

# Curriculum Materials: Scaffolds for New Teacher Learning?

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## ABSTRACT

This report looks at how three secondary English teachers responded to the curriculum materials they encountered as new teachers. The authors were particularly interested in knowing how the materials helped the new teachers learn about teaching language arts. To this end, the authors explored the teachers' perception and use of two sets of curriculum materials—*Teaching the Multiparagraph Essay* and *Pacesetter English*. The authors examined the materials to see what, if any, opportunities for teacher learning were embedded in them. They also considered how the teachers' prior knowledge, both of the subject matter and of approaches to teaching language arts, affected how they responded to and used the material. The authors found that the teachers in the study spent an enormous amount of time searching out curriculum materials for their classes and that the curriculum materials they encountered did, indeed, powerfully shape their ideas about teaching language arts as well as their ideas about classroom practice. The authors describe a trajectory for the teachers' use of the curriculum materials. New teachers begin by sticking close to the materials they have at hand. Then, over time, as they learn more about both students and curriculum, they adapt and adjust what they do, and their use of the materials opens up as they become more willing to play with and take liberties with the materials. The authors argue that new and aspiring teachers need opportunities to analyze and critique curriculum materials. This would begin during teacher education and continue in the company of their more experienced colleagues. Such curricular conversations are helpful to all but especially to new teachers who tend to latch on uncritically to whatever curriculum they are handed.



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## INTRODUCTION

*A curriculum is more for teachers than it is for pupils. If it cannot change, move, perturb, inform teachers, it will have no effect on those whom they teach. It must be first and foremost a curriculum for teachers. If it has any effect on pupils, it will have it by virtue of having had an effect on teachers (Bruner, 1977).*

Near the end of her first year of teaching, Nancy, a high school English teacher, was asked what she would choose for her teaching if she could have anything she wanted. Quickly, without equivocation, she replied—“curriculum.” A few moments later, she elaborated, saying that without “materials that would interest [my students], and not knowing what materials would interest them or what we have available that I could use that would interest them and pull them in, I feel lost.”

Nancy’s plaintive words speak to one of the critical issues facing beginning teachers: figuring out what to teach students and, then, finding the resources necessary to support instruction. As a novice, Nancy had not yet developed the pedagogical content knowledge that would help her have a good understanding of “what would interest her students.” Perhaps more importantly, as a novice, she had not yet learned what types of curriculum materials were available to her, materials that could in fact help her develop knowledge about the teaching of English. For new teachers, at the beginning of their careers and with much still to learn about students, teaching, learning, and the subject matter, curriculum materials have the potential to play a pivotal role in helping them along the trajectory from novices to more experienced teachers. But what do new teachers encounter curriculum-wise when they enter their classrooms?

In response to state frameworks and curriculum reforms, school districts have crafted their own versions of curriculum frameworks and have adopted curriculum materials to help teachers meet the new standards. Some districts have adopted very directed packaged programs that specify in great detail what teachers should be teaching, while others provide materials and structured teachers’ guides, which teachers then use at their own discretion. Other districts specify more general curriculum frameworks and allow teachers to construct their own curriculum. Such curricular policies influence classroom practice in a variety of ways (e.g. Freeman & Porter, 1989; Hoffman, McCarthy, Elliott, Price, Feree, & Abbott, 1998; Sosniak & Perlman, 1990; Stodolsky, 1989). These curricular policies also have important implications for what teachers, particularly beginning teachers, are able to learn about the teaching of specific content.

In this paper, we present results from a four-year longitudinal study of beginning language arts teachers, focusing on how three beginning secondary English teachers responded to the curriculum materials they encountered when they began teaching. We are particularly interested in how these different curriculum materials afforded opportunities for teachers’ learning about teaching the language arts and how the teachers used the curriculum materials they encountered. We explore the following questions:

- How do these new English teachers perceive and use available curriculum materials for teaching the language arts?
- What opportunities for teacher learning are embedded in the curriculum materials new teachers encounter?
- How does new teachers’ prior knowledge, both of the subject matter and of approaches to teaching language arts, affect how they respond to and use curriculum materials?

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## TEACHERS AND CURRICULUM

As mentioned in our opening quotation, curriculum serves not just students; curriculum materials also provide potential learning opportunities for the adults who teach them (Ball & Cohen, 1996). Yet teachers, and teacher educators, have long had an ambivalent relationship with textbooks. Teachers have long been dependent on textbooks to help guide their instruction (Woodward & Elliot, 1990; Sosniak & Perlman, 1990; Stodolsky, 1989; Freeman & Porter, 1989). Yet researchers have found that textbooks are not necessarily of high quality and can limit, rather than support, teachers' learning and developing professionalism (Ball & Feiman-Nemser, 1988; Woodward & Elliot, 1990). In their work on beginning teachers, Ball and Feiman-Nemser found that in the two teacher education programs they studied, the professors disparaged the quality of textbooks and discouraged beginning teachers from using them while simultaneously encouraging them to create their own materials from scratch. Yet, once these preservice teachers were in classrooms, various policies or mandates necessitated the use of textbooks. The researchers found these novices ill-equipped to use textbooks because most of their exposure to them had involved developing critiques, rather than considering how to adapt them for wise classroom use. The researchers concluded that textbooks could contribute to the development of subject matter knowledge for novice teachers who do not have the comprehensive knowledge about certain topics necessary for teaching. Furthermore, the researchers hypothesized that textbooks could serve as a scaffold, helping novice teachers "learn to think pedagogically about particular content" (p. 421) and could give them the skills they need so that they can move towards creating their own materials.

More recent research on teachers and curriculum takes two different directions, looking broadly at teachers' general experiences with the curriculum materials they encounter (or with the lack of materials they find when they enter the classroom) as well as more specifically at what they might learn from their use of curriculum materials. In a study in Massachusetts, researchers interviewed 50 new teachers—at all levels and in all subject areas—and found that these new teachers identified curriculum as one of their central concerns. The authors suggest that while these teachers sense the importance of curriculum and are hungry for curricular guidance, they often find little in this regard; they end up overwhelmed by their responsibilities in terms of creating quality curricular materials to use with their students (Kauffman, Johnson, Kardon, Liu, & Peske, 2002). These researchers conclude that one of the central problems facing new teachers is finding curricular resources and materials that help them know how to accomplish their job.

Remillard (2000) studied two elementary teachers and the relationship between their use of a reform-oriented math textbook and their learning about mathematics and the teaching of mathematics. She concluded that the textbook—and the teachers' use of it—did offer them a variety of opportunities for learning. At the same time, though, she concluded that for the pedagogical change that would support true reform of mathematics instruction, textbooks such as the one she observed teachers using need to do more than just set out activities for students to do and terrain for teachers to cover. She argued that as well as being written for students, textbooks need to be written to teachers. In particular, they need to be more explicit about reasons and purposes for certain content or activities, and they need to provide opportunities for teachers to engage in decision-making, giving them space to play out some of the introduced possibilities on their own.

Ball and Cohen (1996) noted the uneven role curriculum materials have historically played in teachers' practice and argued for a new vision of the design and use of such materials. As Remillard (2000) did, they pointed out the important role curriculum materials could play in teacher learning and the need to integrate



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such materials into professional development programs so as to increase teachers' engagement with and learning from the materials. Like Bruner before them, Ball and Cohen argued that curriculum materials should be designed as much for teachers as for students and should be used as a site for teacher learning.

In our study, we looked closely at both the teachers' experiences with curriculum materials as well as the materials themselves. We also focused on just one subject matter and on teachers at the secondary level, where teachers historically have had more freedom in terms of what they teach. In this new era of school reform and increased accountability, however, beginning teachers do not necessarily relish curricular freedom in the way they once did, and many are eager to find—and learn from—the best resources possible.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study draws on sociocultural theory (Cole, 1996; Wertsch, 1981) to frame the research. As outlined in our conceptual framework (Grossman, Smagorinsky, & Valencia, 1999), we have focused on the different activity settings in which beginning teachers learn to teach and on how teachers acquire conceptual and practical tools for teaching language arts. From the perspective of sociocultural theory, learning involves tool-mediated action; the curriculum materials that teachers encounter represent important tools for learning to teach. Embedded within these materials are conceptions of what it means to teach reading and writing, as well as practical tools to use in classrooms. Yet teachers' use of these tools will vary, depending upon their own beliefs and values, their knowledge of the subject, and the contexts in which they teach, just as how they use the materials helps determine what they learn from them. Our analyses have tried to take account of the tools embedded within curriculum materials, how these tools are used, and the factors that influence how teachers use and learn from these materials.

Curriculum materials can take a variety of forms. For this analysis, under the umbrella of curriculum materials we include: curriculum frameworks (which generally specify what students should be learning); curricular programs, including those that focus either on a full year of instruction or on a shorter period of time or on a single unit; textbooks, including trade books and class sets of books; teacher-created materials; and other resources, such as professional publications that focus on curriculum.

In our analysis, we became interested in several aspects of the curriculum materials we examined. Because the subject matter of English/language arts is broad, encompassing a number of different areas (e.g., reading/literature, writing, speaking/listening, and sometimes even drama, journalism, and visual media), we considered what parts of the subject matter the curriculum materials addressed. For example, do materials focus only on writing or do they include a number of different content areas? As teaching itself is such a complex practice, we were also interested in ways the curriculum materials might help new teachers learn about and master the myriad tasks involved in teaching, including planning, enacting particular pedagogies, assessing student learning, etc. Curriculum materials can fall along a continuum, from more prescriptive, specifying exactly what should be taught, to more flexible, offering guidance and ideas about what and how to teach, but leaving many of the necessary decisions up to the individual teacher. We were interested in where on this continuum particular curriculum materials fell. Finally, because of our interest in how new teachers' knowledge about teaching language arts grows and develops over time—the trajectory they experience as they go through their first few years of teaching—we wondered what kind of support for teacher learning might be built into particular curriculum materials. These varying questions and concerns led us

to identify four dimensions of curriculum materials, further defined and elaborated in Table 1:

- scope of materials with regard to content
- comprehensiveness of materials with regard to instruction
- flexibility of materials with regard to use
- support for teacher learning

**Table 1: Features of Curriculum Materials**

<b>Scope</b>	<b>Comprehensiveness</b>	<b>Flexibility</b>	<b>Support for teacher learning</b>
The number of aspects of the language arts addressed by the curriculum materials	The number of aspects of instruction addressed by the curriculum materials and the resources included within the curriculum materials	How the materials are designed to be used	How much and in what ways the materials engage teachers in tasks that contribute to the development of knowledge about teaching and the subject matter at hand
<i>What aspects of the broad territory of the language arts are included in the curriculum materials? Do the materials focus on a narrow slice of language arts (e.g., writing)? Do they tackle more territory (e.g. literature, writing, speaking and listening)?</i>	<i>Do the materials focus only on what to teach? Do they also include information about how to teach the content or how to assess student learning? Are opportunities for professional development provided? Do the materials provide teachers with just the topics or general content? Or, do they also include lesson plans, activities, worksheets?</i>	<i>Do the materials require teachers to use them as they were written? Can teachers adapt and change the materials depending on their needs and contexts?</i>	<i>Are the materials addressed to teachers as well as students? Do the materials include questions that ask teachers to figure things out for themselves? Do the materials include opportunities for teachers to make their own decisions about how to use or what to do with the materials?</i>

The broader the scope of curriculum materials, the more likely there are to be opportunities for beginning teachers to learn how to integrate the different components of the language arts. Materials that are more comprehensive in nature may provide more opportunities for teachers to learn not only what to teach, but how to teach the material. Materials that provide for some flexibility in how they are implemented may also provide more opportunities for teachers to actually interact with the curriculum and make decisions about how best to use the materials to support student learning. While beginning teachers may or may not take the opportunities offered by the materials, and while some teachers might learn from any curriculum with which they're presented, we argue that the characteristics of the curriculum materials themselves matter to teacher learning.

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## DESCRIPTION OF STUDY

This study followed five secondary language arts teachers from the last year of their teacher education program into their first three years of full-time teaching. Our data consist of individual and group interviews, classroom observations, and documents from both the teachers' classrooms and their districts. During each of the four years of the study we interviewed the teachers individually on at least 11 occasions and observed them a minimum of five times. Each observation was accompanied by a pre-observation discussion and a more extended post-observation interview. We took extensive field notes, collected copies of curriculum materials, and wrote detailed analytic memos of each observation. All the interviews were audio-taped and transcribed verbatim. The group interviews, which included various tasks and discussion prompts, were both audio and video-taped. In one of the tasks, teachers were asked to bring in samples of curriculum materials they had encountered in their schools and to talk about them with the group. In another group task, teachers were asked to rank order the usefulness of various materials they had mentioned in interviews and to talk about their rankings.

Another phase of data collection focused on three of the districts where these beginning teachers found jobs. To get a better sense of the school and district contexts, we interviewed a variety of individuals who surrounded the beginning teachers, including cooperating teachers, mentor teachers, department chairs, and principals. We also interviewed district administrators, including language arts coordinators, assistant superintendents, and superintendents, about district policies regarding the language arts including curriculum policies.

Data analysis was an iterative process. We summarized each interview and observation for all participants in this study and wrote accompanying analytic memos. We engaged in extensive analyses of the individual teachers and then conducted cross-case analyses, looking for both commonalities and differences among the teacher with regard to their uses of curriculum materials. Our analysis focused on 1) how teachers made sense of and used a variety of curriculum materials in their classrooms; 2) factors which influenced how teachers used the curriculum materials; and 3) what teachers reported learning from the materials, as well as evidence of this learning in observations of their teaching and in interviews.

We also carefully analyzed two sets of curriculum materials that the teachers used, focusing on how the materials represented the language arts and embodied opportunities for learning about teaching the language arts. As part of this analysis, we coded materials with regard to features of scope, comprehensiveness, and flexibility, as well as for potential opportunities for teachers to learn about subject matter, about teaching the subject matter, or about teaching more generally. For example, some of the materials actually defined literary terms and gave examples; we coded this as a potential opportunity to learn about the subject matter. The same materials might also provide ways of thinking about how to teach this concept or term to students, which we coded as an opportunity to learn about teaching the subject matter. Finally, some materials introduced instructional activities such as the jig-saw or formats for group discussion that were not inherently tied to the subject matter. We coded these as opportunities to learn more generally about teaching.

## THE TEACHERS AND THE CURRICULUM MATERIALS

In this paper, we focus our attention on three beginning teachers in our study, and on two specific sets of curriculum materials: “*Teaching the Multiparagraph Essay: A Sequential Nine-Week Unit*,” from Jane Schaffer Publications, and “*Pacesetter English*,” from the College Board. The table below provides a brief introduction to the three teachers we discuss in this paper, noting in particular the curriculum materials that were available to them.

**Table 2: Participants in the study**

<b>Nancy</b>	<b>Allison</b>	<b>Bill</b>
Taught 10 <sup>th</sup> and 11 <sup>th</sup> grade in a suburban school district	Taught 7 <sup>th</sup> grade in a suburban school district	Taught 10 <sup>th</sup> and 12 <sup>th</sup> grade in a suburban school district
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Used the Multiparagraph Essay unit</b></li> <li>• Had a list of novels available</li> <li>• State curriculum frameworks</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Used the Multiparagraph Essay unit</b></li> <li>• Had a list of novels available</li> <li>• State &amp; district curriculum frameworks</li> <li>• Teacher-created units</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Used the Multiparagraph Essay unit</b></li> <li>• Had a list of novels available</li> <li>• State &amp; district curriculum frameworks</li> <li>• <b>Used Pacesetter English</b></li> </ul>

During their teacher education program, these teachers all took a two-quarter language arts methods sequence that focused on both the teaching of writing and the teaching of literature. While the students created their own curriculum materials during their teacher education coursework, one unit in their English/language arts methods course and one unit in a course on integrated curriculum, they neither examined nor had opportunities to critique or evaluate published curriculum materials. All three of these teachers internalized the broad principles that ran through their teacher education program. For example, they felt strongly about the importance of meaningful assessments, being clear about one’s goals and objectives, scaffolding student learning, and providing a constructivist learning environment.

At the same time, they felt that one of the weak links in their program had been their preparation for teaching English; while they had been introduced to some general ideas regarding the teaching of writing, for example, they did not necessarily feel they had been prepared to put these ideas into practice. Nancy noted that there were no specific things related to literature or writing instruction that she had learned in teacher preparation that she was using as a first year teacher. She commented, “It’s trial by fire. The methods class that should have covered this was ineffective.” Bill also echoed this sentiment. So, comparatively speaking, while they felt well prepared for the general tasks of teaching, they did not feel as well prepared to tackle the more subject-specific work of teaching literature and writing.

Nancy had an undergraduate degree in English, a minor in psychology, and was hired to teach both of those subjects when she took her first job. She felt that writing, rather than literature, was her strength in the teaching of English/language arts. One of her goals for students was that they not be afraid to try writing, that they feel comfortable “getting it down on paper so that they have something to work with.” Of these three new teachers, Nancy was the most anxious about and concerned with curriculum and curriculum materials. She felt that there was a real lack of available curricular support at her school and said that she was quite “overwhelmed and not quite sure where to start.” Although she originally resisted adopting the unit on the Multiparagraph Essay in her classroom, she ultimately began to rely on it.

Allison was originally a journalism major, but eventually switched to English. She had a plethora of materials available to her and she took advantage of a variety

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of resources around her (e.g., other teachers, the bookroom, published and teacher-created materials, on-line resources). She enjoyed developing curriculum units for her 7<sup>th</sup> graders but also relied on the Multiparagraph Essay unit for teaching writing.

Bill entered teaching as a second career and, unlike Allison and Nancy, his undergraduate degree was not in English but in anthropology. Like Nancy, Bill did not seem to have many resources available to him for teaching his sophomore English class, but he was also assigned to teach the Pacesetter English for seniors, a curriculum that provided him with everything he needed to teach the class.

Before discussing teachers' uses of these curriculum materials in more depth, we first provide an analysis of Pacesetter English and the Multiparagraph Essay unit and the different opportunities these materials offer beginning teachers. We selected these two curricula for analysis both because they featured prominently in the practice of these first-year teachers and because they provide a strategic site for comparison and contrast along some of the dimensions we have outlined.

## ***Teaching the Multiparagraph Essay: A Sequential Nine-Week Unit***

*Teaching the Multiparagraph Essay* is a nine-week unit plan designed and published by a well-known practitioner, Jane Schaffer. A number of districts in our study had adopted this unit plan for the teaching of writing, particularly for 9<sup>th</sup> grade English. In addition to this unit on writing, Jane Schaffer Publications has available a number of unit plans for teaching well known literary texts, including *The Great Gatsby* and *Romeo and Juliet*, all commonly taught in high schools.

### **Scope**

This unit plan focuses primarily on the teaching of writing, although it also includes a selection of literary texts, including two short stories, "A Pair of Silk Stockings" by Kate Chopin and "The Scarlet Ibis" by James Hurst, as well as the first chapter of *Great Expectations*. While the unit briefly mentions the teaching of grammar, it states:

We do not include lessons for grammar instruction in this packet. We use the same grammar references as other English teachers. We see grammar and other mechanics in the context of our own students' writing and believe we see more improvement this way than by teaching it out of context (p. 104).

The unit thus has a rather narrow scope in the context of the language arts as a whole, although it is quite comprehensive for the area of writing.

### **Comprehensiveness**

*Teaching the Multiparagraph Essay* is quite comprehensive, given our definition. The materials provide an overview of the entire unit plan, a sample time line, student worksheets for daily lessons, quizzes on essay terminology, charts on format, terminology, graphic organizers, peer response forms, and a number of examples of student writing, including sample essays on frequently taught literary works including *Of Mice and Men*, *The Crucible*, and *Hamlet*, among others. The materials provide not only the content (what should be taught), but include instructional ideas as well (how it should be taught). The materials also include assessments, such as quizzes, and scoring guides for the actual essays, as well as an explanation of how to use the scoring guide. While the materials do not promise professional development, Jane Schaffer herself gives workshops on the unit plan. One of the districts in our study, for example, had hired her to run a professional development workshop on the teaching of writing,

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which one of our participants attended. The materials themselves, however, do contain references for how the materials might be used within a school or department. For example, in the overview of the essay scoring guide, the materials state:

Our department wanted a scoring guide (rubric) that would help us provide better feedback to our students as well as calibrate our grading of essays. We spent several years developing the guide and use it now on all major essays...We have also used this guide for inservice training. We have read the same sample essays and discussed as a department what grade they deserved and why. The discussions raised all the strong and weak points in each essay and helped us develop a clearer rationale for our grades. (p. 101).

As a resource for beginning teachers, then, the unit plan provides a comprehensive overview of just what it promises—teaching the multiparagraph essay.

## Flexibility

In principle, the unit is designed to be used by classroom teachers, and teachers are encouraged to take what they find useful. As the authors themselves state:

This unit is very flexible. It has absorbed as many variations in sequence and presentation as there are teachers using it. We offer several ways to organize it, all based on first-hand experience, but we know that there are many other combinations that will work as well. We believe that all teachers adapt ideas to fit their own teaching styles, and this unit, like all of our curricular packets, is easily and successfully modified. (p. 7)

While the materials provide a sample time line, it is only a sample, and throughout the unit there are references to other ways to approach the material. One of the features of this unit is its terminology for talking about essay writing. In fact, many of the early lessons focus on the terminology, and there is a chart that summarizes the definitions of all of these terms. However, even as the unit is built around this terminology, the authors state that the exact labels matter less than the underlying ideas; most important of all, they argue, is departmental consistency around a given set of terms.

You may prefer your own terms to those given. For example, “concrete detail” is often called fact, specifics, description, evidence, support, example, illustration, proof, quotations, paraphrase, or plot reference. “Commentary” is our synonym for analysis, interpretation, explication, insight, inference, personal reaction, feelings...evaluation, and reflection...It does not seem to matter which terms you use. What does matter is that every teacher in the department use the same terms in every English class and that all students get a copy of the terms at the beginning of the writing unit. (p. 12)

In this sense, the materials encourage teachers to initiate a discussion in their own departments about the appropriate terminology to use. However, given that the entire unit is predicated around this particular terminology, changing the terms would mean changing all of the supporting materials (worksheets, guide sheets, etc.). Perhaps for this reason, the teachers we observed using these materials all used the terminology offered by the unit.

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## Support for teacher learning

We turn now to discussion of the opportunities for learning that are embedded within this particular set of curriculum materials, focusing first on what teachers could learn about English (in this case, writing in particular), and turning then to discussion of what they could learn about the teaching of writing.

**Subject matter knowledge.** The “*Multiparagraph Essay Unit*” offers opportunities to learn a language with which to talk about writing. The unit plan provides specific definitions of common terms in the teaching of writing, such as thesis statements, supporting evidence, and the development of ideas. As the section above details, in their explanations of these terms, the authors link their terminology to other commonly used terms, so that a beginning teacher could make connections between their own understanding of writing and terms they used themselves and the language used in this unit.

The unit also offers a framework, some might even say a formula, for a five paragraph essay, including a graphic layout of an essay, which dictates that an essay must be a minimum of four paragraphs long, with an introduction, two body paragraphs, and a conclusion. The materials also include multiple examples of essays, from which teachers could learn. While the authors argue that the formula, once internalized by students, can be discarded, the materials reinforce form over content and a fairly traditional approach to the five-paragraph essay.

Finally, the unit plan also offers potential opportunities to learn about new literary texts. As the complete texts are included in the unit plan itself, teachers have the opportunity to read these pieces of literature, with which they may be unfamiliar.

**Pedagogical content knowledge.** Perhaps even more than providing opportunities to learn about writing, this unit provides a wealth of opportunities to learn about how to teach writing to students. For example, in defining common terms, such as thesis, the unit plan provides the language with which to describe the subject matter to students. For beginning teachers, who are struggling to find ways of explaining what they know, this is a non-trivial accomplishment. In fact, all three teachers appreciated having definitions they could use with students to describe the elements of an essay. As Nancy told the group:

[JS] saved me when it comes to thesis statements...I was having a heck of a time teaching the thesis statement...and now I can say, o.k. this is a good thesis statement because she gave me the language I needed to be able to articulate to students, and now kids can say, it's written right into my rubric...a phenomenal thesis statement has a subject and an opinion on a very sophisticated level....and then I can break it down, I have the language and the tools to do that. (Group Interview, Yr. 3)

The unit plan also provides an opportunity to learn about planning a complete unit around the teaching of writing, as well as specific approaches to writing instruction. The materials provide clear guidance on what students should be doing during the unit, including a suggested calendar for each of the 45 days of the unit. Also included are sample lessons for each of these days, complete with student handouts. The lesson plans show a variety of ways to teach prewriting techniques, including bubble clusters, spider diagrams, outlining, line clustering, and columns. If teachers did not already know of these different techniques, the unit materials provide an opportunity to both learn about them and about teaching them. The unit also includes actual short stories and prompts for essays on these stories.

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The unit also offers teachers opportunities to gain insight into what to expect of students, and what they are likely to find especially difficult. This is a critical component of pedagogical content knowledge—learning what students are likely to know and find challenging within a given content area (Grossman, 1990; Hamel, 2003). In offering suggestions to teachers about teaching commentary, Schaffer focuses on some predictable problems teachers might face when asking students to write commentary. She writes:

After teaching commentary to students for 15 years, we would offer the following suggestions:

- 1) We encourage you to expect students to resist writing commentary and reinforce your determination to teach it, regardless of your students' reactions...
- 2) Many students need help in producing commentary. If they get stuck, we tell them to start their commentary sentences with "This shows that \_\_\_\_\_." The result is nearly always commentary. (Schaffer, 1995, p. 40-41)

Such suggestions provide teachers with some insights into what to expect from students as they teach these lessons. They even provide possible remedies for student difficulties, such as the "this shows that" suggestion.

Finally, the unit includes sample student essays, in some instances, essays by the same student written in 9<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup>, and 12<sup>th</sup> grades, and in one instance, essays written by the same student in all four years of high school and in the first year of college. These sample essays provide teachers the opportunity to see multiple examples of student writing, as well as how a student's writing develops over time. Since beginning teachers have not yet had the years of experience from which to build such knowledge on their own, this curriculum provides a rich set of examples from which to learn.

## ***Pacesetter English***

### **Scope**

While the Multiparagraph Essay unit focuses on one aspect of the language arts—writing—and offers teachers support for one discrete unit on the five-paragraph essay, Pacesetter English curriculum materials are broad in scope and focus on many aspects of the language arts. The materials provide teachers with a total of six units, essentially an entire year's course, and include texts and text recommendations, assignments/activities, assessments, as well as a well-developed philosophy of the purposes for teaching the language arts to high school students.

The introduction to the materials describes two overarching goals for students. First, they indicate a core purpose of "making meaning from texts: students understand written, oral and visual texts from a variety of times and cultures in a variety of media and genres." The second purpose they describe is "creating and presenting texts: student communicate ideas through oral, visual and written texts, in both informal and formal modes of presentation." In order to achieve these two purposes, the Pacesetter curriculum materials engage students in activities such as responding to texts, interpreting and analyzing texts, putting texts in context, developing and presenting texts, and demonstrating technical command of both oral and written language (pp. 3-4).

In *The Rise and Fall of English*, Robert Scholes worries about some of the turns the discipline of English has taken in the last century. As one of the creators of the



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Pacesetter curriculum, he comments on what the course does, and how it achieves his vision for student learning in English.

What the course aims at, then, is to increase the textual power of the students who take it: to help them learn how to read in the fullest sense of that word. Reading, in this sense of the word, means being able to place or situate a text, to understand it from the inside, sympathetically, and to step away from it and see it from the outside, critically. It means being able to see a text for what it is and to ask also how it connects—or fails to connect to the life and times of the reader.

This is textual power, but textual power does not stop there; it also includes the ability to respond, to talk back, to write back, to analyze, to extend, to take one's own textual position in relation to Shakespeare—or to any kind of text. (Scholes, 1998, pp. 130-131).

The creators of these materials define “texts” broadly, indicating that the texts students work with as well as the texts they create can be written, oral, or visual. With its emphasis on both the examination and the creation of multiple types of texts, the Pacesetter curriculum materials can help students and teachers develop a broad and comprehensive understanding of both what the discipline of English is and the kind of work people engage in within the discipline.

## Comprehensiveness

In addition to being broad in scope, the Pacesetter English curriculum materials are comprehensive, addressing many aspects of instruction and including a variety of resources for both teachers and students. The course as a whole is called “Voices of Modern Cultures,” and all of the course content and themes revolve around the notion of voice and questions such as “Who am I?” “Who are they?” and “Who are we?” While teachers can address these questions and this broad thematic content from a variety of angles, the overarching content for the course is defined by the curriculum materials. In addition to providing information about what to teach (i.e., broad content), the curriculum materials also offer many resources for how to teach this content.

The first unit in the Pacesetter curriculum is called “Many Selves, Many Voices: An Introduction to ‘Voices of Modern Cultures’;” this first unit is intended to introduce students to the concept of voice, particularly as it pertains to themselves as individuals. Each unit begins with a list of goals for that unit, as well as a narrative introduction to the unit. For example, goals for the first unit include “Acknowledge and demonstrate the *language abilities* with which they begin the course and the *variety of voices* they use in the groups to which they belong; become aware of the variety of voices other writers and speakers use, depending on their *audience* and their *purpose*, and the *forms* they use to give expression to their voices” (p. 14). The narrative overview that follows says “the various activities of this unit are designed to sharpen your attention to your voice and to other voices in cultural conversation.” Key terms for the unit follow the overview information (e.g., voice, text, cultural context, situating context, connections, reflection, portfolio).

The curriculum materials also include two main assignments for each unit, what the authors refer to as “common tasks for assessment.” Each of these assignments is broken down into a variety of steps, and included in the materials are various guidelines and models for structuring the work of the assignment. Also included throughout are occasional examples of how other students have completed various parts of the required assignments. Finally, most units include a number of texts that teachers can use with students as they complete the unit. In the first unit, there are both poems and excerpts from longer fiction and non-fiction works; some of the authors are

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Lucille Clifton, Sojourner Truth, Amy Tan, and Ralph Ellison. Following the work of these more well-known authors are pieces by Pacesetter students, pieces that current students can use as examples to help them think through the various unit tasks.

Among the many resources included in the Pacesetter curriculum materials are a variety focused on assessment. As noted above, the creators emphasize that the two activities or tasks that students do during each unit are themselves a form of assessment, referring to them as “common tasks for assessment.” However, there is also an emphasis on more long-term assessment, in particular, the year-long creation of an assessment portfolio. In the introductory materials the authors explain that an assessment portfolio is “a tool for evaluating your achievement in the course” and provide information about how students will create their own assessment portfolio. Following the instructions are several graphic organizers, intended to help with the process of creating the portfolio. These graphic organizers ask students to describe the entries they have chosen to place in their portfolio, as well as help them discuss what each entry is evidence of. Several other worksheets help students provide their portfolio readers with further information, both about the assignments included and what they have achieved or accomplished through the assignment.

## Flexibility

While the Pacesetter materials are comprehensive, essentially providing teachers with all that they would need in order to offer a full year course, the creators repeatedly suggest that teachers should adapt or change various aspects of the course to suit their own contexts and needs. In this respect, the materials are designed to be used flexibly, and the creators do not require that teachers use them exactly as they were written. In the introduction to the course as a whole, the creators write, “The Pacesetter English course is different in every classroom” (p. 1). One example of the materials’ flexibility is in the selection of texts. As noted above, texts are included at the end of some units, and teachers can use these while completing the unit. Yet, in the introduction to the text section, the materials say, “Your teacher may choose to introduce other related texts.” So, while the Pacesetter creators include text possibilities, they ultimately leave the decision of what texts to use to the individual teacher.

## Support for Teacher Learning

From these materials, new teachers have opportunities to learn about both the discipline of English and the teaching of English; that is, opportunities to acquire both subject matter knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge are embedded in the materials.

**Subject matter knowledge.** The Pacesetter materials provide teachers with information about concepts addressed by the materials, thereby enhancing their knowledge of certain topics or ideas in English. For example, the narrative introduction to the first unit—written to students—explores the concept of voice, providing readers with a variety of ways to think about this concept. One section of the narrative notes, “We are characters who perform in different scenes, saying different kinds of things—to the various people we know in their various settings.” Another, “You may encounter many kinds of voices through the things that you read, the music that you listen to, the films that you watch” (pp. 15-16).

Another instance in which the materials offer teachers the opportunity to acquire subject matter knowledge is through the inclusion of sample texts. The selection of a diverse set of authors and texts (e.g., texts by Amy Tan, Lucille Clifton, Sandra Cisneros, and Ralph Ellison, among others) offers teachers opportunities to learn about authors and texts they may not previously have encountered. Similarly, the texts span a variety of genres—fiction, non-fiction, poetry, excerpts from longer novels,

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etc.—providing teachers with knowledge about the different genres that exist and that could be used in a unit such as the one with which they are paired. The materials also challenge teachers’ taken-for-granted notions of what constitutes a text, broadening the definition well beyond the literary texts with which prospective teachers may be most familiar.

**Pedagogical content knowledge.** The resources that are included in the Pacesetter materials offer teachers many opportunities to acquire pedagogical content knowledge. For example, the different worksheets intended to help students construct their portfolios also serve to help teachers learn ways to teach students how to work with portfolios. In and of themselves, the two tasks that students do for each unit represent a form of pedagogical content knowledge. That is, in order to understand the concept of voice (a broader course purpose and a specific purpose of the first unit), the task is for students to do a written and oral “self-presentation.” The inclusion of this task as a possible way to learn about voice shows teachers how to transform the subject matter (the concept of voice) so that students can engage in active exploration of it and ultimately make sense of it in a meaningful way. It stands as an example of a pedagogical representation for the concept of voice.

Furthermore, each task is broken down into various steps, giving teachers more opportunities to learn pedagogical approaches to a particular task or subject matter. The written instructions for the self-presentation task offer questions and directives teachers can use to help students get going on the project.

Think about which two of your many voices you would like to express. Select two that are somewhat distinct. Then think about which voice you wish to convey in speaking and which in writing.

Questions to think about:

- How formal is your speech in this group?
- How direct, how frank are people generally and you particularly in your communications in this group?
- Do you use special expressions or specialized vocabulary?
- Do you use a language other than English, or mixed with English?

Other ways to think about the teaching of this task and topic are also included, in the form of graphic organizers, worksheets, and prompts.

Two worksheets ask students to “think about different groups and the voices that you use with them.” Another graphic organizer is a floor plan for a house titled “many voices, many rooms.” The floor plan comes in both a completed and a blank version. The completed floor plan lists general areas such as “sports, school, family, etc” to help students start thinking about the groups to which they might belong. They can then use the blank floor plan to generate their own ideas. Again, the inclusion of all of these worksheets and graphic organizers present opportunities for teachers to learn pedagogical content knowledge. Embedded within these materials are ways for new teachers to learn how to present—in meaningful and understandable ways—the content of the unit.

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## FINDINGS

As was true of the Massachusetts study mentioned earlier, the teachers in our study were avid consumers of curriculum materials. The curriculum materials they used in their first years of teaching seemed to have a profound effect on how they thought about and taught the subject matter. Even when they were aware of some of the limitations of particular curriculum materials, their need for concrete guidance often overcame their reservations. On many occasions Nancy commented on the lack of curriculum available to her, “I would beg, borrow, and steal materials from other teachers. ‘Hey, this is the theme we’re working on, what literature do you have that reflects that theme?’” She also commented on the struggle to make the materials that she was able to find fit her particular needs and on the compromises that that eventually involved. “I would reach a point where I’d find something and I was just so exhausted by trying to find something that once I found something I thought, ok, now what do I do with this.”

The curriculum materials were also sources of learning for these beginning teachers. We observed them using the materials to develop ideas for how to organize and teach literature and writing, as well as gleaning specific strategies for teaching English. In their learning, we noticed a trajectory for teachers’ use of the curriculum materials they encountered. They began by sticking close to the materials they had at hand. Then, over time, as they learned more about both students and curriculum, they began to adapt and adjust what they did, and their use of the materials opened up, as they became more willing to play with and take liberties with the materials.

However, as we explore below, while all of the teachers learned something from their use of curriculum materials, their learning remained very much within the imprint of the original materials. Just as in following someone else’s footprints on the beach, another walker might impose a different shape or size to the footprint while following the path originally charted, so these teachers tended to tinker with the details of the curriculum materials, while remaining faithful to the original direction of the materials.

### The Power of Early Encounters with Curriculum Materials

The curriculum materials first encountered by these secondary teachers were particularly powerful in shaping their ideas about teaching language arts as well as their classroom practice, and all of the teachers in our study spent an enormous amount of time searching out curriculum materials for their classes. They found materials that solved the pressing problem of what to teach and quickly latched on to them. The lucky ones worked in supportive departments, where teachers shared their materials; those less fortunate floundered, seizing upon materials that would help them solve the problem of what to teach. The more comprehensive the materials, with respect to addressing both what to teach and how to teach it, the more they solved the problems these beginning teachers faced.

While the teachers in our study were aware of the state curriculum framework standards for English/language arts, they found them too broad to be useful for day-to-day planning. As the study on the new generation of teachers conducted at Harvard also demonstrated (Kauffman, Johnson, Kardos, Liu, & Peske, 2002), state or district curriculum frameworks can create a sense of urgency with regard to curriculum without providing the necessary detail and support so that new teachers can design lessons around these frameworks. While district and state frameworks articulated some sense of what students should be learning at different grade levels, the expectations were generally quite global (e.g., students should have opportunities to engage in the writing process). Such frameworks also provided little opportunity

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to learn what the writing process is or how to help students engage in it. As such, the frameworks did not prove particularly useful for the day-to-day planning of beginning teachers (Grossman, Thompson, & Valencia, 2001).

All three of the teachers encountered the Multiparagraph Essay unit early on, and for all three, this set of curriculum materials became an indispensable part of their teaching. Bill first encountered the writing unit during his student teaching experience. The district hired Jane Schaffer to do a staff development day with teachers, and Bill and his colleagues were “hook, line, and sinker taken” with Jane Schaffer and her approach to the teaching of writing. The district subsequently adopted the Multiparagraph Essay unit for teaching writing at the 9th grade level. After student teaching, Bill was hired by this same district but he no longer taught 9th grade, and so was no longer required specifically to teach the writing curriculum. He continued to be enthusiastic about the curriculum, however, and aspects of this approach continued to be a part of his practice.

Bill passed along the Multiparagraph Essay unit materials to his peers during the teacher education program and, for Allison, the unit became a mainstay of her teaching practice. During the three years that we observed her, she used the unit at least four different times. Her initial use of the unit occurred in one of her student teaching assignments, when she had to find something to teach immediately; the unit plan solved that problem for her. Even though the unit was developed for high school contexts, she decided to try to adapt it for her middle school students.

I knew that immediately I had to start teaching something and so it was something that was prepackaged, something I didn't need to do all that much preparation for. I mean I did, but I didn't have to create it from scratch, and so I figured I want to try this, I want to play around with this and see if I can make it work for middle school kids...

Allison continued to use the materials in her first three years of teaching middle school.

Nancy initially resisted using the Multiparagraph Essay unit, arguing that while “the other teachers teaching English tend to use Jane Schaffer's write-by-numbers technique, my philosophy is that no one writes that way.” Nancy believed that students learn to write best by writing frequently. However, in her first year, with few curricular materials to draw on, she struggled with how to teach writing to her students. “It would be nice if the English department as a whole had a set curriculum so you knew what you were supposed to be teaching.” As the year progressed and Nancy continued to flounder, her initial resistance to the Multiparagraph Essay unit materials waned and she ultimately decided that they would be useful for her students. Although she initially used the materials in her 10<sup>th</sup> grade writing class, she also found herself drawing on them in her 11<sup>th</sup> grade American literature class.

I'm still not comfortable because there is no curriculum for American Lit. I'm making it up as I go along and realize that these kids don't have a lot of the writing skills that they need. We're going to start focusing on writing in the context of literature so we will start doing a little focus on some of the Jane Schaffer elements. Yesterday was topic sentence.

Because Nancy was so unsure of what to do in her American literature classes and because these materials provide such clear direction and explicit day-to-day plans, they helped solve Nancy's problem of what to teach not only in 10<sup>th</sup> grade, but in her American literature class as well.

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Although our primary focus here is on the Multiparagraph Essay unit, Jane Schaffer Publications also produces curriculum materials for novels. As previously noted, in her 11<sup>th</sup> grade American literature class, Nancy drew on the Multiparagraph Essay unit materials she had been using in her 10<sup>th</sup> grade class. For this literature-oriented class, however, she also used Jane Schaffer curriculum materials that focused on novels.

I'm still not very good at teaching novels. How do you balance discussion, vocabulary, guiding questions...I have all these questions about these different novels and I've had no real training in it...so the only thing that I have as far as how to teach these novels is I get these Jane Schaffer packets from [a colleague]. 'Oh, I have a Jane Schaffer packet on *The Scarlet Letter* or I have one on *Huck Finn*, see what you can do with it.'

For Nancy, the prepared materials on novels solved her problem not only of what to teach, but *how* to teach.

While all of our participants had access to and used the Jane Schaffer materials, only Bill had the opportunity to use another significant set of curriculum materials: the Pacesetter program for 12<sup>th</sup> grade English. The comprehensiveness of this program, as well as the fact that it was quite congruent with Bill's own visions for teaching and learning, meant that it provided tremendous support for Bill as a first year teacher.

I think that a lot of the Pacesetter philosophy was the philosophy that I came out of the teacher ed program with, in terms of how to approach material. That it's not book test, book test, book test, chapter test, unit test, final. That students have to experience text to understand it and do it in a number of different ways and from different approaches and that's a lot of what Pacesetter is about. But [having Pacesetter] certainly didn't hurt. They gave me a nice hefty bag of tricks. The balls that I'm juggling look really good. They're quality balls that I'm juggling, you know.

Bill happily used the ideas, materials, and texts that Pacesetter provided, in large part because the curriculum made sense to him in terms of what he had learned in teacher education, and in part because the materials provided him with a clear sense of what to do with his students, on both a short and long term basis. While Pacesetter offers teachers opportunities to substitute texts, Bill stayed quite close to the original recommendations in his first year of teaching.

Having the Pacesetter materials as a resource allowed Bill to put his ideas into practice. While his vision for those classroom practices comes originally (in part) from his teacher education experience, it is his access to Pacesetter that helped him make his vision of classroom practices into a reality. For example, when talking about the assessment used in Pacesetter, Bill indicated that the instructor of his assessment course would love the assessments because "they're wholly authentic."

## Learning from Curriculum Materials

In all of these instances, the new teachers grew quite attached to the curriculum materials they used in their first year of teaching. They tended to adhere relatively closely to the curriculum materials their first time through, a finding which supports other studies of teachers' use of curriculum materials. For example, prepared materials provided Allison with the ideas for particular lessons and how to teach them. In doing literature circles, she photocopied the roles for students out of the Harvey Daniels book on literature circles and used them verbatim as worksheets for

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students. In the Multiparagraph Essay unit, she copied the peer review sheets and other handouts for students. Similarly, Bill remained quite faithful to the Pacesetter curriculum, as originally designed. As he commented to us, “It’s like going for a test-drive in someone else’s car.” He taught the recommended texts for a unit, even when he didn’t particularly care for them, and despite the designers’ explicit charge to teachers to substitute texts at their discretion.

Curriculum materials provided teachers with opportunities for trying out new ideas and strategies. Both Allison and Bill used curriculum materials to figure out how to teach particular topics or skills. They then learned from the experience of using the materials. In this sense, the materials serve as a scaffold for new learning. Furthermore, the materials often gave these new teachers confidence about teaching particular topics or skills. Allison taught a unit on *Midsummer Night’s Dream* to 7<sup>th</sup> graders, and felt confident about doing so largely due to the support the *Shakespeare Set Free* materials provided. Similarly, the materials from the Harvey Daniels’s book made it possible for her to try out literature circles in her first year of teaching. Because she did not have to create everything from scratch, the prepared materials freed Allison to experiment more, something she was already inclined to do.

Similarly, Bill appreciated the support the Pacesetter curriculum provided—particularly instructional guidance—and was able to experiment with different classroom activities. He also benefited from the rich set of assessments that accompany the curriculum. His own beliefs about assessment both predisposed him to like Pacesetter and his use of the curriculum reinforced his beliefs about the value of authentic assessments. As was true of his use of the rest of the curriculum, Bill generally used the assessment tools exactly as they were designed, even though the curriculum suggests modifying them for particular classes.

But the assessments are not mine, the assessments belong to Pacesetter, and I can do other assessments as I see fit, but they provide the rubrics—if it was bad, I wouldn’t do it, but they’ve been so good.

While all of the teachers in our study appreciated the assessment course they had taken in teacher education and identified it as one of the most valuable classes they had taken during teacher education, only Bill actually implemented the kinds of authentic assessments they had studied. As Bill himself acknowledged, he used the Pacesetter materials to do so. Without these pre-designed assessments, it is hard to imagine Bill creating this range of assessments on his own.

## **Building On and Adapting Curriculum Materials**

There is some evidence that after teachers used the materials a first time, they began to adapt the materials to better fit their own contexts. In her second year of teaching, Allison described tailoring the peer revision worksheets to focus her students’ attention on more specific elements of the writing.

The essay unit, I cut out a couple of things...I took some stuff out. I changed the peer revision. I did that much differently. I made a new worksheet that had specific things that I wanted them to look for, questions that they had to ask themselves as they were reading the essay and then questions that they had to answer and comments that they had to give their partner. Like specific things that they were looking for...Strong verbs, dead words like “nice,” “bad,” “good.” Fragments and run-ons. So that there were some specific things that they were looking for as opposed to just looking at it holistically. (Int. 12/98, p. 18-19)

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Here, based on her experiences the previous year, Allison designed a new worksheet to guide the peer revision process.

Nancy also borrowed ideas from curriculum materials and used them in new ways. For example, she developed what she calls a “fill in the blank essay” for her students, an idea she took from the Multiparagraph Essay materials. “I got that from Jane Schaffer. She has them outline their essays in that form and I just expanded upon the form as she had because she would do it for a paragraph and I did it for a whole essay.” Nancy also created an extensive set of worksheets for her students to walk them through this assignment; while she modeled the worksheets on the Multiparagraph Essay unit materials, she created these herself. Nancy also borrowed the idea of providing students with thesis statements, which they can choose to prove right or wrong, for another student writing assignment.

Well, the assignment actually came out of something that I got out of a Jane Schaffer book, where instead of saying okay, here’s a question, write a thesis, write a paper on it, what she does is she gives basically...a couple of different thesis statements and says choose one of the following and prove it right or wrong...So basically in some form she’s giving them the thesis. So I took and I structured [this assignment] in a similar manner, well, the same manner, where I gave them three different statements about the book and I said choose one of the statements and prove it correct or incorrect. And that’s the basis of their paper.

In this instance, Nancy used the curriculum materials as a scaffold as she learned to create writing assignments for her students.

Just as Nancy and Allison adapted materials the second time they used them, Bill also made changes to the Pacesetter curriculum, based on his first-year experiences. In a group interview, he announced that “Pacesetter is my starting point...but my Pacesetter moves as I move.” One important occasion where this happened surrounds an assessment (i.e., an essay) that is part of one of the Pacesetter units.

Actually I changed it a little bit this year. [He describes the trouble his students had reading a Baldwin essay.] So I came up with some different strategies of having them read it. They broke up in groups of two or three. They explored single paragraphs at a time, reading the paragraph and then discussing what it was about, so they would have a more solid sense as they moved through it.... I think it was [more successful] also because they knew what the assessment was. I had more success with that than last year, letting them know what the assessment is at the beginning of the unit, so they’re working towards it, so they have some sense of a purpose. It’s not like, here’s an assessment—do it. So what I did in this particular case, they were writing this essay, so I broke the essay up for them in three distinct parts: the event, the reflection on the event, and its larger significance.

In this instance, Bill applies what he knows about scaffolding student learning to this particular exercise. By breaking both the reading and writing into more manageable chunks, he is able to support students’ comprehension of the passage and their ability to write an essay of their own. This example represents how Bill is able to bring what he already knows about teaching to this curriculum in order to tailor it more effectively to his students. When he decided that it was working well, he went to the Pacesetter bulletin board and shared what he had been doing and why it had been so effective, thus leaving his own mark on the curriculum materials.



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## Limitations to Curriculum Materials

Curriculum materials play an important role for beginning teachers, by providing them with tools for instruction and not forcing them to reinvent the wheel each time they teach something new. By trying out instructional approaches, such as literature circles or peer editing, the teachers also had opportunities to learn from their experimentation. However, what they learned depended heavily both on the knowledge and frameworks they brought to the classroom, as well as on the opportunities for learning embedded within the curriculum materials themselves.

Allison appropriated an approach to teaching essay writing from the Multiparagraph Essay unit materials, a way of structuring literature circles from the Harvey Daniels text, and tools for teaching Shakespeare's plays through performance through *Shakespeare Set Free*. At the same time, how Allison used the materials can be problematic. She did not critique the materials ahead of time or to try to tailor them for her particular needs and purposes; this led to a number of missed opportunities for student learning. For example, Allison's use of xeroxed and pre-fabricated role sheets for literature circles—taken directly from the book—shows how poorly the generic worksheets on roles prepared students to discuss the Robert Frost poem in *The Outsiders*. The poem was virtually ignored by the students in their discussion of the novel, because none of the roles was designed to scaffold students' understanding of a poem.

In the Shakespeare lesson, Allison focused on the performance aspects of Shakespeare without really engaging students in the interpretive challenges of the play. For example, she used a lesson in *Shakespeare Set Free* that asks students to act out the subtext of a scene without actually teaching them how to identify subtext in text. The representation of having students come up and read a single line with different subtexts—given to them by the teacher—contributes to the notion that subtext is arbitrary, assigned from outside, rather than coming from an interpretation of the text itself. The limitations of curriculum materials, if not addressed by teachers, thus become limitations in what students are able to learn from the enacted curriculum.

As noted above, in her efforts to adapt materials from *Teaching the Multiparagraph Essay* for her own context, Allison created a new guide sheet that was indeed more specific. Yet it still did not focus at all on issues related to content or meaning. In fact, there is little in the unit plan as written that would focus teachers' attention upon content. The unit focuses almost entirely upon the form of the essay, rather than on meaning and presents a formulaic approach to writing. At the same time, Allison's own understanding of writing and the teaching of writing was not strong enough to overcome some of the inherent limitations of the original materials. Her ability to learn from prepared curriculum materials is constrained by her own lack of subject matter knowledge. Even in revising the peer revision worksheets, she did not think deeply about the kinds of revision strategies that are most useful for students, the different demands of particular genres of writing, or how to teach towards these. The Multiparagraph Essay unit was almost too easy for her; it served its immediate purpose but failed to challenge her own thinking about how to teach writing.

In a similar attempt to adapt the Multiparagraph Essay unit materials for her own purposes, Nancy also ran into the limitations inherent in the materials. The materials did in some sense help Nancy learn about writing assignments and how to construct them, but, in the instance where she decided to create thesis statements for her students (having seen something similar in the materials), the materials did not simultaneously provide a framework for Nancy to think about the trade-offs involved with providing students with ready-made thesis statements. The materials taught Nancy how to set up a procedure for helping students complete a paper rather than a process for helping them think through the issues in a literary text and then engage in

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writing about those issues. While the provision of a thesis statement provides a form of scaffolding for less experienced writers, the materials did not help Nancy think through how to engage students in developing their own ideas about literature.

## IMPLICATIONS

As Nancy's original comments suggest, new teachers are hungry for curriculum—and the guidance it can provide. High quality curriculum materials, those that articulate a clear vision of the purposes for teaching language arts, can serve as a valuable resource for beginning teachers. Such materials both solve the immediate problem of *what* to teach and provide instructional activities that support student learning in a content area. In a broad and somewhat vaguely defined area such as English, a well-designed curriculum can also help beginning teachers understand how the various components of language arts are connected, and how to turn a vision into daily lesson plans.

In part because of their immediate needs, new teachers initially may latch on to curriculum materials uncritically. The combination of a lack of exposure to and analysis of prepared curriculum materials during teacher education and the overwhelming nature of the first year of teaching may make it difficult for teachers to adopt a more critical stance in their first year of teaching. But no curriculum is likely to be perfect, and new teachers will need help developing a more critical stance, if they are to be able to overcome the inevitable limitations of any curriculum materials. As our analysis suggests, without guidance, new teachers may adapt existing curriculum materials without necessarily addressing major flaws in the representation of content.

New teachers need opportunities to analyze and critique curriculum materials in their early years, in the company of more experienced colleagues. Such curricular conversations become opportunities for teachers to deepen their own understanding of the subject matter. An analysis of the Teaching a Multiparagraph Essay unit, for example, could become an opportunity to examine its assumptions about writing, and the tensions between a focus on form and structure and an emphasis on ideas in the teaching of writing (Grossman, Valencia, Evans, Thompson, Martin, & Place, 2000). Conversations around the curriculum and about some of the adaptations teachers may need or want to make can help them think through facets of the subject matter, as well as the consequences of instructional decisions for student learning. The goal of conversations around curriculum materials is not to make teachers technicians, but to help them understand that curriculum materials are professional tools, tools that when used thoughtfully and well can help them with their job.

More comprehensive materials, which include more facets of instruction (e.g., content, instructional approaches, assessment, etc.) may also provide more learning opportunities for new teachers. By using the Pacesetter curriculum, Bill not only learned about how to organize content around broad themes, he was introduced to both instructional and assessment strategies that he was able to try out in his classroom. In Deborah Ball's descriptions of her encounters with the Science Curriculum Improvement Study (SCIC) (Lampert & Ball, 1998), she describes how the curriculum directed her to engage students in particular kinds of experiments and then ask open-ended questions. As she describes:

The teacher's guide offered me questions to ask and provided glimpses of what students were likely to say. It was "scripted." The scripts offered me handholds for what I could say and helped me develop new ways of being in the role of teacher. The guide's specific questions helped me find new ways to talk about mathematics with students (Lampert & Ball, 1998).

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The prompts for questions provided her with a window into students' thinking that if she had controlled the discussion more tightly, or not held a discussion at all, she might not have had. By specifying not just content but instructional approach, the curriculum provided opportunities to learn about students' thinking. Math curricula that ask teachers to teach with problems and then engage students in discussion around those problems provide opportunities to learn about students' mathematical thinking. What teachers are actually able to glean from these discussions again will depend upon their own understandings of children and subject matter.

If new teachers indeed follow a trajectory in their use of curriculum materials in the early years of teaching, it makes sense to build early professional development opportunities around curricular materials. While opportunities for professional learning are embedded in all curriculum materials, new teachers may have neither the time nor the subject matter background to inquire into the materials on their own. Such opportunities to learn from and about curriculum materials should rightfully begin during teacher education. While the design of individual curricular units, a common assignment in teacher education, is a wonderful way to develop pedagogical thinking and curricular understanding, teacher educators may unwittingly rob students of the opportunity to learn more about the curricular materials they are more likely to use in their first year of teaching. Even when such materials provide problematic representations of the subject matter, they become the grist for discussions of ways of adapting or supplementing the materials and, as such, can serve as valuable scaffolds for teacher learning.



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