Common Core

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Paradigmatic Shifts

By

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To our parents, Londell Kelso and Lucille Brown Chadwick, and Robert Donald and Barbara Pels Grassie who continue to guide us and speak to us.

I also dedicate this book to “My Best Thing,” always and forever—adamantine.

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List of Abbreviations Used in the Text

ADE	Association of Departments of English
AGO	Art Gallery of Ontario (Toronto, Canada)
CCSS	Common Core State Standards
CLC	Collaborative Learning Community
DOE	US Department of Education
ELA	English language arts
ESEA	Elementary and Secondary Education Act (1965)
ESL	English as a Second Language
IRA	International Reading Association
MLA	Modern Language Association
NASA	National Aeronautics and Space Administration
NCES	National Center for Education Statistics
NCLB	No Child Left Behind Act (2002)
NCLE	National Center for Literacy Education
NCSS	National Council of Social Studies
NCTE	National Council of Teachers of English
NSTA	National Science Teachers of America
PLC	Professional Learning Community
SpEd	Special Education

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In addition, I must acknowledge the inestimable contribution Dr. Kimberly Parker's students made to this book, for at the end of the day, education is about our students.

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Jocelyn A. Chadwick
Cambridge, MA

PREFACE

What *Common Core State Standards: Paradigmatic Shifts* is not: this exploration of the Core is not an exploration into assessment, the argument for or against formative and summative evaluation, an assessment on educators, politicians, and policymakers, or railing against vendors. This exploration of the Core is not seeking to praise any one person or to vilify any one person with regard to this phase of education reform. While Common Core State Standards addresses both English language arts and Mathematics and this exploration of standards does apply to both, the focus of this book lies with English language arts. My rationale for this focus lies not only with the early focus by standards-makers but also because to this day, English language arts—the courses themselves, the skills, and the foci—thread through all other content areas and are a required core content area K-12.

Rather, this exploration of Common Core State Standards aims to be a part of the conversation the Core ignited, literally, across the United States. It is my hope that the contents of this book and the contributions by teachers and their students will shed some light on this issue, will foment reflection about how and why we teach, and will enable us as educators to assert more voice and guidance in the educational-policy movements that have always been with us and will continue to be, even after the Core gives way to a "new and improved approach." It is the ultimate aim of this exploration to say, resoundingly, YES, WE CAN! Yes, we can provide for *all* of our students a consistent, coherent, cohesive learning experience for college and career quilting each state *without* sacrificing our individual uniqueness, without compromising our students' individual uniqueness, and *with* leaving our siloed content areas to collaborate and share "across the aisle," for the sake and future of our students.

INTRODUCTION

RODRIGO JOSEPH RODRÍGUEZ

> Underneath the cut of bright and dazzling cloth, pulsing beneath the jewelry, the life of the book world is quite serious. Its real life is about creating and producing and distributing knowledge; about making it possible for the entitled as well as the dispossessed to experience one's own mind dancing with another's; about making sure that the environment in which this work is done is welcoming, supportive.
> —Toni Morrison, 2008, p. 190

Years ago, while studying at Kenyon College, I read Toni Morrison's speech upon her acceptance of the National Book Foundation Medal for Distinguished Contribution to American Letters. She presented her remarks on November 6, 1996. Nearly twenty years later, her speech is just as relevant today as it was then to communicate the need for a larger understanding of peace that requires the "dance of an open mind when it engages another equally open one" (p. 187). Moreover, Morrison describes this act as a humane and necessary habit and skill, or an "activity that occurs most naturally, most often in the reading/writing world we live in." She reminds us that this kind of peace must be secured, and thus "warrants vigilance," as the reader and writer enact and struggle to fulfill their essential labors for survival.

In a similar dialogue about imagination, knowledge, and labor, I'd like to add the work of teachers, who Jocelyn Chadwick has captured and given voice to, found in the book *Common Core State Standards: Paradigmatic Shifts*. The reader, writer, learner, and teacher are braided in this book as we advance the standards dialogue that calls for individual and collective action—from our classroom and schools to policymaking arenas such as boardrooms and capitols—to enact change and sustain progress. We learn about the historical development, existence, and influence standards have held through the centuries and across the states in U.S. education.

As a teacher educator with interests in world languages, literatures, and cultures, I am drawn to Chadwick's argument for and vision about literacy learning standards for *all* children to fulfill the promise of equality and

equity across the United States. Her commitment to "English/language arts as a coherent, central instructional strand" further advances our commitment to literacy learning and instruction that are sustaining across content areas and disciplines (Chapter 1, p. 2). Her teacher voice of experience impels us to listen, learn, and act. Namely, the dialogue she establishes on standards and relationships for quality teaching and learning assures that we are present, active, and influential in a wide range of spaces and repertoires with our students, because teachers and students learn and problem-solve together.

The inclusive, conversational tone with pragmatic inquiry and reflection that Chadwick offers to experienced teachers, pre-service teachers, administrators, education faculty, librarians, parents, and researchers is refreshing, motivating, and instructional. In fact, her tone reaches a level of empowerment in various classrooms that become engaging laboratories and dramatic stages of learning and deliberation as we read on. Hers is a deliberate, holistic labor for us to experience how standards can function at higher levels of expectation in our teaching, thinking, and learning with our students.

Joy and optimism appear in these chapters as reservoirs of hope and energy, which can be contagious and life changing. The voices, narratives, and perspectives provided include administrators, artists, authors, critics, historians, parents, policymakers, políticos, students, teachers, and thinkers involved at varying levels in meaning-making at the intersection of language arts and literacy. Essentially, we must face the urgent reality of a changing society Chadwick describes for us:

> What we need now and will need even more in the future is for our students to be thinkers who can think and act and engage so they will be able to understand and function and experience a quality of life unhobbled, unfettered by lack of knowledge, lack of ability to process, lack of ability and knowledge to connect the sometimes seemingly disparate dots across cultures, times, locations, experiences—difference. (Chapter 2, p. 15)

The research and perspectives presented in *Common Core State Standards: Paradigmatic Shifts* are necessary for a dialogue on the work to be done in literacy education that's supportive, welcoming, and collaborative. In addition, the models, strategies, and reflections with resources are treasures for us to adopt and adapt in our very own prekindergarten through post-graduate classrooms with our students as well as in professional learning workshops and programs with our teaching colleagues.

Our shared work and vision holds a big promise in the literacy lives of our students, and the generations to follow, as they strive to reach their potential to become caring, learned, and responsible citizens in diverse environments within a global society. Like the life of an enduring book, our teaching life is just as serious and significant. We have the teacher power and moral compass to awaken the "peace of the dancing mind" in our students and teacher colleagues that both Morrison and Chadwick imagine and ignite for us.

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SECTION ONE:

THE SHIFT:
STANDARDS AND THE CORE

> "It was a very optimistic time: we really thought as governors, that we could really make a difference, and we could do it over a relatively short period of time. The White House was right with us," said Thomas H. Kean, an early leader in the standards movement who took part in the event as the Republican governor of New Jersey. "We haven't had a moment like that since, on any subject." ("1989 Education Summit Casts Long Shadow: Historic Sit-Down Propelled National Drive for Standards-Based Accountability," *Education Week*, 24 September 2014, 1:18)

As I was sitting on a plane reading Gerald Graff's *Clueless in Academe: How Schooling Obscures the Life of the Mind* in the winter of 2012—with highlighter and pencil in hand—a fellow passenger asked me if I were a teacher. After I said yes, we began a conversation in which he, despite *not* being an educator, did most of the talking. What he said was quite revealing in light of the present focus on standards. Essentially, he explained that he and his wife accepted his extensive travel schedule primarily because it allowed them to secure excellent schools for their two children. Moreover, their consideration and subsequent purchase of a home was solely based on the schools they had determined to be best. To paraphrase this passenger, "teacher quality, rigor, standards, student engagement, and input from parents in the community," were key factors in their decisions regarding their children's schools.

As he continued to talk, I wondered, "What happens to those students whose parents do not or cannot consider such an option for their children?" Do not *all* students merit the same quality of education, the best teachers, regardless of where they live? While many factors shape a child's education, one factor that has sparked spirited conversation and focus—both pro and con—for some time, and is especially dominant now, are standards—at present, Common Core State Standards (CCSS). And because the CCSS focus heavily on literacy, they have emerged as a lightning rod for educators, politicians, parents, and business.

So, here we are: from 1893 to the present, standards and their forerunners have surrounded us as ELA teachers—our preparation, our instruction, and our perspectives. What returns us to the subject in 2014 is not only the concern of educators and schools, but also the collective voices of parents, such as my fellow passenger. Across the country, parents are expressing concern and taking action to ensure that their children receive the best possible education.

Many have expressed their opinions and have subsequently affected policy at state, federal, and community levels. Perhaps, now, as the standards' situation appears to be curiouser and curiouser, we English language arts teachers, K-12, for *ourselves* should peer a bit more deeply into how we actually arrived here, reflect, think, and then speak and act on the behalf of our students—all of our students, *everywhere*. An example of this recommended perspective that includes speaking and acting is the new NCLE Report, *Remodeling Literacy Learning Together: Paths to Standards Implementation* (2014). I reference the Report here and in this first chapter because it focuses on the voices, expertise, and recommendations from over 5,000 teachers, instructional specialists, and administrators with this objective, goal, *standard* in mind—namely, that *all* students are entitled to effective, engaging, and relevant literacy learning. So, *how did we get here?* Perhaps, we may have already arrived…and the question now is what do we do?

CHAPTER ONE

A BRIEF OVERVIEW— WHERE DID THEY COME FROM?

As teachers, especially K-12 ELA teachers, we have *heard and read* the term, *standards*, for so long that as ubiquitous as the term seems, the conversation today is as though standards are new, or different to us. In reality, however, many of us are unfamiliar with the origins or original intents of the term. My curiosity about this topic really began with *conversations*, like the one on the plane, over Common Core State Standards. Over the past few years, I have read, written, spoken, and listened to educators (and non-educators) talk about the Core—its unpacking, its intentions, its "political subtext," its "ham-handedness," its *rigor*, its aim to remove "any semblance of what ELA teachers love to do"—namely, teach literature and the joy of reading, and instructional concerns.[1]

I have, at times, found myself parroting Lewis Carroll's Alice, for the journey itself continues to evolve as curiouser and curiouser, and, like her, I have sometimes " . . .quite forgot how to speak good English." Right now, from what I have discerned, several positions on the Core exist:

1) Supporters of the Core who, at the same time, find themselves distancing themselves from apparent controversial persons or issues, including the name Common Core;
2) Non-supporters of the Core who find the Core intrusive and an attempt to remove instructional power from ELA teachers;
3) Politicians who support or do not support the Core based on their political stances and agenda;
4) College/university educators who are curious about the Core and want to know more about it;
5) College/university educators who view the Core as an affront to how they prepare ELA teachers. And,
6) A collective group, some refer to as "the vendors" who want to figure out how to market, redact, adjust, and create new content and content organization for Core requirements.

Notice the absence of a particular constituency? I have. Over the two years I have been reading and researching to satisfy my curiosity about standards, I still miss any substantive conversations about our students—*their* voices, *their* future, *their* aspirations as 21st century literacy learners. Now, let me say one thing: I am absolutely no Little Mary Sunshine, nor am I naïve. Indeed, I am an English teacher. So, my curiosity put me on this path, and it has been, thus far, enlightening, frightening, and even hopeful. The aim of this book is not to explore exhaustively standards *or* the Core, but rather, to spark the beginning of a conversation on how we *arrived* here with the term "standards" and our relationship with them. In addition, I want to know why can't we, as educators, parents, and policymakers, agree that *all* of our children, Pre-K-12, *deserve* and *must have* the kind of education preparedness we *know* they need now and as they move into the world at large?

Codifying goals and objectives for public K-12 education in the United States began as early as 1892 with the Committee of Ten.[2] I use the words objectives and goals because, as a reviewer-colleague cited to me, my personal reading of this document and my understanding them as standards *was not necessarily so*, for the actual term, standards, is not used in the Committee of Ten original document. Well, —based on a closer reading, this statement is not entirely accurate. The term does appear twice in this document in the context of *standards*: "From this point of view, Tables I., II, and III. may be considered to set a standard towards which secondary schools should tend; and not a standard to which they can at once conform" (*The Committee of Ten: Main Report*, 22). What this Report and others that followed illustrate is the ongoing effort to set goals, objectives, and standards for K-12 education.[3] Another factor that emerges in these documents is the focus and identification of English language arts as a coherent, central instructional strand, particularly at the secondary level.

The actual term, *standards*, clearly appears in *A Nation At Risk,* a report prepared for the Reagan administration in 1983. And educators, such as Rick Ginsberg, "Educational Reform: Overview, Reports of Historical Significance," cite the report as the primary catalyst for ushering in the "standards period initiatives," thereby codifying the concept and establishment of standards as a means of seeking instructional coherence.

After years and years of adjusting to the "swinging pendulum" of pedagogical trends—both effective and not—and after individual states' and districts' efforts to *conform* English language arts curricula, we now share Dante's conundrum at the obscured path. Do we embrace the idea of

the *new* concept for literacy learning, or do we hold fast to the notions that have contextualized the teaching of ELA since its inception? How did we come to the point at which some view our content area as separate, practically isolated parts, not to be melded as a communicative and critical thinking whole? Many contemporary, informative articles have addressed this conundrum for an extended period of time: Jeffrey Mirel's "The Traditional High School: Historical Debates Over Its Nature and Function," William Sewell's "Entrenched Pedagogy: A History of Stasis in the English language arts Curriculum in United States Secondary Schools," H. M. Kliebard's *The Struggle for the American Curriculum, 1893-1958*, R. Tremmel's "Changing the way we think in English education: a conversation in the universal barbershop," and R. P. Yagelski's "Stasis and Change: English education and the crisis of sustainability," are a few. Binding each of these articles and others on this topic is the agreed notion that in order to move forward now, we *must* look backward and understand how English language arts at the secondary level *came to be*.

This chapter, then, is both a flashback and a flash-forward to where we were and where we are headed in terms of teaching English language arts.

As we look backwards to understand better our present, the progression of how we inherited not only the concept of standards but also the multifaceted quilt of our content area provides an interesting, sometimes hopeful journey. It is a journey that as we now stand at an instructional crossroads, we must explore deeply and then ask the hard questions with regard to standards and instructional practice. This journey necessarily takes us back more than a century ago, beginning with The Committee of Ten.

The Committee of Ten—1893

In 1892 the National Educational Association appointed the Committee of Ten with the task to create a standardized curriculum for public school students who were, as viewed by the committee, primarily *not* college-bound. That said, the Committee believed these students should receive the same rigorous instruction, even though many would never complete a full education, the report asserted. Led by Harvard University President Charles Eliot, along with five other university presidents, the Commissioner of Education, William T. Harris, two Head Masters, and one professor, the committee meticulously created a report in response to their assigned task, and James Baker submitted the report to the National Council of Education in 1893. Within the larger committee resided nine smaller sub-

committees, or conferences, each dedicated to a specific content area. The Committee of Ten provided each of the nine conferences, what we would today describe as guiding questions, ten of them, to focus work and discussions. Of course, English was one of the nine conferences, made up of ten men—six professors, one teacher from Michigan State Normal School, two high school teachers, and one Superintendent. While the report clearly focuses on a coalesced K-12 educational curriculum, its emphasis and specifications on English language arts emerge clearly, particularly the secondary curricular framework. What clearly emerges also from this report is the identification and delineation and codification on the core content areas, its focus primarily on the primacy of secondary education, and the purpose of this coalesced curriculum on preparation for students.[4]

What is interesting about the overall report lies in *how* the participating members actually view public school education holistically. First, public school education is decidedly not for those students who are destined to attend universities, for it was assumed the majority of these students would attend private schools. Rather, public school education, according to the Committee, should focus on those students who will attend a portion of K-6 or even complete high school and become members of society at large; it is with this goal that the committees created a national curriculum.

For ELA, this report sets in motion what and how we would approach our content area—our perspective, our content knowledge, and our instructional goals and approaches. The English sub-committee, the Conference, comprised of six professors, one head master, one superintendent, and two teachers, determined the following:

> . . . In several passages of this report the idea recurs that training in English must go hand in hand with the study of the other subjects. Thus the Conference hope for the study of the history and geography of the English-speaking people, so far as these illustrate the development of the English language. . . It is the fundamental idea in this report that the study of every other subject should contribute to the pupil's training in English; and that the pupil's capacity to write English should be made available, and to be developed, in every other department. (Baker, 21).[5]

Over and over again, beginning with this Report, English, and now English language arts (ELA), emerges as the core content area for teaching skills that inform and support the other content areas in training students to become productive citizens of society.

One thought we should carry forth from the Report of the Committee of Ten is its notion of the necessity for a national curriculum with its goal

being to graduate students who contribute intellectually and critically to society. In a polled 98-teacher response to two of the ten guiding questions:

7. Should the subject be treated differently for pupils who are going to college, for those who are going to scientific school, and for those who, presumably, are going to neither?
8. At what age should this differentiation begin, if any be recommended?

Teachers resoundingly and unanimously "declare[d] that every subject which is taught *at all* [italics mine] in a secondary school should be taught in the same way and to the same extent to every pupil so long as he pursues it, no matter what the probable destination of the pupil may be, or at what point his education is to cease." (Baker, 17) [6]

This point from the past does in fact inform our present; one recurring observation and comment, including from some educators, lies with the notion that the CCSS push some students beyond their capabilities and experiences. Even some of those who created the Core expressed this perspective, which will be discussed in Chapter 2. In addition, we dare not *assume*, much less support the dangerous pitfall of hobbling our students because we feel they cannot navigate successfully the rigors of our ELA classrooms with critical reading, critical thinking, and critical writing. Successful implementation of this goal on a national level, as this 1892 report suggests, however, lies not only with students and their environments and experiences, but also, and as importantly, with us, the ELA teachers. For us, then, one key query emerges: how do we accomplish this task within the ever-changing contexts our students and we encounter?

Twenty-five years later, as the United States' demographics began to change significantly and more students were remaining in school longer, education and its standards, particularly at the secondary level, required another revaluation and revision.

A Report of the Commission on the Reorganization of Secondary Education: Cardinal Principle of Secondary education—1918

Whereas the Committee of Ten focused on a rigorous national curriculum for all students who would complete grade twelve—*all students* not including immigrants, many girls, and children of color (See

note 7)—another committee twenty-five years later would propose a completely different path for public education in the United States. As Jeffrey Mirel in "The Traditional High School" asserts, with a greater influx of immigrants, even psychologists had firm opinions about the correct path secondary education should take:

> It is not hard to see where the battle lines would have been drawn, even then, especially, as a wave of new immigrants was bringing tens of thousands of foreign adolescents to our shores. G. Stanley Hall, psychologist and president of Clark University, denounced the Committee of Ten's curriculum recommendations, because, he said, most high-school students were part of a 'great army of incapables . . . who should be in schools for the dullards or subnormal children.' (Mirel, 15). [7]

The key criticism by Hall and others with regard to the Committee of Ten's report was identified as the report's lack of educational equity within a democracy.

Whereas the Committee of Ten recommended a clearly classical and rigorous liberal arts approach, in 1918 the Commission on the Reorganization of Secondary Education created a response: *Cardinal Principles of Secondary Education*. With this Commission, a word with which we are now quite familiar, *differentiation*, emerges in order to address students' varying abilities, interests, and goals: "The character of the secondary-school population has been modified by the entrance of large numbers of pupils of widely varying capacities, aptitudes social heredity, and destinies in life." (Commission on The Reorganization of Secondary Education, 6).[8] Democracy, the ideal of democracy, differentiation, fulfillment, "well-being," personal and social interests, leisure, and ethical character are recurring anchor-terms within this document. To this Commission, the "main objectives of education" are health, command of fundamental processes, worthy home membership, vocation, and citizenship, worthy use of leisure, ethical character. ("Cardinal Principles," 11)[9]

Ironically, with both of these approaches, neither group believes that the majority of high school students are capable of or interested in tackling rigorous learning. The Committee of Ten supports the rigorous curriculum but at the same time asserts that most students will not complete the secondary level, much less attend college. The "Cardinal Principles" create differentiated tracks, ostensibly tailored to each student's *uniqueness* in aptitudes and abilities, understanding all the while they are supporting exactly what contradicts their stated overall objective---education equity. While all students under the "Cardinal Principles" who complete high school will receive a high school diploma, the diplomas do

not at all represent an equal, equitable education. Although each report with its recommendations contains unique features and appears logical, the consequences of both of these approaches, as Mirel asserts, " . . . in reality . . . had grossly *un*equal impact on white working-class young people and the growing number of black students who entered high schools in the 1930s and 1940s. These students were disproportionately assigned to nonacademic tracks (particularly the general track) and watered-down academic courses." (Mirel, 18)[10]

With regard to ELA, specifically, the 1892 Committee of Ten and the 1918 *Cardinal Principles of Secondary Education* both concurred on the import of all high school students taking four years of English. A report one year earlier influenced this position. With the 1917 report, *Reorganization of English In Secondary Schools*—a collaboration between the National Education Association and National Council of Teachers of English—we begin to see clearly the pivotal role English language arts would have in the secondary classroom. What distinguishes the *Cardinal Principles Of Secondary Schools* report from its predecessor emerges with the *de-emphasis* on using English at the secondary level singularly as college-prep, even though the Committee of Ten did not believe the majority of students would complete the entirety of grades 9-12. Whereas the Committee of Ten's English report is more content-focused, the 1917 collaborative report focuses on the student as the nucleus of a process engendering " . . . the habit of thoughtful reading and the joy of study, . . . [resulting in at the college level a student capable of] intelligence in gathering and digesting information [rather than a student imbued with] information as intelligence." (Hosic, 7).[11] In so many ways, this approach parallels what in the 21st century pedagogical strategies for ELA would be identified as relevance, language learning, and producing an "informed member of society," objectives/goals espoused in NCTE's 1996 *Standards for the English language arts*.

What Happened between 1919 and 1960?

By 1852, compulsory school attendance in every state began with Massachusetts and concluded with Mississippi in 1918. Between 1919 and 1960, several education reforms developed, including the following: Congress passed the G.I. Bill, federally funding college education for veterans not only at public but also private and religious institutions in 1944. U.S. Supreme Court rejected and therefore made illegal racial segregation in government schools in *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, 1954.* In 1958, Congress enacted the National Defense Education

Act, thereby providing federal funds to local public schools for science, mathematics, foreign language education, and guidance counseling. Congress enacts ESEA, also known as the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, in 1965, providing federal funding for local public schools.[12]

As these earlier reports placed what we would eventually identify as standards reform at the core of educational conversation, the 1940s and the 1960s saw the United States experience a huge demographic influx, the Depression, the conclusion of one World War and the onset and conclusion of another, and the seeming *surety* of the American Dream via the new middle class. Education was, indeed, once more the subject of revision and re-tooling. This time, however, once the revisions began, no one realized we would remain, almost perpetually, in a state of a *protean revising as we teach mode*.

Other Reform Markers: *Secondary Schools for American Youth* (1944); *The American High School Today* (1959); *A Nation at Risk* (1980)

Between 1944 and 1983, educational studies and revisions of K-12 education, and of ELA, continued to chisel and define what researchers deemed appropriate national standards. Among the critical studies, L.A. Williams' *Secondary Schools for American Youth* (1944), James B. Conant's *The American High School Today* (1959) and the pivotal *A Nation At Risk Report* (1983) under the Reagan administration provide an interesting and revealing look into how the concept, and eventually, the term itself, *standards* settled firmly into the educational fabric.

From Williams's perspective, the primary problem with secondary education's not being as effective emerged because of " . . . youth from every race and every nationality that now live within these United States. These youth bring with them all the traditions, customs, points of view, attitudes, intellectual status, social and civic training, and the like to be found in the entire population. [In essence,] the high school population has . . . become increasingly representative of all occupational groups and is almost a true cross section of the total population." (Williams, 119).[13] William finally concludes, " . . .the fact is that a very great proportion of present high school students are incapable of learning so-called liberal subjects as they are at present organized." (Williams, 120).[14]

While the majority of Williams's analysis explores and deconstructs what he identifies as "how secondary schools have become an organic part of public schooling," the secondary portion of his book deconstructs

curriculum, courses, assessment management, and core (basic) courses vs. common courses. His assessment is the following:

> The student population in today's high schools is as varied, as rich and as poor, as cultured and as crude, as industrious and as lazy, as frugal and as spendthrift, as healthy and as ill, as is the total population whose children they are. The high school finds that its pabulum of verbal symbolisms, its emphasis upon academic learning and scholarly pursuits, and its insistence upon intellectual refinements produce only irritation, stubborn resistance, or open revolt . . ..
>
> It is this heterogeneous and conglomerate mass of youth which the high school has to receive and try to fashion into a citizenry imbued with ideals of freedom, justice, square dealing, thrift, frugality, self-reliance, civic responsibility, respect for property, conformity, to law and order; in short, to make them into citizens capable of governing themselves and others like themselves. (Williams, 497-98).[15]

Although Williams's text deconstructs minutely the problems, as he perceives them, he fails, however, to outline any clear path to address the challenge he has described. In addition, his views on high school as a preparation for college entrance are equally didactic and exclusionary: "It is no kindness to direct toward a college career—or any other career—a youth whom *biology* [italics mine] has disqualified for that career. Youths and parents alike may be greatly disappointed, but that is far easier to bear than the disillusionment which would follow failure in the ill chose career." (Williams, 525).[16]

Fifteen years later, James B. Conant's *The American High School Today: A First Report to Interested Citizens* (1959) buttresses Williams's position. Essentially, Conant's report, with regard to English, parallels the aforementioned studies and reports. Conant's essential thesis on which he anchors the study emerges with his distinction between comprehensive vs. college preparatory schools, with a focus on the comprehensive schools that include his delineations of ability grouping (Conant, 49).[17] It is Conant's assertion that 80-85% of the student population is not college-focused but vocational and therefore should not receive the caliber of instructional rigor the other 15-20% should receive. For English, these comprehensive high schools focus on composition because with these skills, students may be better prepared for what he identifies as "marketability" or trade courses (Conant, 51-55).[18] An interesting counter-point to Conant's report emerged with James D. Koerner's "The Tragedy of The Conant Report" in 1960.

That Koerner was adamantly opposed to Conant's assessment and recommendations for comprehensive schools is more than evident early in

the article: "I had his recommended program, almost item for item, in English, "social studies," "vocational education," and all the rest. Only what I had was not education. Neither was it training. Not was it even "adjustment." It was an unspeakable abomination." (Koerner, 121).[19] Ironically, while being passed from disconnected vocational program to vocational program, no one noticed Koerner's penchant for books and intellectual rigor. He describes this oversight, employing sobering and persuasive rhetoric:

> It is not so much that they disbelieve is students' intellectual capacitates (though they do in considerable measure) but that they believe other things, particularly Mr. Conant's 'marketable skills,' are more important for most students . . . I would suggest to Mr. Conant that nobody has the right to assume that *any* student will not go to college. Nobody has the right to assume, because a student may think he will not go to college, that he should not be educated. Nobody has the right to encourage or coerce students into becoming anything less than they might become—and nobody knows, least of all the students themselves, *what* they might become. In short, nobody has the right to shut intellectual doors . . .. [T]he idea that most young people *cannot even be introduced* to vast stretches of mankind's hard-won stock of knowledge and understanding must continue to be named for what it is—a doctrine of educational defeat. (Koerner, 124).[20]

What Koerner reveals in this article is the core of the argument up to this time, regarding educational standards, as well as the position ELA plays on both sides. From the nineteenth century and the middle part of the twentieth, secondary education always includes English, *but* the focus of all the reports asserts that the majority of students do not require any substantive sort of intellectual rigor or exploration or discovery, particularly if they do not follow a college path. Gender, class, and ethnicity are key components in these early decisions and views. In addition to Koerner, one can only wonder with such an insular and separate perspective, what would have happened to Steve Jobs and other entrepreneurs of the world who customized and blended their paths?

By the time *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform: An Open Letter to the American People: A Report to the Nation and to the Secretary of Education* emerges from the Reagan administration, it appears public education, especially secondary education, is in line for significant revision and rethinking once more. With this report, we begin to see elements taken from the previous studies and reports but also more contemporary-driven objectives for all students—that also includes the notion of tracking, or as Conant identified, ability grouping.

Key findings included, establishment of "the core modern curriculum" comprised of 4 years of English, 3 years of mathematics, 3 years of science, 3 years of social studies, one half-year of computer science, and for college-bound students, 2 years of foreign language. (Department of Education, 32).[21] The report's recommendation specifically for English for all students is more global and more rigorous than previous reposts and studies:

> The teaching of *English* in high school should equip graduates to: (a) comprehend, interpret, evaluate, and use what they read; (b) write well-organized, effective papers; (c) listen effectively and discuss ideas intelligently; and (d) know our literary heritage and how it enhances imagination and ethical understanding, and how it relates to the customs, ideas, and values of today's life and culture. (Department of Education, 33).[22]

According to the report, the ultimate aim now for English at the secondary level is to enable and empower students to develop and exercise requisite skills for modern times: critical thinking honed through reading and writing and discussing and listening, cultural and historical understanding and appreciation through experience with varied literatures.

Codification and National Revision: No Child Left Behind and CCSS

One codified response to the "At Risk" report emerged in 1996 with NCTE's *Standards for the English language arts*. NCTE provides an ELA roadmap for standards—a road map that still guides ELA curriculum development to this day.

Among its attributes, the NCTE standards' guide tackles what no other report, survey, or study did in the past, namely, the *earnest* inclusion of all students. All students should be expected to and encouraged to attain as much as they can. In addition to this mission, the document foreshadows the 21st century emphasis on cross-curricular importance, critical thinking in a global community, and the importance of relevance in a student's learning. In short, the NCTE document redefines *literacy learning:* "Although the standards focus primarily on content, we also underscore the importance of other dimensions of language learning. In particular, we believe that questions of why, when, and how students grow and develop as language users are also critical and must be addressed by those who translate the standards into practice." (NCTE and IRA, 2).[23] The standards this document set forth focus on what is identified as "the expanded

definition of literacy": "reading, writing, speaking, listening, viewing, and visually representing." (NCTE and IRA, 6).[24] Success of this instructional position would necessarily include, according to the document, "a broad range of texts," including literary, informational, academic texts, student-produced texts, speeches, newspapers, and a vast array of other digital and media sources. (NCTE and IRA, 13).[25] With reference to the import of ELA and its relationship with other core content areas, the assertion is that "English language arts is important not only as subjects in and of themselves, but also as supporting skills for students' learning in all other subjects." (NCTE and IRA, 7).[26]

As discussions and "re-tooling" of education continued, two other developments in conjunction with NCTE's *Standards* have had a profound impact on K-12 education and particularly on ELA curriculum and instruction: the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) 2001 and Common Core State Standards (CCSS), 2009. Like the NCLB, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), continues to seek, it asserts, " a fair, equal, and significant opportunity to obtain a high-quality education and reach, at a minimum, proficiency on challenging State academic achievement standards and state academic assessments."(United States Department of Education, 2001).[27] ELA remained a focal point, as it had in other reports and studies. Funding for ESEA continues to be subject to political parties and their agendas, however. To further solidify English language arts' import in other content areas, science and social studies developed parallel core standards in 2014 that state specifically the necessity for these content areas to foment and sustain skills students learn in ELA.

Notes

[1] The following articles and discussions on these issues illustrate some of the ongoing conversations: Stan Karp. "The Problems with the Core," *rethinking schools*, 28, no. 2 (2013), rethinkingschools.org; Julie Borowski, "Top 10 Reasons to Oppose Common Core," *Freedomworks* (July) 2013, freedomworks.org; Catherine Gerwertz, "Success of Standards Depends on Translation for Classroom," *Education Week: Math, Literacy, & Common Standards: Mapping out the landscape of academic content and instruction in the common-core era*. 31, no. 29 (2012): s6-s11. Also available online: edweek.org; Jeff Baxter, "The Standards Are Working In My Classroom," *Education Week: Commentary*. 34, no. 5 (2014): 23; Liana Heitan, "Under Common Core, Teachers Band Together to Build Math Coherence," *Education Week: Making Sense of the Math: Common-Core Math In Practice*. 34, no. 12 (2014): s10-s11. Also available educationweek.org; Micahel Q. McShane, "The controversial Common Core," *American Enterprise Institute*