationwide. The trepidation among English teachers is palpable—English teachers will be the easy scapegoat once the scores plunge and the public outrage will create a backlash against teachers.

Susan Pimentel places the responsibility for enforcing the shared text responsibility in the hands of teachers and local administrators. “If a lot of good, close reading of high-quality, challenging texts is going on in science and history classes, then the English language arts teachers need to carry less of that responsibility” (“Teachers Differ” 14). Pimentel urges English language arts teachers be a part of the change, and provide valuable input concerning the best way to provide quality instruction and stress close reading of informational texts in a cross disciplinary manner.

The idea of close reading, as required by the standards, appears to take a scientific, rather than literary approach to the analysis of a text. Essentially, close reading means reading to uncover layers of meaning that lead to deep comprehension. The Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) supplies clarification useful for teaching with Common Core standards in mind:

Close, analytic reading stresses engaging with a text of sufficient complexity directly and examining meaning thoroughly and methodically, encouraging students to read and reread deliberately. Directing student attention on the text itself empowers students to understand the central ideas and key supporting details. It also enables students to reflect on the meanings of individual words and

sentences; the order in which sentences unfold; and the development of ideas over the course of the text, which ultimately leads students to arrive at an understanding of the text as a whole. (“Common Core FAQ”)

This type of reading is guaranteed to deter the average student. Nor will it foster a love for literature in students. Dr. Anthony Esolen of Providence College, recently voiced his concerns against the standards:

What appalls me most about the standards . . . is the cavalier contempt for great works of human art and thought, in literary form. It is a sheer ignorance of the life of the imagination. We are not programming machines. We are teaching children. We are not producing functionaries, factory-like. We are to be forming the minds and hearts of men and women . . . to be human beings, honoring what is good and right and cherishing what is beautiful. (“Why I Cannot” par. 16)

The Common Core requires students to “engage with a text of sufficient complexity directly, and examine meaning thoroughly and methodically, encouraging students to read and reread deliberately” (CCSS “FAQ”). This type of engagement is meant to focus student attention on one text, in order to force them to repeatedly read the text until they comprehend the central ideas and key supporting details. Does this type of learning sound engaging? How will our students ever understand that literature was created for entertainment purposes?

The passion for literature is lost when “the focus is placed squarely on the text, not on making connections to outside experiences or dwelling on prior knowledge” (Greene par. 4). Personally, I find this to be the most disheartening mandate by the CCSS. As an English teacher, the most rewarding part of teaching literature is when I am observing my students make meaningful connections to the text. Reader-response theory recognizes the reader as an active

agent who imparts "real existence" to the work and completes its meaning through interpretation. The beauty of literature is sharing interpretations of the text through personal experience. Everyone has different life experiences, which influences the interpretation and evaluation of a text. The CCSS strips students of a critical thinking strategy that has proven fruitful in my classroom for many years, and I am hesitant to change my curriculum in order to align with untested standards that require me to shun the strategies I learned and embraced during my undergraduate and graduate work. The future of education seems dim, and many quality educators are considering deserting the occupation as the reforms have stripped the joy from teaching.

5. CCSS Aligned Assessments and Teacher Evaluations

“A teacher cannot be evaluated without his students, because as a craft, *teaching is an interaction*. Thus, how can you gauge a teacher’s success with no control of a student’s participation or interest? This relationship is at the heart of instruction and there will never be a system by which it is accurately measured” (Young). High school student Ethan Young voiced these astute words in his speech against the CCSS last fall. Although Ethan’s words are spot on, policy dictates that Ohio’s teachers must join his home state of Tennessee and fully implement the CCSS in 2014-15, so Ohio educators look to Tennessee and New York schools for guidance. The results of the new educational policies in the aforementioned states are causing increased trepidation among Ohio teachers concerned for not only their students, but also their job security.

New York has long been the pilot state for education reform. English teachers in Ohio and nationwide are apprehensive of the shift to more informational texts in the classroom, but they are agonizing over the impending PARCC exams, which are the newly designed, CCSS aligned standardized state achievement assessments. Although the new standards require the

informational text ratios to be achieved across the disciplines, English teachers continue to worry their students achievement scores will falter if teachers of science and history refrain from expanding their focus to include an emphasis on informational texts. Especially because of the loathed implementation of the Ohio Teacher Evaluation System (OTES), the data driven, newly formed standardized test-based educator evaluation system, which includes fifty percent of a teacher's evaluation is determined by growth measures and tied to proficiency test scores.

The fear among educators is not unfounded. In the 2012-13 school year, New York tested their students with the newly aligned CCSS achievement tests for the first time. According to a report from the Annenberg Institute for School Reform, "Nearly two-thirds of city students failed the higher-standards math and reading tests, but districts with large percentages of high-needs students did especially poor" (Chapman and Lestch par. 1). An open letter to parents co-authored by Carol Burris, New York's 2013 Principal of the Year, states that children reacted adversely to the new assessments. "We know that many children cried during or after testing, and others vomited or lost control of their bowels or bladders. Others simply gave up. One teacher reported that a student kept banging his head on the desk, and wrote, 'this is too hard,' and 'I can't do this,' throughout his test booklet" (Burris, et al par. 6). One year later, many districts in Ohio piloted the PARCC exams, and during the spring of the 2013-14 school year my former boss, now the Assistant Superintendent of a local educational service center, reported similar behavior patterns among distressed students, especially in elementary schools. He was taken aback at the visceral reaction students were having as he traveled to various districts to glean first hand knowledge of the new testing procedures. He was fairly aware of the issues exposed by the students and educators in New York the year before, yet he told me he was

unprepared for what he viewed firsthand—an unfathomable strain on students and educators that he had never encountered during his twenty-five years in education.

Unfortunately, in New York the low passing rate was predicted prior to administering the test in the spring of 2013. Deputy Commissioner Slentz (NY), released a memo in March of the same year that “stated that proficiency scores (i.e., passing rate) on the new assessments would range between 30%-37% statewide” (Burris, et al. par. 7). Subsequently, when scores were released in August 2013, the statewide proficiency rate was announced as thirty-one percent, an abysmal number that fails to accurately gauge teacher and student performance. Prior to the publication of the New York scores, teachers and principals were alarmed by the number of unclear test questions that occurred on both the math and English tests. “Many teachers and principals could not agree on the correct answers to ambiguous questions in both ELA and math. Identical passages and questions appeared on more than one test and at more than one grade level. One school reported that on one day of the ELA Assessment, the same passage with identical questions was included in the third, fourth AND fifth grade ELA Assessments” (Burris, et al par. 5). Among the other concerns outlined in the letter were the length (with many students unable to complete the questions in the time allotted) and sheer number of mandated tests, benchmarks that were set too high, and test scores dramatically lower and contradictory to other mandated proficiency tests.

Next year, Ohio educators can expect the same abysmal scores, which will—as predicted—further the achievement gap in education. The fallacy that the new state standards, which supplant literature with 70% informational texts in high school, will better prepare our students for college and careers is not the solution to our trailing education rankings, and the misinformation regarding the implementation of informational texts will undoubtedly place the

burden solely in the hands of English teachers. Teachers and administrators in Ohio are watching state legislators closely, eagerly advocating for a moratorium on the CCSS. The state has continued to establish unwavering deadlines as we rush toward full implementation, but for a multitude of reasons, our teachers and administrators are simply not prepared to fully implement the education reform agreed to under Race to the Top. In August, Ohio Representative Andy Thompson, sponsored House Bill 237, which would halt the implementation of Common Core academic standards (among other RttT mandates) in the state of Ohio and prohibit the state from using the PARRC assessments or any other assessments connected with Common Core (“Reading Samples Draw Fire” par. 15). Eleven months later, the bill has expanded and survived several revisions, and educators across the state warily wait for a vote, while feeling powerless in a fight against billionaires who are profiting due to the educational reforms they helped create.

The thrill of education has been displaced by frustration and apprehension. The standards mandated reforms call for curriculum and evaluation changes that leave me feeling like I am treading water, struggling to stay afloat in the midst of a howling Nor’ Easter. Teaching to a test is unappealing, and what I strived to avoid most when I entered education—yet, this is our reality. The assertion that the national standards “do not dictate how teachers should teach” (CCSS “FAQ”) is essentially deceptive. An English teacher who spends the majority of his or her time teaching great literature cannot continue to do so, and must instead substitute a large chunk of informational texts (in order to teach to the test) or risk a poor teacher evaluation. High school student Ethan Young drew a rousing round of applause during his speech last fall, when he declared: “Education is unlike every other bureaucratic institute in our government. The task of teaching is never quantifiable. If everything I learned in high school is a measurable objective, I haven’t learned anything” (Young). He epitomized why I chose education when he stated: “We

teach to free minds; we teach to inspire; we teach to equip; the career will come naturally” (Young). His words resonated with educators, who go to work everyday, hoping to instill in our students the very words he spoke to an audience that ultimately reached millions. In a nation that has focused on everything educators are doing *wrong*—this young man stood up and gave a speech that exemplified everything educators are doing *right*. If only our politicians could do the same.

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ENG 6040 Final Essay Notes/Feedback:

Dear Brooke:

Perhaps we should make my following sentiment into a bumper sticker: "I learned to read by reading comic books; I learned how to think by reading poetry." Furthermore, if "informational text" is a synonym for "non-fiction," I could provide plenty of examples of both extremely banal and extremely difficult non-fiction, both of which categories might be classified as "literature." A Tale of Two Cities and The Red Badge of Courage are not history, but you can learn a great deal about history by reading them, in the context of larger discussion, etc.

If you continue to craft this piece for your portfolio, I'd suggest that you do, however, look for some more potentially rational counterarguments (for example, teachers who have made the standards work and/or interpreted them in a way that actually works?)

Overall, a depressing yet provocative assessment of our current situation!

A pleasure to have you in class again--have a great new year!

Rob

Brooke E. Kukay

Dr. Rob Wallace

ENG 6040

16 Dec. 2013

The American Education System—Big Business for Billionaires

“Oh, by the way, the Ohio standards for English are changing dramatically. Everything is going to be nonfiction, and informational texts. You can throw out all that old stuff—Shakespeare, Thoreau, Salinger—they’re all gone.” When my Curriculum Director relayed this information to me three years ago, I was stunned. The notion of eliminating the very works that stirred within me an indescribable, insatiable appetite for literature, and later inspired me to become an English teacher was appalling. Did my college education, steeped in rich literature courses, suddenly mean nothing? Who was implementing this drastic change? Seeking answers, I was dismayed at the realization the switch to informational texts was part of Ohio’s mandated education reform.

In June 2010, Ohio’s state Board of Education entered the Race to the Top (RttT) competition, and consequently agreed to a bevy of reforms. To be eligible for the \$4.35 billion available in funding, states were required to adopt the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) in English language arts (ELA) and mathematics, implement the aligned standardized assessments (known as PARCC), and require a value added teacher evaluation system (OTES), designed to evaluate educators by their students’ academic progress. Teachers and administrators across Ohio and the nation were baffled and overwhelmed by the swift and immense changes, but one thing was clear—educators were widely viewed as the source of America’s perceived education woes. Although the standards were implemented to improve education, empirical and rhetorical

evidence indicate the new English language arts standards—a result of the United States subpar international education rankings from 2009—ultimately widen the achievement gap. The 2009 rankings prompted a comprehensive reform of education, erroneously influenced by private sector billionaires and government officials, whose motivation for change was not dedicated to improving education for students, rather a desire to profit financially and politically from the U.S. education system.

1. A (Misguided) Call to Action

Although the newest wave of education reform launched in 2009, the ideology of tying the standards to college and career readiness began in 2004, during the years of No Child Left Behind, when a multi year report conducted by Achieve, Inc. was released. The report, titled “Ready or Not: Creating a High School Diploma that Counts” declared: “The diploma has lost its value because what it takes to earn one is disconnected from what it takes for graduates to compete successfully beyond high school—either in the classroom or in the workplace” (1). The report brought the supposed deficiencies and inequality of America’s state-by-state education standards to light, and lead both state and national leaders on a quest to reform the standards in order to better prepare students for college and careers post high school graduation.

Several years later, scores from the 2009 Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), considered by some, as the most comprehensive of all exams that compare educational levels across nations, appeared to further justify the need for national reform. The results “show 15-year-old students in the U.S. performing about average in reading and science, and below average in math. Out of 34 [developed] countries, the U.S. ranked 14th in reading, 17th in science and 25th in math” (“In Ranking” par. 2). Although the results were an improvement over the 2003 and 2006 reports, they were still far behind the highest performing countries. It

was the subpar PISA ranking that prompted swift action among lawmakers. Upon release of the results, U.S. Education Secretary Arne Duncan declared, “This is an absolute wake-up call for America. The results are extraordinarily challenging to us and we have to deal with the brutal truth. We have to get much more serious about investing in education” (qtd. in “In Ranking” par. 4). Duncan’s announcement relayed a sense of urgency, and reformers quickly answered the call to action.

However, PISA, the assessment tool that initiated an education revolution was deemed disingenuous by numerous education scholars. In late January 2013, Martin Carnoy and Richard Rothstein released a comprehensive analysis of international tests by Stanford and the Economic Policy Institute, which asserts that U.S. schools are not being outpaced by the international competition. The report, published in January of 2013, titled “What Do International Tests Really Show About U.S. Student Performance?” focused on the oversimplifications and inaccuracies relayed in the 2009 PISA results. The scores, “Ignore the complexity of test results and . . . lead policymakers to pursue inappropriate and even harmful reforms” (Carnoy and Rothstein 2). The report speculates the ulterior motives behind releasing the average national scores five weeks before publishing the disaggregated scores, which focus on students’ social and economic characteristics, their school composition, and other informative criteria that allows analysts to draw conclusions with more extreme care and accuracy (Carnoy and Rothstein 2).

Upon examination of the disaggregated data, “the U.S. rankings on the 2009 PISA test in reading and math would rise, respectively, to sixth from 14th and to 13th from 25th after controlling for social class differences and a sampling error by PISA and after eliminating between-country differences that are statistically too small to meaningfully affect a country’s ranking” (Carnoy and Rothstein 3-4). Among many inaccuracies, the report discovered a

sampling error that allowed for an over representation of students from the most disadvantaged schools in the U.S., which further depressed the average test scores. According to the Stanford Report, the rush to release the scores:

Is a puzzling strategy, which ensured that policymakers and commentators would draw quick and perhaps misleading interpretations from the results. This is especially the case because analysis of the international database takes time, and headlines from the initial release are likely to be sealed in conventional wisdom by the time scholars have had the opportunity to complete a careful study.

(Carnoy and Rothstein 3)

Arne Duncan did not wait for the release of the comprehensive report before calling for a major overhaul in the education system. On February 17, 2009 President Barack Obama signed into law the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, which, among other things, set aside roughly \$4.35 billion for states to compete for funding under the RttT Initiative.

According to the U.S. Department of Education (ED), the new education reform initiative “marks a historic moment in American education. This initiative offers bold incentives to states willing to spur systemic reform to improve teaching and learning in America’s schools”

(“Knowledge and Skills” par. 1). The Department of Education concludes that a commitment to the RttT initiative embraces a reform of the following four key areas:

- Development of rigorous standards and better assessments
- Adoption of better data systems to provide schools, teachers, and parents with information about student progress
- Support for teachers and school leaders to become more effective
- Increased emphasis and resources for the rigorous interventions needed to

turn around the lowest-performing schools. (par. 3)

The initiative was well under way by the time the appropriately adjusted and more accurate PISA international ranking was released. The improved ranking was scarcely publicized because it did not fit the reform that policy makers and their like-minded generous donors wanted to portray in the media. Although there is always room for improvement, the success rate of American students was not nearly as dire as initially reported; yet the criticism of public educators and their curriculum was brutal and unrelenting. The criticism opened the door for private foundations to influence educational policy at unprecedented levels.

Michelle Rhee, an outspoken and polarizing figure in education, is the founder and head of the organization, StudentsFirst. Private donors have provided her a mindboggling amount of financial contributions necessary to rail against teachers, and our current education system. Rhee's brief time in education was mired in scandal; nevertheless, her unrelenting focus on education reform and anti union stance attracts funding from high-powered donors such as the Gates Foundation, Rupert Murdoch, the Walton Foundation, and the Koch brothers, among others. Rhee has frequently propagandized her audiences at speaking engagements and used the incomplete data provided in the initial release of the 2009 PISA scores as ammunition in her attack on the state of education in our economy. As Valerie Strauss describes:

Rhee has been given a platform to misinform. She doesn't explain that, at the insistence of policymakers, and unlike other countries, America tests every kid—the mentally disabled, the sick, the hungry, the homeless, the transient, the troubled, those for whom English is a second language. That done, the scores are lumped together. She doesn't even hint that when the scores of the disadvantaged aren't counted, American students are at the top. (Strauss par 18-19)

Rhee is a compelling and energizing speaker, who earns \$50,000 per appearance, plus first class travel and accommodations to misinform her audiences regarding issues in America's schools. She has an immeasurable amount of influence, despite her lack of classroom experience, and her brief tenure as Chancellor of D.C.'s public schools that was marred with controversy and deceit.

In an article titled "Michelle Rhee is Shameless," Former U.S. Assistant Secretary of Education, Diane Ravitch, condemned Rhee's attacks on education. One example of her agenda driven and audacious tactics against educators was a thirty-second ad created by Rhee's organization StudentsFirst. The commercial showed an overweight U.S. Olympian rolling around, struggling to stand and compete, and compared the Olympian to the inaccurate 2009 PISA scores as evidence failing education system in America. Ravitch was outraged by the commercial and described it as a disgusting lie that smeared America, our teachers, and our students (par. 1-4). Ravitch responded to the deceptive ad with a few facts:

- 1) The US was never first on international tests. When the first test was given in 1964 (a test of math), our students came in 11th out of 12.
- 2) On the latest international tests, students in American schools with low poverty (10% or less) came in FIRST in the world.
- 3) As poverty goes up in American schools, test scores go down.
- 4) The U.S. has the highest child poverty rate—23%— of any advanced nation in the world. Michelle Rhee says nothing about poverty, which is the most direct correlate of low-test scores. (par. 9-14)

Unfortunately, the facts were overshadowed by well-funded and high-powered voices who voiced a more attention inducing, although dishonest tale of the education woes in America. Regardless of the flawed data, plans for a complete overhaul of the education system were well

underway, and Obama's RttT Initiative was creating a highly contentious atmosphere in the education community.

2. The Development and Adoption of the CCSS

In 2009, the National Governors Association (NGA) and the Council of Chief State School Officers, lucratively financed by the Gates Foundation, spearheaded the movement for education reform. Their goal was to create standards that would allow American students to compete globally—both academically and in the work place—and they hired the organization Achieve the Core (also funded by the Gates Foundation) to create new education standards for college and career readiness. Many have questioned how an “unelected, unrepresentative networking forum quickly became a serious driver of education policy changes for the nation” (Pullman par. 5). The answer is quite simple: educators cannot compete with politically motivated big businesses and billionaires who seek power and fortune through education reform, most notably the Gates Foundation, which has poured nearly \$500 million and counting into the reform effort.

In 2010, the well-funded team at Achieve the Core, lead by “architect” of the standards David Coleman (who also served as Treasurer of Michelle Rhee's organization StudentsFirst during this time), released the Common Core State Standards in English language arts and mathematics. Achieve the Core describes the new standards as follows:

The Common Core State Standards Initiative is a state-led effort that established a single set of clear educational standards for kindergarten through 12th grade in English language arts and mathematics that states voluntarily adopt. The standards are designed to ensure that students graduating from high school are prepared to enter credit bearing entry courses in two or four year college

programs or enter the workforce. The standards are clear and concise to ensure that parents, teachers, and students have a clear understanding of the expectations in reading, writing, speaking and listening, language and mathematics in school. (CCSS “FAQ”)

More specifically, the three key shifts in the CCSS English language arts and literacy standards are as follows:

1. Informational Text: *Building knowledge through content-rich nonfiction and informational texts.*

At the elementary level, the standards call for a 50-50 balance between informational texts and literature. They shift the emphasis to 55 percent informational by middle school, and 70 percent by high school. Such reading includes content-rich nonfiction in history/social studies, science, and the arts. Informational text is seen as a way for students to build coherent general knowledge, as well as reading and writing skills.

2. Citing Evidence: *Reading and writing grounded in evidence from text.*

The standards place a premium on students’ use of evidence from texts to present careful analyses and well-defended claims. Rather than asking students questions they can answer solely from their prior knowledge or experience, the standards envision students’ answering questions that depend on reading texts with care. The standards also require the cultivation of narrative writing throughout the grades. The reading standards focus on students’ ability to read carefully and grasp information, arguments, ideas, and details based on evidence.

3. Complex Text: *Regular practice with complex text and its academic vocabulary.*

The standards build a “staircase” of increasing text complexity to prepare students for the types of texts they must read to be ready for the demands of college and careers. Closely related to text complexity, and inextricably connected to reading comprehension, is a focus on academic vocabulary: words that appear in a variety of content areas (such as “ignite” and “commit”). (CCSS “FAQ”)

Because adoption of the CCSS was a requirement for states vying for RttT funding, the majority of states quickly adopted the standards. Unfortunately, the rush for funding outweighed a careful consideration of quality of the new standards—prior to adoption.

A federal law prohibits the ED from mandating national curriculum standards, but Duncan and Obama skirted the law by using Race to the Top funds as incentive for state adoption. “It was well understood by states that they would not be eligible for RttT funding (\$4.35 billion) unless they adopted the Common Core State Standards” (“Why I Cannot” par. 13). Although congress, the ED, or state and local governments never voted on the CCSS, it was initially adopted by forty-six states and the District of Columbia, despite evidence that some state standards were superior to the CCSS because every state wanted their share of the federal funds. In an article by Diane Ravitch, educational historian and policy analyst, Ravitch affirms “The former Texas State Commissioner of Education, Robert Scott, has stated for the record that he was urged to adopt the Common Core standards before they were written” (“Why I Cannot” par. 14). Some states already enforced state standards that were indeed superior to the CCSS, and well tested, but they were nonetheless replaced with the Common Core in an effort to expand educational funding.

In 2010, the right leaning Fordham Institute released a study, which was financed by a one million dollar grant from the Gates Foundation. Unsurprisingly, the report found 39 states across the union inferior to the CCSS. The researchers listed only California, Indiana, and the District of Columbia as clearly superior to the CCSS. The handful of remaining states were listed “too close to call” (Carmichael, et al 302). Texas, among the states too close to call, was first ranked as clearly superior, had their 2008 English language arts/reading standards compared to the CCSS. Fordham initially gave Texas an A-, and the CCSS a B+ (Carmichael, et al 304), but later reversed the scores when Texas refused to adopt the CCSS. The initial judgment reveals the Fordham Institute’s overall conclusion, prior to the reversal:

Texas’s ELA standards are more clearly written, better presented, and logically organized than the Common Core standards. The Texas standards include expectations that more thoroughly address the comprehension and analysis of literary and non-literary text than Common Core, including helpful, detailed standards that outline genre-specific content and rhetorical techniques. In addition, Texas has prioritized writing genres by grade level. Grade: A-.

(Carmichael, et al 304)

There was no reasoning given for the Texas state standard downgrade, but speculation cites their refusal to sign onto the CCSS and pressure from the Gates Foundation. If their standards are superior, why would they need to adopt inferior education standards? The question that should be asked by the Fordham Institute and the Gates Foundation is—how do we best serve our students? Not, how do we pressure all states to adopt the Common Core?

Today, the lone holdouts are Minnesota, Alaska, Texas, Nebraska, and Virginia. Minnesota made the unique decision to adopt only the English language arts standards because

state officials believe the new benchmarks for mathematics lack the rigor of their own state standards. Indiana initially adopted the standards in 2010, but followed in the steps of Georgia and Oklahoma this fall when they dropped out of their commitment to the CCSS and the adopted standardized achievement tests, PARCC, which stands for the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers.

3. Common Core Criticism

The CCSS lead writers, who controlled the CCSS Initiative were David Coleman and Susan Pimentel in English language arts, and Jason Zimba, Phil Daro, and William McCallum in mathematics. Of the five lead writers', Coleman and Zimba had no previous experience writing standards. Furthermore, the lead writers for the grade level ELA standards never taught reading or English in K-12 or the college level (Pullman par. 19). Sandra Stotsky, a committee member during the creation of the standards, reveals her reservations toward the ELA writers. "Neither has had a doctorate in English, nor had either or them ever published serious work on K-12 curriculum or instruction. Neither had a reputation for literary scholarship or research in education; they were virtually unknown to English language arts educators and to higher education faculty in rhetoric, speech, composition, or literary study" (Stotsky 2). Moreover, Coleman and Pimental have left educators in the dark by failing to publicly define college and career readiness in ELA, or how specific texts constitute college and career readiness.

With the exception of the lead writers, the identity of the other CCSS writers has been shrouded in secrecy since their inception. There were two working committees (one each for math and English language arts), each held roughly a dozen members, and both committees were separate from the Validation Committee. According to a report by Joy Pullman, a research fellow of The Heartland Institute, "While many people sat on these various committees, only one

in 60 was a classroom teacher. All of the standards writing and discussions were sealed by confidentiality agreements, and held in private” (par. 14). The members of the committees had no idea what happened to their comments once they were submitted. They claimed, “the ‘facilitators’ for the Validation Committee were virtually impossible to work with” (par. 17) and just wanted the members to sign a final approval letter. This was in direct opposition of the charter, which stated the committee had final say over the quality of the standards and could revise as necessary. Although a handful of committee members ultimately refused to sign off on the Common Core, the opposition is conspicuously missing from the Validation Committee’s final report.

Sandra Stotsky, who is nationally known for her in depth analyses of the Common Core English language arts standards, was one of only five members of the 29 appointed to the Validation Committee of the CCSS, who refused to sign off on the standards. It is unclear how or why certain individuals were chosen for the VC as no rationale was ever provided. “Similar to the composition of the Standards Development Work Group and the standards-writing teams, the VC contained almost no academic experts on ELA and mathematics standards; most were education professors or associated with testing companies, from here and abroad” (Stotsky 2). Stotsky was appalled by the lack of content experts on the VC, considering the CCSS was poised to initiate a sweeping reform across the nation.

Today, Sandra Stotsky is an outspoken advocate for a repeal of the CCSS. On November 20, 2013, Sandra Stotsky testified in front of the Ohio Education Committee, and delivered a speech titled “Fatal Flaws in Common Core’s English Language Arts Standards.” Her testimony was a scathing and eye opening insider’s perspective on the creation of the CCSS. She claimed “The people who wrote the standards . . . were not qualified to draft standards intended to

“transform instruction for every child” (Stotsky 3). And the Validation Committee that was created to put the seal of approval on the drafters’ work was useless if not misleading, both in its membership and in the procedures it had to follow” (Stotsky 1).

Sandra Stotsky, along with Professor James Milgram of Stanford University determined the Validation Committee was nothing more than a rubber stamp, despite the charge to validate the standards. Both Stotsky and Milgram repeatedly requested and were denied “the names of high achieving countries whose standards were supposedly used as benchmarks for the CCSS chiefly because CCSS were (intentionally) not internationally benchmarked (or made comparable to the most demanding sets of standards elsewhere); now the CCSS claims that it was “informed by” documents in other countries” (Stotsky 3). After being confronted, the lead writers changed the verbiage from “internationally benchmarked” to “internationally informed” (Bauerlein and Stotsky 5). They were offered no research evidence to support the emphasis on writing over reading, its division of informational texts and literature, or its claim regarding the value of reading informational texts in English classes. Stotsky claims, “It couldn’t because there is not evidence to support the Common Core’s revision of the K-12 curriculum. Nor did Common Core offer evidence that its standards meet entrance requirements for *most colleges and universities* in this country or elsewhere—or for a high school diploma in many states” (Bauerlein and Stotsky 4). Due to the lack empirical evidence to validate the Common Core’s supposed college readiness standards, the changes adopted by state boards or commissioners had no legal basis.

4. English Language Arts Standards and Informational Texts

Among the three key shifts in the ELA standards is the shift to informational texts. The momentum behind the reform to transition to increased informational texts—50% in elementary

and an increase to 70% in middle and high school—has baffled educators. The emphasis on informational texts addressed a need that stemmed from the 2004 report by Achieve, Inc. and the American Diploma Project. The report suggested “employers and college instructors found students weak at comprehending technical manuals, scientific and historical journals, and other texts pivotal to their work in those arenas” (“Districts Gird” 14). What the report lacked was evidence to back up their claim. An additional influence on the standards was the framework for the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) in reading, “which reflect an increasing emphasis on informational texts as students get older” (“Districts Gird” 14). Diane Ravitch disputed the legitimacy of aligning the ratios to NAEP, “which gives specifications to test-developers, not to classroom teachers...[therefore] the arbitrary ratios make no sense” (Ravitch par. 14). The question remains—why are educators left in the dark? And why have all attempts to justify the shift to informational texts through viable research been ignored?

Diane Ravitch has declared, “The flap over fiction vs. informational text further undermined my confidence in the standards. There is no reason for national standards to tell teachers what percentage of their time should be devoted to literature or information. Both can develop the ability to think critically” (par. 14). There are no studies to prove the validity of the ratios, and the new standards have caused many teachers to doubt their craft. Ethan Young, is a Tennessee high school senior who lives in a state that has been awarded \$500 million in RttT funds, largely due to Michelle Rhee’s personal commitment to reforming education in the state where her children attend school. The students and teachers in Tennessee are finally speaking out, and Ethan Young delivered a stunningly eloquent speech regarding the Common Core at his school’s monthly board meeting November 15, 2013. He stated, “Creativity, appreciation, inquisitiveness, these are impossible to scale. But they are the *purpose* of education, why our

teachers teach, why I choose to learn” (Young). Many teachers are feeling stifled by the new reform and frustrated by the constant references to the need for increased rigor, as the reasoning behind the new standards. Yet the question remains, how have the new standards created more rigor?

Educators see the word rigor as nothing more than the newest buzz word in education. The standards are not more rigorous; they are just different. Sandra Stotsky and Mark Bauerlein agree. After analyzing examples of complexity in high school texts, Stotsky determined “the average reading level of the passages on the common tests now being developed to determine ‘college readiness’ may be at about the grade seven level” (Bauerlein and Stotsky 3). After their time on the CCSS Validation Committee was completed, Bauerlein and Stotsky penned *A Pioneer Institute White Paper* titled “How Common Core’s ELA Standards Place College Readiness at Risk.” In the paper, Stotsky criticizes the ELA standards as “empty skill sets that cannot lead to even a meaningful high school diploma” (2). As the empirical data against the CCSS continues to come to light, it is becoming increasingly difficult to support the mandated education reform.

Furthering the frustration is the lack of guidance provided in many states and across local districts. Even worse is the constant stream of misinformation, or a misinterpretation of the guidance offered from local, regional, and state leaders. In Ohio, the policies are shifting month-to-month, week-to-week—even day-to-day. At virtually every professional development training seminar teachers and administrators from our district have attended over the past two years, we have been told information that differs from previous training seminars. The varied understandings of the policies have caused unnecessary and bitter disputes over who is misinterpreting the standards or policies being released at the state level.

The misunderstandings continue inside the classrooms, as teachers are wary of how to properly implement the standards. Students should be encountering all types of texts throughout the school day, but nationwide, there appears to be a disconnect—a lack of accountability regarding implementation of informational texts across the curriculum. Jamie Highfill is an 8th grade English teacher who “found no room this year for her cherished nine-week unit on poetry. Ditto for her unit on comedy and parody” (“Teachers Differ” 11). Instead, she sprinkles pieces of her old poetry unit into the new curriculum whenever she can manage to make meaningful connections to new units, which focus primarily on informational texts. However, “she is dogged by concerns that students have lost something important, and much of what displaced it . . . is not a good match developmentally for her 8th graders” (“Teachers Differ” 11). She found the concepts to be too challenging and abstract for her students. One of her new texts is Malcom Gladwell’s *Tipping Point*, and students struggled to comprehend and make meaningful connections to the text. Highfill, the 2011 Arkansas ELA Middle School Teacher of the Year, found herself dragging them through the book, just to get through it.

Jamie Highfill is not alone when she admits that in her district “there still seems to be more of a focus on English teachers’ using nonfiction in classrooms than the other content areas stepping up to the plate” (qtd. in “Teachers Differ” 13). Susan Pimentel and David Coleman, lead authors of the ELA standards recognize the “mistaken belief” that literature and fiction “should take a backseat” in order to make room for informational texts in the high school ELA classroom (“Teachers Differ” 14). The inventors of the CCSS further state that critics and educators have misinterpreted the ratio between literature and informational texts. “The percentages . . . reflect the sum of student reading, not just reading in ELA settings. Teachers of senior English classes, for example, are not required to devote 70 percent of reading to

informational texts. Rather, 70 percent of student reading across the grade should be informational” (Shanahan 14). Thus, according to the CCSS, English teachers will still be able to spend the majority of their time on literature. But who will enforce it? The reading of informational texts across the disciplines is a mandate, but teachers in other subjects see it as a more of a polite request.

The vast majority of ELA teachers are wary teachers in other subjects will fail to alter their curriculum to include informational texts. William Maniotis, a high school English teacher, interpreted the CCSS, and “he doesn’t conclude that he must drop a lot of fiction from his classroom, but upcoming assessments for the common standards, due to roll out in 2014-15, could exert a powerful influence on that” (“Teachers Differ” 15). Maniotis, a 17-year veteran teacher, foresees a struggle to maintain a balance between literature and informational texts once students begin taking assessments that are closely aligned to informational texts. “When the new test scores come out, and the focus is more on nonfiction, and the test scores go down, who are they going to look to fix that? The English teachers” (qtd. in “Teachers Differ” 15). If you take into account the plummeting test scores and lack of proficient students who were assessed last year using a vendor assessment that was aligned to the CCSS in pilot states, it is inevitable the scores will tumble nationwide. The trepidation among English teachers is palpable—English teachers will be the easy scapegoat once the scores plunge and the public outrage creates a backlash against teachers.

Susan Pimentel places the responsibility for enforcing the shared text responsibility in the hands of teachers and local administrators. “If a lot of good, close reading of high-quality, challenging texts is going on in science and history classes, then the English language arts teachers need to carry less of that responsibility” (“Teachers Differ” 14). Pimentel urges ELA

teachers be a part of the change, and provide valuable input concerning the best way to provide quality instruction and stress close reading of informational texts in a cross disciplinary manner.

The idea of close reading, as required by the standards, appears to take a scientific, rather than literary approach to the analysis of a text. Essentially, close reading means reading to uncover layers of meaning that lead to deep comprehension. The Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) supplies clarification useful for teaching with Common Core standards in mind:

Close, analytic reading stresses engaging with a text of sufficient complexity directly and examining meaning thoroughly and methodically, encouraging students to read and reread deliberately. Directing student attention on the text itself empowers students to understand the central ideas and key supporting details. It also enables students to reflect on the meanings of individual words and sentences; the order in which sentences unfold; and the development of ideas over the course of the text, which ultimately leads students to arrive at an understanding of the text as a whole. (“Common Core FAQ”)

This type of reading is guaranteed to deter the average student. Nor will it foster a love for literature in students. Dr. Anthony Esolen of Providence College, recently voiced his concerns against the standards:

What appalls me most about the standards . . . is the cavalier contempt for great works of human art and thought, in literary form. It is a sheer ignorance of the life of the imagination. We are not programming machines. We are teaching children. We are not producing functionaries, factory-like. We are to be forming the minds and hearts of men and women . . . to be human beings, honoring what is good and

right and cherishing what is beautiful. (“Why I Cannot” par. 16)

The Common Core requires students to “engage with a text of sufficient complexity directly, and examine meaning thoroughly and methodically, encouraging students to read and reread deliberately” (CCSS “FAQ”). This type of engagement is meant to focus student attention on one text, in order to force them to repeatedly read the text until they comprehend the central ideas and key supporting details. Does this type of learning sound engaging? How will our students ever understand that literature was created for entertainment purposes?

The passion for literature is lost when “the focus is placed squarely on the text, not on making connections to outside experiences or dwelling on prior knowledge” (Greene par. 4). Personally, I find this to be the most disheartening mandate by the CCSS. As an English teacher, the most rewarding part of teaching literature is watching my students make connections to the text. Reader-response theory recognizes the reader as an active agent who imparts "real existence" to the work and completes its meaning through interpretation. The beauty of literature is sharing interpretations of the text through personal experience. Everyone has different life experiences, which influences the interpretation and evaluation of a text. The CCSS strips students of a critical thinking strategy that has proven fruitful in my classroom for many years, and I am hesitant to change my curriculum in order to align with untested standards that ask me to shun the strategies I learned and embraced during my undergraduate and graduate work. The future of education seems dim, and many quality educators are considering deserting the occupation as the reforms have stripped the joy from teaching.

5. CCSS Aligned Assessments and Teacher Evaluations

“A teacher cannot be evaluated without his students, because as a craft, *teaching is an interaction*. Thus, how can you gauge a teacher’s success with no control of a student’s

participation or interest? This relationship is at the heart of instruction and there will never be a system by which it is accurately measured” (Young). Ethan Young spoke these astute words, in his speech against the CCSS one month ago. Although Ethan’s words are spot on, policy dictates that Ohio’s teachers must look ahead to the full implementation of the CCSS in 2014-15, so they look to New York schools for guidance. New York has long been the pilot state for education reform. English teachers in Ohio and nationwide are apprehensive of the shift to more informational texts in the classroom, and the impact it will have on the PARCC assessment scores, which are the newly designed, CCSS aligned standardized assessments. Although the new standards require the informational text ratios to be achieved across the disciplines, English teachers continue to worry their students achievement scores will falter if teachers of science and history refrain from expanding their focus to include an emphasis on informational texts, especially with the loathed implementation of the Ohio Teacher Evaluation System (OTES), the data driven, newly formed standardized test-based educator evaluation system, which includes 50% of a teacher’s evaluation is determined by growth measures and tied to proficiency test scores.

In the 2012-13 school year, New York tested their students with the newly aligned CCSS achievement tests for the first time. According to a report from the Annenberg Institute for School Reform, “Nearly two-thirds of city students failed the higher-standards math and reading tests, but districts with large percentages of high-needs students did especially poor” (Chapman and Lestch par. 1). An open letter to parents co-authored by Carol Burris, New York’s 2013 Principal of the Year, states that children reacted viscerally to the new assessments. “We know that many children cried during or after testing, and others vomited or lost control of their bowels or bladders. Others simply gave up. One teacher reported that a student kept banging his head on

the desk, and wrote, ‘this is too hard,’ and ‘I can’t do this,’ throughout his test booklet” (Burriss, et al par. 6). Furthermore, the low passing rate was predicted prior to administering the test in the spring of 2013. Deputy Commissioner Slentz (NY), released a memo in March of the same year that “stated that proficiency scores (i.e., passing rate) on the new assessments would range between 30%-37% statewide” (Burriss, et al. par. 7). Subsequently, when scores were released in August 2013, the statewide proficiency rate was announced as 31%, an abysmal number that fails to accurately gauge teacher and student performance.

Prior to the publication of the New York scores, teachers and principals were alarmed at the number of unclear test questions that occurred on both the math and English tests. “Many teachers and principals could not agree on the correct answers to ambiguous questions in both ELA and math. Identical passages and questions appeared on more than one test and at more than one grade level. One school reported that on one day of the ELA Assessment, the same passage with identical questions was included in the third, fourth AND fifth grade ELA Assessments” (Burriss, et al par. 5). Among the other concerns outlined in the letter were the length (with many students unable to complete the questions in the time allotted) and sheer number of mandated tests, benchmarks that were set too high, and test scores dramatically lower and contradictory to other mandated proficiency tests.

Next year, Ohio educators can expect the same abysmal scores, which will—as predicted—further the achievement gap in education. The fallacy that the new state standards, which supplant literature with 70% informational texts in high school, will better prepare our students for college and careers is not the solution to our trailing education rankings, and the misinformation regarding the implementation of informational texts will undoubtedly place the burden solely in the hands of English teachers. Teachers and administrators in Ohio are

watching state legislators closely, eagerly advocating for a moratorium on the CCSS. The state has continued to establish unwavering deadlines as we rush toward full implementation, but for a multitude of reasons, our teachers and administrators are simply not prepared to fully implement the education reform agreed to under Race to the Top. In August, Ohio Representative Andy Thompson, sponsored House Bill 237, which would halt the implementation of Common Core academic standards (among other RttT mandates) in the state of Ohio and prohibit the state from using the PARCC assessments or any other assessments connected with Common Core (“Reading Samples Draw Fire” par. 15). Four months later, the bill has expanded and survived several revisions, and educators across the state warily wait for a vote.

The thrill of education has been displaced by frustration and apprehension. The standards mandated reforms call for curriculum and evaluation changes that leave me feeling like I am treading water, struggling to stay afloat in the midst of a howling Nor’ Easter. Teaching to a test is unappealing, and what I strived to avoid most when I entered education—yet, this is our reality. The assertion that the national standards “do not dictate how teachers should teach” (CCSS “FAQ”) is essentially deceptive. An English teacher who spends the majority of his or her time teaching great literature cannot continue to do so, and must instead substitute a large chunk of informational texts (in order to teach to the test) or risk a poor teacher evaluation. High school student Ethan Young drew a rousing round of applause during his speech last month, when he declared “Education is unlike every other bureaucratic institute in our government. The task of teaching is never quantifiable. If everything I learned in high school is a measurable objective, I haven’t learned anything” (Young). He epitomized why I chose education when he stated “We teach to free minds; we teach to inspire; we teach to equip; the career will come naturally” (Young). His words resonated with educators, who go to work everyday, hoping to

instill in our students the very words he spoke to an audience that ultimately reached millions. In a nation that has focused on everything educators are doing *wrong*—this young man stood up and gave a speech that exemplified everything educators are doing *right*.

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