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INSTRUCTIONALLY DENSE LITERACY PRACTICE IN THE MIDDLE GRADES:
A QUALITATIVE STUDY

by

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A DISSERTATION

Presented to the Faculty of
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In Partial Fulfillment of Requirements
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Under the Supervision of Professor Stephanie Wessels
Lincoln, Nebraska

INSTRUCTIONALLY DENSE LITERACY PRACTICE IN THE MIDDLE GRADES:
A QUALITATIVE STUDY

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University of Nebraska, 2016

Advisor: Stephanie Wessels

This qualitative, practitioner inquiry examined how a group of novice and experienced middle-grade reading teachers integrated facets of instructional density (Pressley, Wharton-McDonald, & Mistretta-Hampston, 1997) into their practice. Instructional density is a descriptor of effective teaching whereby practitioners layer their instruction in individual lessons with other elements of the curriculum. This occurs in the planning of instruction as well as during dialogic exchanges with students that are the natural outcrop of instruction. The researcher's role was to conduct a series of observations and post-observation reflections and provide coaching that helped participants generate understanding of instructional density and how it could be enacted. Through detailed vignettes, this study provides insights into (a) how instructional density is realized in the context of classroom teaching, (b) how differences in content knowledge inform the process of using instructional density, and (c) how practitioners negotiate meaning of instructional density through collaboration. The design of the study regarded professional collaboration as fundamental to improving practice. The descriptions herein are useful in considering how teachers learn to use their curriculum in new ways, ones that are more cohesive and efficient, and that acknowledge its interconnectedness.

Dedication

To my grandmother, Dorothy L. Jorgenson, who always encouraged me to do this
work.

Norwegian Blessing

*May the ruts in the road fit your pickup
May the wind always be off the lake
May the sun shine warm upon your Lefse
The snow fall soft upon your roof
And until we meet again,
May God save you from unnecessary Uff-da's.*

Acknowledgments

This accomplishment is owed to the many people in my life, both past and present, whose guidance and compassion made it possible. Thank you Todd and Mason for being my clearing in the woods. So much gratitude goes to my parents, who faithfully instilled the values of learning and provided their constant material and emotional support to that end.

I'd like to thank the TLTE professors who made my CPED coursework a joy. Each and every class brought fresh perspectives and transformed my thinking. A special thank you to Stephanie Wessels for always being a soft place to land. I also owe a great deal of gratitude to my committee: Ted Hamann, Jenelle Reeves, and Robert Brooke—your time, attention, and wisdom helped me shape this work from the seed of an idea to its final form.

I owe a debt of gratitude to my faithful colleagues who helped me see this inquiry to its final form. Your time, patience, and openness to learn will forever inspire me to keep engaging in practitioner inquiry.

To my CPED cohort, an abundance of thanks. The friendships I've made over these last four years have carried me through and will continue to enrich my personal and professional life.

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Definition of Terms

The table below provides terms and definitions for the purposes of this study.

Term	Definition
Instructional density	A striking characteristic of instruction in high-achievement classes; the intentional, planned integration of multiple goals into single lessons and the frequent use of mini-lessons during dialogic exchanges (Wharton-McDonald, Pressley, & Mistretta Hampson, 1998).
Intended curriculum	The set of content standards that provide teachers with a set of guidelines for what students are expected to know and be able to do; the written curriculum documents that drive daily instruction (Porter, Polikoff, & Smithson, 2009).
Enacted curriculum	The content of instruction delivered by classroom teachers (Porter, 2004).
Professional development	The actual learning opportunities with which teachers engage in regards to time and place, content, and pedagogy, sponsorship and purpose; the learning that occurs therein, and the transformation in teachers' knowledge, understanding, skills, and commitments in what they know and are able to do in their individual practice as well as in their shared responsibilities (Feiman-Nemser, 2012, p. 131).
Pedagogical content knowledge	The most regularly taught topics in one's subject area, the most useful forms of representations of those ideas, the most powerful analogies, illustrations, examples, explanations, and demonstrations—in a word, ways of representing and formulating the subject that make it comprehensible to others. Pedagogical content knowledge also includes an understanding of what makes the learning of specific topics easy or difficult; the conceptions and preconceptions that students of different ages and backgrounds bring with them to the learning of those most frequently taught topics and lessons (Shulman, 1986, pp. 9-10).

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Lee Shulman in his (2004) *Wisdom of Practice*, concluded aptly that “classroom teaching is perhaps the most complex, most challenging, and most demanding, subtle, nuanced, and frightening activity that our species has ever invented” (p. 504). That challenge and complexity takes many forms. Among them are the planning and enactment of curriculum, and the inherent complications that arise when teachers must consider the breadth and scope of such. There are real challenges in designing daily lesson plans that are situated appropriately and timed properly. Subject matter content must be carried out within a designated class period, the corresponding unit of study, and the larger parameters of a semester or school year. Further, teachers are tasked not only with the daily enactment of curriculum in a live classroom, but with some “end point” of instruction, or the long-range learning objectives to be met. Most often the latter is tied to high-stakes assessment.

The social exchange between teachers and students that is the hallmark of teaching presents its own set of challenges. Classroom instruction is characterized at times by its sheer unpredictability. Teachers must learn to fluidly shift through a repertoire of teaching maneuvers to accommodate any number of unforeseen circumstances. The enactment of curriculum requires a myriad number of daily choices a teacher must make in terms of subject matter content, many of which are influenced by, or directly affected by, the external pressures of federal, state, and local accountability. All of these factors come to bear on the execution of content in the realms of planning and in-the-moment instruction.

The study considered the unique challenges novice teachers face as they enter the classroom and begin to develop the practical knowledge and skill necessary to teach students an academic curriculum that comprises the core of their work. Novices must hone their sense of content while simultaneously grappling with a number of other teaching domains. Establishing management techniques that will allow them to teach, learning the routines and rituals of the school environment, designing and implementing lesson plans, developing and maintaining relationships with students, assessing student learning, communicating with parents and other stakeholders, and attending to many other professional obligations are just a few of the tensions that must be resolved in order to master the craft of teaching.

The present study examined how a group of teachers forged new understandings about the curriculum they teach in a collaborative fashion. It was designed so that the participants had access to one another's expertise. Most importantly, the study was designed so that they would be more equipped to confront the challenges of negotiating curriculum if they *witnessed* acts of teaching in their natural contexts. The observations and reflections that took place underscored a need for more curricular support in the school environment. Teachers in all career stages can benefit from the ongoing development and refinement of their curriculum and its intersection with classroom instruction.

There is indeed wisdom to be found in the practice of colleagues. Behind closed doors of classrooms are boundless demonstrations of excellence, from novices who bring fresh ideas to seasoned veterans who skillfully balance many demands at once. The goal of the study was to illuminate those ways of thinking and

doing, and specifically to understand what the concept of instructional density brings to bear on curriculum and pedagogy.

Statement of the Problem

Standards-based reform. Paradigm shifts in federal policy, beginning in the early 2000's with the passage of No Child Left Behind [NCLB], have had significant impacts on how teachers experience their curriculum. Goertz (2001) describes the adoption of NCLB as a turning point for states and one that had vast implications at local levels. The legislation would require them to establish rigorous content and performance standards, develop curriculum and instruction programs to support them, and create appropriate assessments to measure adherence to the new standards. The ushering in of a new age of accountability spurred states to respond to annual progress requirements. Baker & Linn (2002) explain the underlying theory of standards-based reform as producing better student outcomes with stronger accountability for individual and aggregate student performance. The ostensible goal of the reform movement was to provide educational equity with the introduction of performance standards. Now more than a decade later, the results of making accountability a centerpiece of improving educational outcomes have attenuated the more sensible approaches to curriculum. Many critics (Berliner, 2009; Crocco & Costigan, 2007; Joseph, 2011) have cited distortions of curriculum such as "narrowing." Henderson & Gornik (2006) describe narrowing in terms of the demands the standardized paradigm places upon those who are closest to it, teachers. As states and local districts respond to top-down initiatives, practitioners respond in turn by adjusting the substance and form of their teaching toward

student achievement on standardized measures. These impositions have had far-reaching consequences for those on the front lines. They have eroded professional satisfaction, compromised teachers' professional identities, and attributed to attrition rates (Boyd & Grossman et al., 2009).

In 2010, the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices in a joint effort with the Council of Chief State School Officers [CCSSO], introduced the Common Core State Standards Initiative [CCCS]. Many states have since adopted these national standards. Though the Midwestern state in which the present study was carried out had not adopted the standards at the time of this writing, the standards had been revised for the 2014-2015 school year to more closely reflect the CCCS. Porter (2011) describes the initiative as "an unprecedented shift away from disparate content guidelines across individual states" (p. 103). While much is yet to be determined regarding the challenges and successes with implementing national standards, it has brought a renewed attention to issues of implementing curriculum. The authors of the standards themselves addressed these matters: "To deliver on the promise of common standards, the standards must address the problem of a curriculum that is 'a mile wide and an inch deep.' These standards are a substantial answer to that challenge" (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2010b, p. 3). But like its predecessor, the CCCS had undoubtedly further complicated how teachers understand their curriculum and enact it across time. As Labaree (2010) argues, complications arise when renewed attention to content standards fail to bring about a meaningful connection between the intended curriculum and

the practice of teaching. Cohen and Ball (1999) regard curriculum in terms of the interplay between it and the students it is designed for:

Teachers' intellectual and personal resources influence instructional interactions by shaping how teachers apprehend, interpret, and respond to materials and students. There is considerable evidence that teachers vary in their ability to notice, interpret, and adapt to differences among students. Important teacher resources in this connection include their conceptions of knowledge, understanding of content, and flexibility of understanding; acquaintance with students' knowledge and ability to relate to, interact with, and learn about students; and their repertoire of means to represent and extend knowledge, and to establish classroom environments. All these resources mediate how teachers shape instruction. Consequently, teacher's opportunities to develop and extend their knowledge and capabilities can considerably affect instruction by affecting how well teachers make use of students and materials. (p. 9).

Conceptualizing curriculum. Instructionally dense teaching is underscored by a need to acknowledge that the term “curriculum” is too broad of a rendering. It requires teachers to understand that *what* they teach in terms of content is significantly different than *how* or *what* students learn. An unfortunate fallout of the shaping and reshaping of standards over time is that it has imposed upon practitioners a narrowed view of the facets of a curriculum and how they are interrelated (see Berliner, 2011; Landsman & Gorski, 2007). Joseph (2011) explains that practitioners have experienced a shift away from understanding how “their curriculum work reflects a mélange of unarticulated methods and purposes, a struggle to maintain a coherent vision amidst many competing pressures, or an overarching aim enacted daily and embodied within a congruous set of practices” (p. 10).

Porter (2002, 2004) has delineated curriculum into three domains: *intended curriculum*, *enacted curriculum*, and *assessed curriculum*. This conceptualization

provided a useful frame for teachers in the participant group as they attempted to reconcile their content load with the complex ways it played out in classroom instruction. The intended curriculum is comprised of the content established by a common set of standards. It is the subject matter content that provides the form and substance of daily lesson plans and what is required to be covered by the designated curriculum document. Component documents are the planned aspects of teaching and are typically designed in advance of actual instruction; how the lesson unfolds in a localized context is known as the enacted curriculum. It requires teachers to bring together knowledge of content with what actually transpires in the course of instruction. Enacted curriculum is the content that is delivered to students within the learning environment. It consists of the daily experience of students as they interface with opportunities to learn in their various presentations: instructional practices and techniques, materials, assignments, and the multiple pedagogical strategies therein. Assessed curriculum completes the triad and refers to how the learning of content is measured. The present inquiry limited its concern to the first two domains, which are intricately dependent on one another and which constitute the underlying premise of instructionally dense teaching.

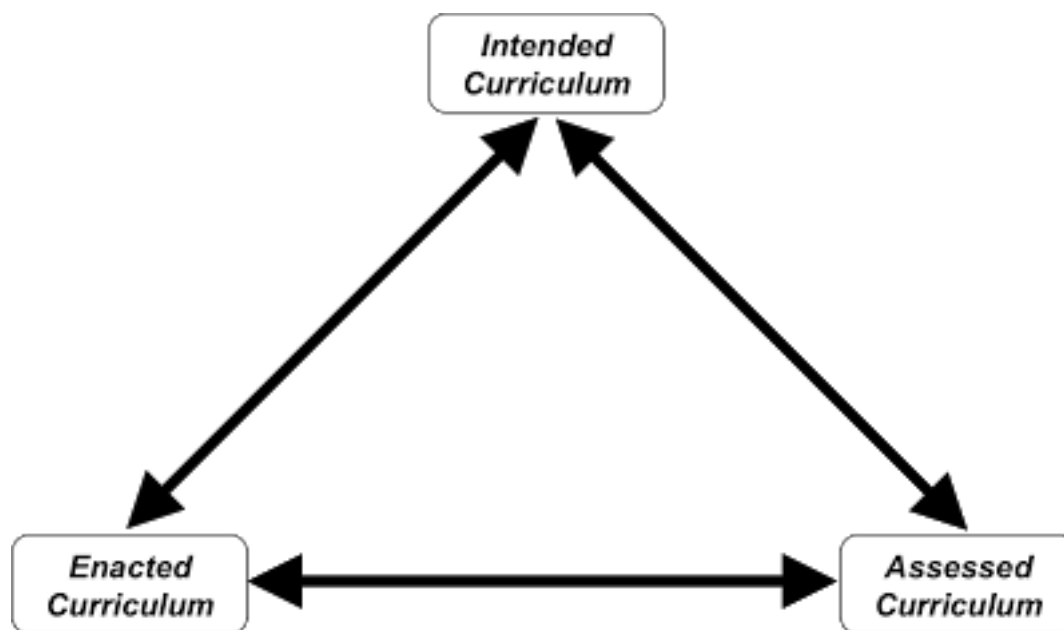


Figure 1.1: Domains of curriculum.

The need for integrative practice. Elmore (1999) problematized the entrance of teachers to the field in an era of standards reform and concluded “the black box is open and what teachers teach and students learn is increasingly a matter of public scrutiny and debate, subject to direct measurement and inspection” (p. 16). This is arguably a relevant and serious implication for any professional; however, it calls for innovative ways to support new teachers in planning and enacting their curriculum. According to Kauffman (2002), “it is important to consider the potential influence of curriculum and assessments on whether new teachers stay in the teaching profession and whether they learn the skills and knowledge necessary to succeed” (p 274).

The originators of the idea of instructional density found that teachers in their studies employed it as a way to navigate the rapidly shifting theoretical terrain of their day. A bifurcated view of how children best learn to read had emerged in the

early part of the 1990s, resulting in abrupt changes to the curriculum as districts situated themselves into theoretical camps: whole language versus phonics approaches to reading instruction. The exemplary teachers in the seminal work of Pressley, Wharton-McDonald, & Mistretta-Hampston (1997), Pressley, Rankin, & Yokoi (1996), and Mandel Morrow, Tracey, Gee Woo & Pressley (1999), were able to ground themselves in two worlds, so to speak, by masterfully engaging students with aspects of both approaches. Throughout the body of literature, these researchers continuously and intentionally sought out ways to thematically connect disparate aspects of the intended curriculum while enacting them during teaching. This set of skills was a striking and remarkable characteristic among the subjects who were the most exemplary teachers.

Arguably, today's teachers are similarly and analogously tasked with overwhelming demands in terms of their curriculum. They are pulled in many directions, and often make difficult choices when it comes to managing a large number of standards, many of which are tied directly to high-stakes assessments. Feiman-Nemser (2012) cites the need for new teachers to have "a compelling vision of good teaching and a beginning repertoire of approaches to curriculum, instruction, and assessment consistent with that vision" (p. 121). But beyond preparing teachers to adroitly relate domains of curriculum, there is also a need to acknowledge other complicating factors. These factors were relevant to the inquiry at hand, and represent real dilemmas with which the participants struggled.

"Lost at sea". The upheavals of curriculum that ensue after sweeping reforms can leave teachers feeling "lost at sea." Kauffman & Johnson et al., 2002 in

their *Lost at Sea: New Teachers' Experiences with Curriculum and Assessment* interview study, discussed teacher responses to curriculum framework documents, their challenges with aligning a paucity of materials to them, their feelings of inadequacy in trying cover so many topics, and their feelings of anxiety around student achievement. These authors examined a host of concerns that affected how all teachers, but especially new ones, experience their curriculum in the era of standards-based reform. A main finding was that, no matter was provided new teachers in terms of curriculum, "Left to their own devices, they struggled day to day to prepare content and materials instead of developing a coherent plan to address long-term objectives" (p. 278). Their research suggests that teachers require more structure and support than curricular materials on their own can provide. They also found that the current environment of high standards and accountability created a sense of urgency among teachers, but that whatever guidance they received in terms of planning curriculum to meet those ends was without correlative support on pedagogical methods. Other research (see Fisher, Grant, Frey, & Johnson, 2008; Miller, Heafner, & Massey, 2008; Witzel & Riccomini, 2007) has noted a wide disparity along the spectrum of autonomy deferred upon classroom teachers—while some districts provide broad parameters, leaving practitioners to manage a large body of curriculum content, others have intensified pressure by requiring use of pacing guides that meticulously map out topics tied to benchmark assessments. Often these pacing guides even specify minute-by-minute presentation of material, leaving teachers in a quandary about what to do if students cannot learn the content within the designated time. Significant to the present study, the *Lost at Sea* study

illustrated a paradoxical tension between “the curriculum void” (p. 279) and “too much to cover” (p. 290). Many of the respondents reported that their curriculum was a list of suggested topics and skills to be covered, but with little or no guidance on how to teach it. Many of the teachers in the *Lost at Sea* study (Kauffman & Johnson et al., 2002) indicated that the curriculum was too vague, didn’t exist at all, or lacked supporting materials and resources. That some of these teachers were charged with teaching more than one or even multiple subject areas to teach in a given day added to their sense of frustration. Especially in history and the social sciences, some teachers reported “there was simply too much to cover” (p. 290). This was also highly relevant to the study at hand. Its participants expressed a similar tension between which aspects of curriculum to cover thoroughly and which to merely introduce. In the case of the present study, the standards for language arts had been revised at the beginning of the 2015-2016 school year to more closely align with the CCCS (see Appedix A). Though the state has yet to formally adopt the new standards at the time of this writing. The operational standards are divided into 4 major divisions: Reading, Writing, Listening/Speaking, and Multiple Literacies, all with the stated emphasis of preparing students for college and career. Within the major divisions are 44, 12, 19, and 7 sub- and supporting standards, respectively, totaling 82. The sheer number of standards presents a challenge to all teachers, but especially novices who carry the labor-intensive burden of learning to sequence their content while continuously modifying it so that the needs of students are met and the content is learned.

At times teachers feel undermined in their curricular choices by looming end-of-year high-stakes assessment—there is a sense of haphazardness in hoping to at least minimally teach discrete items which may or may not be tested. During the period of the present study, the state assessment was modified in substance and format. The participants reported having to adjust which aspects of the curriculum they emphasized and spent more time teaching test-taking strategies activities to prepare students for the changes. A substantial collection of research has examined how accountability pressures influence what is taught and learned (see Corbett & Wilson, 1990; Cuban, 1993; Menken, 2006; Rex & Nelson, 2004; and Volante, 2004). Increasingly, and what is corroborated by the *Lost at Sea* study, the demands of testing have extensive effects on instruction.

Grossman and Thompson (2004) provide another analysis that is useful to the purposes of this study. They described some of the dilemmas new teachers face in terms of their curriculum, particularly in teaching the language arts. They articulate the complexity of a formal language arts curriculum and that all teachers, but especially the newest ones, are challenged by teaching its different components (reading, writing, grammar, and vocabulary, to name a few) cohesively. Applebee (1996) sustains the argument that conflicts between covering the sheer scope and minutia of a curriculum often supplants an emphasis on the depth necessary for students to truly acquire new knowledge and skills. Further, according to Weisz (2001) the underlying assumption of renewed emphasis on curricular matters is that improvements to the curriculum provide a basis for instructional improvements. Despite this assumption, there has remained a disproportionate

sparseness of inquiry into how the curriculum is enacted in the classroom, especially given the extraneous requirements of what is to be taught. Novice and experienced teachers alike may receive support in understanding *what* they are to cover and teach over the course of a semester or school year. But even if and when they are familiarized with the specific standards of their discipline and provided appropriate materials to support those standards, they receive comparatively little support in how they are to handle an immense load of content and materials efficiently, nor how the content plays out in the real context of classroom work.

The professional development void. Continued professional development plays a critical role in helping teachers develop and improve their practice. The importance of ongoing reflection on pedagogy and curriculum cannot be understated, and the need to establish professional communities of learning in American schools is widely addressed by extant literature. Much research (see Dufour & Eaker, 2005; Schmoker, 2004, 2006; Stoll & Volam, et al., 2006) makes compelling arguments for collaborative focus on teaching and learning. Vescio, Ross, & Adams (2008) describe the specific characteristics of collaboration that hold the most promise for positive impacts on student learning. But however promising the merits of forming community, we have failed to address certain aspects of teaching expertise, namely the means by which teachers can develop a sense of balance when attending to what they are required to teach and how they effectively teach it on a moment-by-moment basis. Increasingly, attention to what is taught and how it is learned abides by the means and ends of test performance, ostensibly for the individual student to demonstrate “learning” of the content, but more realistically

for the aggregate data that does or does not demonstrate school-wide proficiency. A superficial focus on the overt curriculum, which Weisz (2001) defines as “the specific, academic material which teachers intend to convey to students, sometimes through activities that are referred to as lessons” (p. 156) has not resulted in a systematic examination of how classroom teachers actually maneuver their intended daily content in relation to the communicative exchanges between teacher and student during acts of instruction. Shulman (1987) contends that there are too few explicit analyses of teachers who manage their curriculum within classroom discourse activity and that codifying a knowledge base about exemplary practice will require a reified approach to this facet of professional life.

Some scholars (Corno, 2008; Fairbanks, Duffy & Faircloth et al., 2010; Parsons, Davis, & Scales, et al., 2010) have attended to how teachers adjust instructional practices and extemporaneously tap student knowledge. They refer to this as adaptive teaching and have noted vast differences in individual teachers regarding degrees of flexibility. Adaptive teaching, however, has largely been explored relative to differentiating for individual learner differences. There is a greater need to, as the *Lost at Sea* study (Kauffman & Johnson et al., 2002) suggests, “establish a new model for professional culture in schools—one that engages all teachers in the important, ongoing work of developing curriculum and improving teaching practice” (p. 295). The requirements and pressures bound up in managing curriculum necessitate a clearer focus on how expert teachers negotiate their content.

One of the hallmarks of good teaching is the ability to move fluidly between the prescribed curriculum and how it plays out through the dialogic exchanges that comprise the act of teaching. Cook-Gumperz (2006) explains that what students learn within a discipline hinges upon the linguistic repertoire they bring to the milieu, their associated background knowledge of the world, and the content and form of what is presented during instruction, tasking the teacher with bridging that knowledge to bear on the content at hand. Despite what scholars know about classroom discourse, much of the professional development aimed at effective teaching methods does not attend to the significance of verbal exchanges initiated by the classroom teacher, especially as they are related to an understanding of the intended curriculum. Cook-Gumperz similarly argues that, by and large, teachers do not consider the specifics of *how* they interact with students within the complex interplay of thoughtful incorporation of the curriculum and negotiating its meaning in the moment.

The present study was designed as a departure from what was typically provided to the school site's teachers in terms of professional development. The administration did indeed value and require the observation of peers. All teachers including the participants were required to conduct a monthly observation of a fellow teacher. The observations, however, were not specified by content area, nor were they designed with any particular facet of instruction in mind. The participants and myself agreed to use the designated observation times to observe one another during the period of study, focusing on the use of instructional density. This fulfilled what Rhine (1998) describes as a "novel way to address content" (p. 27). The study

design was also intended to create a “culture of collaboration” (DuFour, 2004, p. 3) that acknowledges teachers learn best when they are not isolated from one another’s practice. Much of the contemporary research on professional development (e.g. Garet, Porter, Andrew & Desimone, 2001; Guskey, 2000) has concluded that teachers need significant time to develop, reflect upon, discuss, and continuously practice new knowledge.

Purpose of the Study

The present study explored how a small group of novice and experienced teachers used instructional density as a way to manage their curriculum. Through a series of classroom observations and contextual discussions, the teachers examined their own use of instructional density for a variety of purposes. The exploratory case study was inspired by the research of Pressley, Wharton-McDonald, & Mistretta-Hampston (1997). These authors studied the classroom habits and dispositions of a number of primary teachers and created the term “instructional density” as a descriptor of exemplary ones. Instructional density is characterized as the rich layering of subject matter within individual lessons and effective use of dialogic teaching. Teachers with instructionally dense practice are thoughtful planners, that is, they consider the broad spectrum of the content and seek out ways to incorporate its elements into given learning events. They are adept at covering a wide range of content, in part by intentional design and in part during impromptu interaction with students. By deeply examining the practice of effective teachers, the researchers were able to extract a precise term, one whose heuristic capacity is to bring to the fore this aspect of thinking about teaching. An ancillary purpose of this

study was to apply a nomenclature to an important but scarcely acknowledged disposition of the most effective teachers.

Three major questions were investigated:

1. In what ways do middle-level language arts teachers enact instructionally dense practice?
2. How do differences in content knowledge inform the process of using instructional density?
3. What is the role of collaborative discourse in generating the enactment of instructional density?

The study design, which centered around observations of teaching, illuminated both how the participants approach the planning of intended curriculum and how it was enacted during verbal exchanges with students. The participants had ongoing access to how other participants negotiated the complexities of curriculum. The purpose of the coaching was to explicitly underscore areas of opportunity. Coaching to help illuminate areas of opportunity Because the observations will be accompanied by post-observation discussion sessions, the inquiry had the capacity to contextualize the practices and mindsets of its participants. The study will likely bring fresh insight into how instructional density can be employed with intentionality and bring this aspect of teaching from obscurity into increased understanding.

The novice teachers in the participant group gained insight into developing habits and mindsets of more experienced teachers. Corcoran (1995) suggests that teaching practice is changed by bringing emphasis to subject matter content. This argument is based on the reality that novice teachers in particular often lack

content-specific pedagogical knowledge and that according to Hiebert et al. (1996), enhanced content knowledge allows novices to more efficiently help students make connections between that content and their own experiences.

Theoretical Framework

Adaptive expertise. I situate the inquiry within the Dimensions of Adaptive Expertise theoretical frame (Schwartz, Bransford, & Sears, 2005). This model informed my understanding of how participants learned to incorporate instructional density into their teaching practice. Adaptive expertise is a constructivist model of thinking about teaching and learning and emphasizes the intersection of efficiency and innovation. The horizontal dimension of Figure 1.2 represents efficiency and those practitioners who are able to “rapidly retrieve and accurately apply appropriate knowledge and skills to solve a problem or understand an explanation” (p. 40). It characterizes expert teachers who have an abundance of prior experience from which to draw; they are able to quickly and accurately assess what students say and do throughout the act of instruction and optimize learning opportunities. Expert teachers have become efficient by repeatedly practicing tasks with a high degree of consistency and are mindful to helping students maximize success in the classroom. Hotana and Inagaki (2006) explain that practitioners, by performing procedural skills, construct conceptual knowledge and become more adaptive over time. Burden (1981) provides a characterization of “first-stage” teaching and one that was relevant to the novices in the present study. They were in the early stages and working from a limited knowledge of many practical aspects of teaching such as knowing what to teach and when, daily and long-term lesson

planning, designing and managing the classroom environment, motivating and disciplining students, assessing student learning, assimilating into a professional culture, communicating appropriately with parents, and record keeping, to name a few. These present a great deal of challenge for novices but mastery of them is essential in moving along the continuum to routine expertise.

The vertical dimension of the model represents innovation, or the willingness to experiment with new instructional strategies. Movement along the innovation dimension is critical to a novice's mastery of pedagogical content knowledge and expertise in this domain is characterized by openness to "letting go" of previously held beliefs about teaching. It is important to note that the structure of the model, which consists of two seemingly divergent ideals, implies that exclusive growth along either dimension will not result in development of expertise. Though movement along one dimension may result in a temporary shift away from the other, efficiency and innovation are equally important goals.

Schwartz and Bransford (2005) suggest that for beginning stage teachers, while developing efficient routines leads to feelings of professional competence, problems arise when they become resistant to change. Likewise, an imbalanced emphasis in the innovation domain may compromise learning. For the purposes of this study, I envisioned the Dimensions of Adaptive Expertise as a theoretical framework to understand how participants learned about instructional density. Instructional density as a strategy to manage curriculum was novel to them and represented an innovation in terms of how they approached lesson planning and interacting with students around their enacted curriculum. I regarded the efficiency

domain in terms of instructional density's capacity to help novices solve the problems of daily classroom life. When instructional density is a habit of mind, it brings about efficiency in reaching across disparate aspects of the curriculum to develop cohesiveness in a content area. It also represents an efficient means by which to respond to student queries in a way that probes their understanding, pushes them to understand content in deeper ways, and value their thinking. The Optimal Adaptability Corridor (OAC) is a diagonal path that represents the ideal balance between efficiency and innovation. Teachers who become adaptive experts have mastered both domains of the model and can apply aspects of instructional density to a variety of contexts.

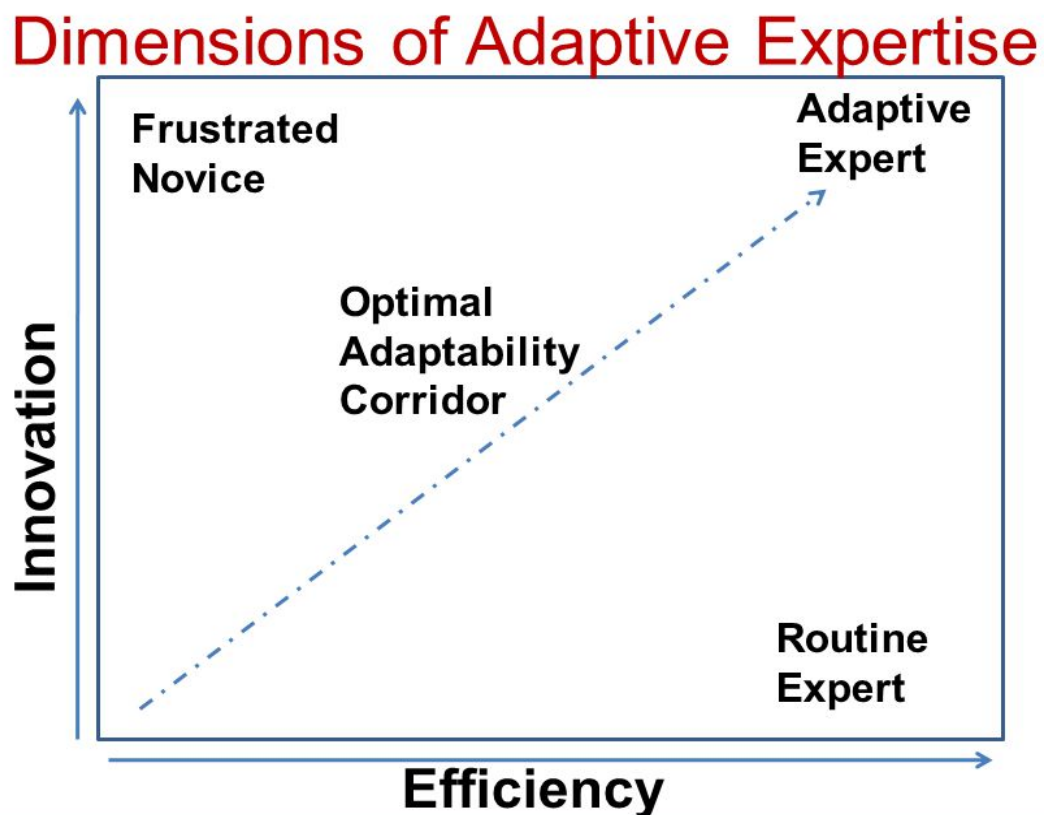


Figure 1.2 Two dimensions of learning and transfer: Innovation and efficiency.

Conclusion

Managing different aspects of a curriculum presents a complex task for classroom teachers, no matter the specific elements of their discipline or content area. This has become arguably more daunting in an era of standards-based reforms. Presenting or “covering” a sequence of learning objectives and materials over an allotted period of time requires skill, flexibility, and an expert sense of timing. A certain degree of efficiency is required of classroom teachers if the multifarious and sometimes competing elements of curriculum are to be managed successfully. The development and refinement of instructionally dense practice offers practitioners a way to alleviate tensions that are ubiquitous in matters of curriculum and pedagogy.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The section to follow will provide an overview of constructs that provided a foundation for the inquiry. Each component informed the study design and research purposes. Three main areas of research are presented: (1) Instructional density, (2) Collaborative practices for professional teacher learning, and (3) The novice to expert continuum.

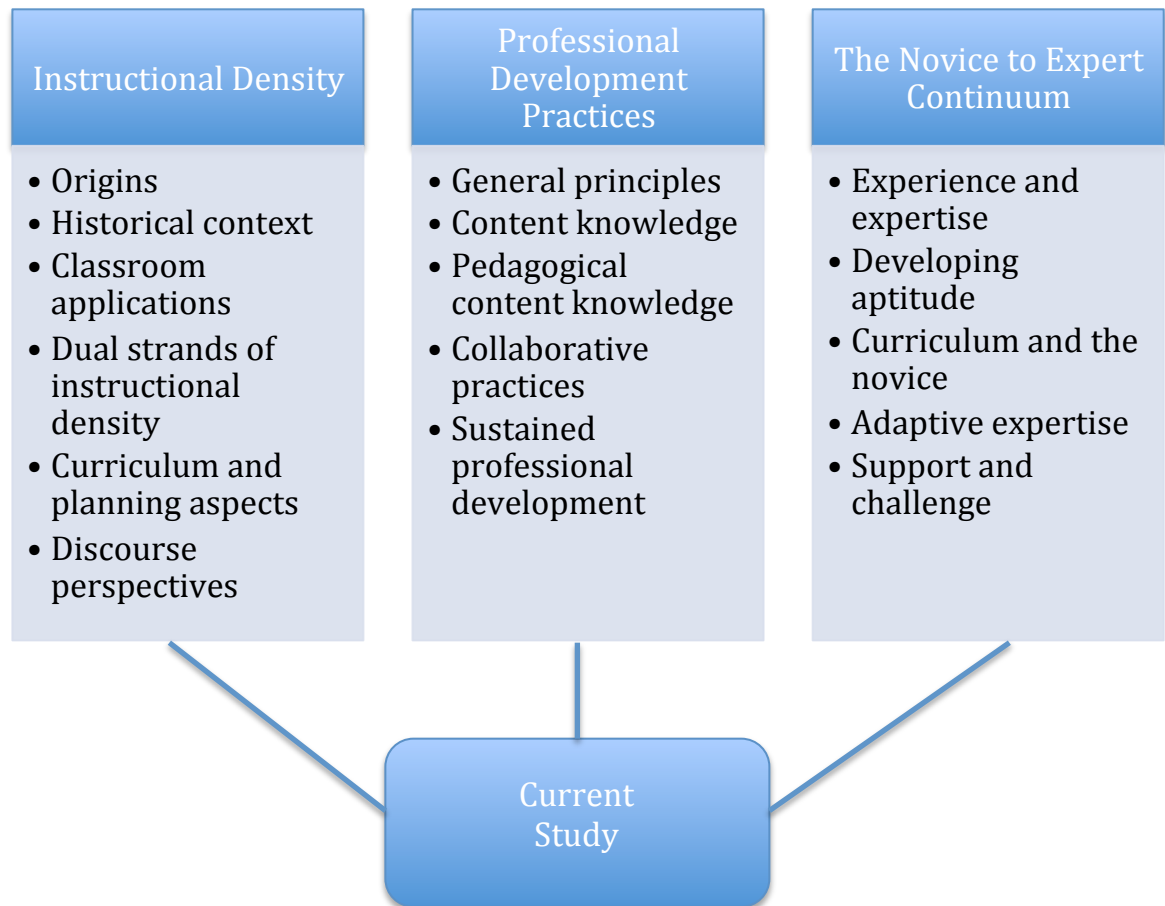


Figure 2.1: Overview of literature review relevant to the development and integration of instructionally dense classroom practices through peer observation and collaboration.

The first section provides a historical overview and extended definition of the pedagogical concept of instructional density, a characteristic exhibited by

effective classroom teachers. Instructional density will be delineated into two strands of scholarship and examined in terms of its curricular and planning aspects and classroom discourse perspectives. The second section discusses some general principles of effective practices for teacher learning and the role of collaborative learning in professional growth. Forming communities of practice, developing reflective practice, and engaging with peer observation and coaching will also be discussed. The third section focuses on considerations of teacher growth along the career continuum. The section will provide an overview of the unique needs of novices as they negotiate the complexities of classroom life and assimilate into a professional culture, as well as how veteran practitioners deepen their knowledge and skills through ongoing professional development, mentoring and coaching, and collaboration and inquiry (see Figure 2.1).

Instructional Density

The following section offers a detailed definition of instructional density and descriptions of how instructional density manifests in actual classroom practice. Because it is not a widely recognized term, it was also necessary to relate instructional density to more recognizable pedagogical constructs. I begin with a historical overview, followed by the delineation of instructional density into two key areas: curricular and planning aspects and classroom discourse perspectives. A number of key concepts within each category informed my understanding of instructional density.

Origins of the term. The term “instructional density,” coined by authors Wharton-McDonald, Pressley, & Mistretta Hampston (1998), is described as “one of

the most striking characteristics of instruction in high-achievement classes” (p. 115). These researchers began identifying sine qua non characteristics of high-quality reading and writing instruction by engaging in classroom observations offers across 4 suburban school districts. The research was initiated with a desire to hone attention to the practices and perspectives of the teaching of reading and development of literacy. What emerged from their body of work was a synthesis of the characteristics of effective instruction. According to Wharton-McDonald, Pressley, & Mistretta Hampston, (1998) the expert practitioners in the study were remarkable for their balance of high-quality literature with other authentic reading and writing activities and their use of instructional density. It is characterized as the rich layering of subject matter within individual lessons as well as smaller, related mini lessons that occur in the course of the dialogic exchanges that comprise teaching and learning. It is evident in thoughtful planning as much as it is evident in the moment-to-moment interactions between student and teacher. In classrooms with high instructional density, curricular decisions are made thoughtfully with the developmental needs of students in mind, prescribed standards, and the larger social contexts of learning. But they are also made extemporaneously when a particular idea or need arises throughout the course of instruction. Teachers who employ instructional density have at their disposal sophisticated and subtle metacognitive techniques as they illicit student responses to material. They tap students’ prior knowledge as well as respond intelligently to errors in thinking. Instructional density is a teacher’s ongoing practice of incorporating multiple instructional goals into a single lesson and thoughtfulness about moment-to-

moment interaction with students that help them foster connections across subject matter. Teachers who have instructionally dense practice exploit spontaneous occasions that arise in the course of teaching for instructional purposes that less skilled practitioners do not.

Historical context. The term originated at a time when the educational landscape was rife with uncertainty over the use of whole language and phonics approaches to reading instruction in primary classrooms, specifically which approach was more effective, (see Ball & Blachman, 1991; Cazden, 1992, Duffy, Roehler, & Sivan, et al., 1987, and Foorman, 1994). Researchers Pressley, Rankin, & Yokoi (1996), and Pressley, Wharton-McDonald, & Mistretta (1997) set out to observe practices of exemplary primary teachers. These researchers sought to ease tensions between two divergent “camps” regarding the most effective pathways to developing early literacy. Entire practitioner journals had emerged in the latter part of the decade and into the early 1990s, devoting their contents to one perspective or another, espousing either the more contemporary approach that emphasized language processes and authentic reading and writing experiences (e.g., see Weaver, 1990), or the more traditional approach whereby explicit, systematic phonetic and decoding instruction that emphasized words and their components (e.g., see Chall, 1967) were thought to increase reading comprehension. What began to emerge in the latter part of the 1990s was the idea that “effective primary literacy instruction is multifaceted rather than based on one approach or another” (Pressley, Rankin, & Yokoi, 1996, p. 365) and furthermore, that the most capable teachers were skillfully adept at using both approaches. Duffy & Hoffman (1996) concluded that, “teachers,

policy makers, researchers, and teacher educators need to recognize that the answer is not in the method but in the teacher” (p. 10). The systematic, qualitative inquiry into what effective teachers do differently was markedly different from the largely hypothetico-deductive approach that had comprised much of the research undertaken to that point. While much of the scholarship advocated at the end of one extreme—for either traditional decoding or the more contemporary, psycholinguistic model of whole language, these early scholars grounded their understanding, in part, on expert theory (see Chi, Glaser, & Farr, 1988; Ericsson & Smith, 1991; Hoffman, 1992), that explains the “privileged understanding” (Pressley, Wharton-McDonald, & Mistretta (1997, p. 365) teachers employ when they make instructional moves in the classroom and the multifarious decisions that factor into them. According to expert theory, classroom teachers, like experts in other fields, are able to relate their sense of knowing based upon the particular structures and nuances of the contexts in which teaching and learning activities are carried out.

Other researchers (Ayers, 1993; Cazden 2001) describe this sense of knowing as a distinction between visible practice, or what is readily and easily observable about teaching, from the behind-the-scenes decision-making that involves planning, ongoing reflection, analysis of student work, and interpretation of all manner of classroom events, all of which comprise the ways of thinking and doing of teachers. The seemingly countless numbers of decisions teachers make, both visible and invisible, are based on specific knowledge about their students and what works and does not work in their classrooms. These decisions are evident both

in planning aspects of teaching as well as in the moment-to-moment interactions that constitute the dialogue of teaching and learning. Teachers deemed effective in the topic of study at hand took a balanced approach to integrating different aspects of the curriculum while managing the scope and sequence of lessons and at the same time, used discursive activities that occurred throughout normal activities of instruction to infuse other skills and discrete content matter into conversation with students. These aspects of classroom knowledge in both curriculum planning and temporal actions provide the foundation for instructional density.

Classroom applications. The authors cite the curricular intentionality of the teachers within the concept of instructional density. The most effective teachers were mindful that individual lessons were opportunities to cover many other aspects of the curriculum. For example, when asked about a journaling activity in her class, one teacher in the study explained that she employed that strategy “for diagnostic purposes, as a medium for children’s free expression, as an opportunity to practice capitalization and punctuation, and to teach specific reading and writing skills to individual students” (p. 116). By contrast, a teacher in the designated “low achievement” group described the purpose of her reading groups by the following:

Well, basically, when we read out of the basal books, it’s pretty much reading the next story, whatever that may be, and then there are some... workbook pages... the workbook page itself is an assessment of what they read—and how they follow, even down the page... But just orally listening to them read; watching them to see if they’re paying attention, following along while others read. You know, you can tell so much just in that short time—how they’re coming along (p. 116).

Other vignettes describe teachers who optimize verbal interactions by prompting students to link concepts across the curriculum. In one excerpt, a teacher

is eliciting words that contain the long “o” sound. She does so by prompting them to remember what a character in a recent story had been wearing, “coat,” and by asking, “What happens when you put wood in water,” a concept from their current science unit. Throughout the elicitation of words, the teacher required students to verbally spell the words they offered, giving occasional reinforcement about phonetic rules. The students recorded the list of words during the activity, which kept them engaged and supported handwriting and spelling skills. These vignettes suggest that effective teachers in primary classrooms not only plan rich lessons with particular skills in mind, i.e. phonemic awareness of letter sounds, but think well on their feet to capitalize on teachable moments. These facets of instructional density work in harmony and are evident in observing the teaching of effective teachers.

Dual strands of instructional density. The original study suggests there is a compelling distinction between the two sub groups of teachers in their ability to layer simultaneous, flexible purposes into aspects of their instruction. Instructional density can be understood along two distinct strands. From a standpoint of what is readily observable, it is apparent in extemporaneous interactions with students. Effective teachers are able to maneuver in situ learning opportunities so that they constantly engage students in higher-order thinking and reach across disparate aspects of the curriculum to tap student knowledge. Instructional density, though an obscure term in extant literature, shares commonality with a number of ideas about dialogic instructional moves in the classroom. There is a substantial body of research about dialogic teaching that explains the relationship between classroom talk and student learning. But the dialogic skills associated with instructional

density work in concert with other kinds of skills. Teachers who have instructionally dense practice are adept at intertwining multiple goals thoughtfully into individual lessons.

Curricular and planning aspects. The multidisciplinary demand of the language arts was a consideration in how teachers were able to be instructionally dense in their practice. According to Wharton-McDonald, Pressley, and Mistretta Hampston (1998), instructionally dense teaching involves the integration of reading and writing. In the more effective classrooms, for example, “reading and writing were interwoven, with students frequently writing about what they were reading and using books to further develop topics they chose for writing” and that “according to these teachers, writing is an ‘integral part’ of reading development” (p. 118). The authors further explain that a key difference between more and less effective teaching was the purposeful layering of multiple, planned goals within individual lessons. The most effective teachers deliberately incorporated other subject areas into reading and writing activities.

The teachers in the seminal study (Pressley, Wharton-McDonald, & Mistretta, 1997) took an integrative approach to their teaching and were challenged with bringing together disparate aspects of their work, namely the use of whole language versus phonics, which was the theoretical contention of the era. They used instructional density not only to strike a balance between what was an instinctual understanding that both approaches held merit, but to interweave what seemed, at times, like divergent and competing goals of their curriculum. As early as the 1970's scholars were challenging the polemic treatment of the language arts and suggesting

more integrated processes for teaching reading and writing. That integration, they argued, was more a more natural fit to the cyclical nature of literacy development in children. For example, Estes (1978) described the components of the reading process as a "synergistic interaction" (p. 6) in that the content of what is read, the particular background knowledge and nuances of understanding of the person reading it, and the multitude of cognitive processes they employ are all intertwined and encompass the process of reading. Viewing reading as an interaction of working parts, in his view, would necessitate a new approach to teaching. Other scholars (Fish, 1970; Shafer, 1968) observed that reading is a convergence of cognitive processes and phenomena. Each reader's experience when they encounter a text represents an intimate relationship with that text, one that is highly dependent on an individual's needs, interests and abilities. The making of meaning, they argued, is an individualized process of constituent parts that overlap one another. This has special implications for teaching, namely that "students' needs, interests, and abilities are exactly the points of focus we should have in teaching" and furthermore that "text and reader exist in a context of which each is a part, and the effect is somewhat reciprocal" (Estes, 1978, p. 7).

Several authors had begun to recognize the need to re-vision the language arts by means of perceiving it as an integration of processes. They advocated for a more holistic means of teaching to convey the interconnectedness of the language arts (see Lehr, 1981; Hall, 1981; Allen, 1976). Others (Goodman, 1986; Robins, 1990) explicitly called for a moving away from the drilling of isolated bits and pieces of language and instead restructure classroom activities so that reading and writing

are carried out in more authentic, natural contexts. Komoski (1990) problematized teaching in the language arts and argued that breaking down the constituent parts into discrete skills is a “behaviorist reductionist” approach (p. 72). He advocated for curriculum wholeness, recognizing that “holistic approaches to teaching and learning represent a rebalancing of educational practice” (p. 73). Komoski also advocated for treating this new sense of inter-curricular connectedness as not only innovative practice, but as a paradigm shift in thinking about how students really learn. This movement was founded on the understanding that, at the same time, teachers were being called upon to also teach an abundance of discrete facts and skills. Komoski cites a number of examples of this new way of conceptualizing curriculum. “Current examples abound: teaching writing and reading simultaneously with the whole-language approach, teaching vocabulary by means of semantic clusters of conceptually related words, and teaching mathematics so that students understand overarching mathematical ideas and relationships” (p. 72).

Established K-12 learning standards for the English Language Arts have since been designed to accommodate the view that literacy development occurs along a continuum and that standards should comprise a series of component, interrelated parts. The *Standards for English Language Arts* (NCTE & IRA, 1996) identify twelve key areas of literacy development that are applicable across K-12 grade levels. They include a broad range of skill sets including: reading a wide range of print and non-print texts, reading and writing in a variety of genres, using spoken, written, and visual language to communicate ideas, writing for different audiences and purposes, applying knowledge of language structures and conventions, conducting and

presenting research, using technological and information resources, and becoming thoughtful, reflective members of a larger literacy community. In providing these standards, the NCTE/IRA recognizes that “what students should learning in the English language arts—reading, writing, listening, speaking, viewing, and visually representing” (p. 1) “they are not distinct and separable; they are, in fact, interrelated and should be considered as a whole” (p. 3). Figure 2.2 illustrates the organizing principle of the NCTE/IRE into 3 primary domains. The graphic is an attempt to visually represent the centrality of the learner in the demands of content, cognitive and emotional/social development, and purposes of learning.

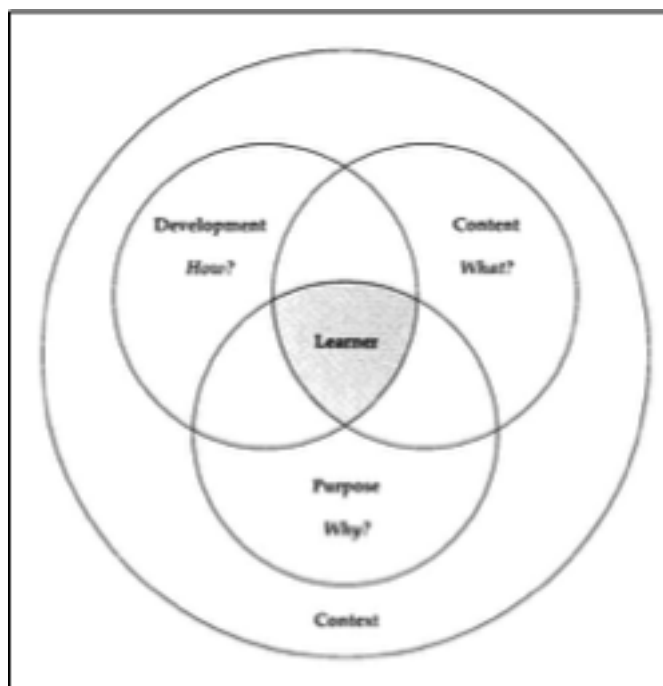


Figure 2.2 An interactive model for the English language arts standards

The present inquiry examined instructional density in the context of State standards for Language Arts adopted in 2014 applicable to the urban school district of this study (heretofore referred to as Moljner Public Schools, or MPS). The standards (Appendix A) reveal that for grades 7 and 8, there are four primary

standards and within each, multiple sub-standards totaling 82. The primary standards are broadly categorized into reading skills, writing skills, speaking and listening skills, and multiple literacy skills—the ability to research, synthesize, evaluate, and communicate across a breadth of digital platforms. These standards and sub-standards cover an immense range of intellectual aptitudes as they pertain to the development of literacy skills for middle school students. And though the school district in which this study took place has not adopted Common Core State Standards (CCCS) as of the time of this writing, these standards are similarly demanding in terms of sheer number.

Despite wide acknowledgment for integrating the processes of language arts so that students can develop competencies across a broad range of literacy skills, it is arguably a daunting task for novice and expert teachers alike, as according to Popham (2004) and Wiggins & McTighe (2005), list of standards have been designed to be comprehensive. Luft, Brown & Sutherin (2007) note that the overwhelming nature of the task at times precludes the standards from being taught effectively. Feiman-Nemser (2012) and others (see Johnson, 2004 and Achinstein, Ogawa, and Speiglmann, 2004) have regarded the responsibility to plan and teach lessons as a daunting task indeed, particularly for novice teachers who yet lack a sufficiently broad repertoire to competently address multiple aspects of the curriculum. Several researchers (Alspaugh and Harting, 1997; Fenzel, 1992) have noted that particularly for middle school students, more holistic, integrated experience with the curriculum had better outcomes in terms of overall

achievement as indicated by measures such as grade point average and standardized measures.

Classroom discourse perspectives. Discussion practices in the classroom have long been a focus of pedagogical inquiry. As Boyd (2012) reminds us, “time spent on guided participation and negotiation of meaning and purpose not only supports students, it also helps teachers to understand the tension between effective and efficient practice and to understand that no practice is efficient if it is not also effective” (p. 27). How teachers engage students in dialogue is tied to the larger purpose of equipping students with the intellectual tools to fully and actively participate in larger social and cultural conversations. Philosophical perspectives of discourse have their origins in the thinking of Socrates and later, John Dewey (1966) who advanced the notion of education as preparation for civic life. He emphasized the need for teachers to facilitate informed discussion, debate, and persuasion as key processes of decision-making both in and out of the classroom. The use of lively discussion in the classroom has its theoretical orientations partially in a Vygotskian perspective on thought and language. Early social learning theorist Vygotsky (1986) articulated the social nature of knowing and learning, and that knowledge is co-constructed by those participating in communicative exchange. He also presupposed that spoken conversations in the classroom, those which are able to be observed, affect the thought processes of the participants, which are not observable. This creates a necessity to distinguish between what types of dialogue are evident in the routines of a classroom. Under consideration here are teacher-initiated discourse activities. Numerous scholars have turned focused on classroom

discourse as the educational landscape shifts and changes, and in light of ever-evolving goals and purposes of what it means to be educated changes and is shaped by broader goals and purposes, renewed attention has been given to current discourse practices in American classrooms.

Like Pressley, Rankin, & Yokoi (1996), and Pressley, Wharton-McDonald, & Mistretta, (1997) who examined the orientations of effective teachers who continually realigned content to help students make connections across the curriculum, several others have suggested that effective teachers respond to student cues during the act of teaching. Dyson (1990) and Aukerman (2007) distinguished this kind of teacher talk from scaffolding. Whereas scaffolding is an inherently teacher-directed framework for building bridges to more sophisticated content and skills, teacher talk deftly executed in the moment has the capacity to “reciprocally support and weave student exploration and elaboration into the classroom discourse” (Boyd, 2012, p. 26). Renshaw (2004) has also highlighted the construct of dialogue and analyzed interfaces between its participants in processes of thinking and reflection. Boyd (2012) asserts that while research has underscored the need for the kind of teacher talk that “weaves student exploration and elaboration into the classroom discourse,” there is scant research on “what such lived contingent classroom practices look like” (p. 26).

O'Connor and Michaels (1993) position teachers within social constructivist theories of learning, as their role is in "creating conditions for successful socialization of all children into school-based literacies" (p. 318). Creating these optimal conditions is accomplished by facilitating classroom discourse. Erickson

(1982) characterizes this task as occurring on a moment-to-moment basis, and hinging upon the facilitation of dialogue that is an ongoing negotiation of social participation. He notes that this is a constant activity, and highly dependent upon a teacher's adaptive stance towards ever-shifting and unfolding social-participation structures. The section to follow will elaborate upon how effective teachers adapt their instruction moment-by-moment and construct meaningful discourse in the classroom that supports pre-planned curricular goals. I begin by outlining a number of pedagogical constructs that are congruous to instructional density.

The teachable moment. A more universally recognized term than instructional density or some of the others used to describe the instantiation of an opportunity in the teacher-student interaction, the teachable moment is a more ubiquitous one. It is common in the professional language of teachers, and widely acknowledged as a worthwhile aim of instruction. Glasswell and Parr (2009) denote the powerful interactions that take place during instruction, what they refer to as “teachable moments”, the prevailing term used to describe times “when we have found a valuable and authentic opportunity to teaching something useful—something we think needs teaching—to someone who needs to learn it and who is ready to learn it right then” (pg. 354). Earlier research on characteristics of effective reading teachers describe ones with a strong sense of adaptability: “Although they plan their instruction well, they also take advantage of teachable moments by providing many apt mini-lessons in response to student needs throughout the school day” (Allington and Johnston, 2002, p. xiii). In another study of exemplary primary literacy instruction, Morrow, Tracey, Woo, & Pressley (1999), highlighted

both the planned and spontaneous aspects of skill development that were indicative of high-achieving classes. These researchers note that effective teachers plan lessons in which multiple learning goals are addressed, but also “plan” for spontaneity within those prescribed activities. Teachers who employ this way of thinking and doing are able to maneuver in situ learning opportunities so that they are constantly engaging students in higher-order thinking. According to these researchers, “In addition to planning their instruction, teachers seized opportunities for teachable moments,” (p. 468) and thereby seek ways to create meaning and connections during discourse. Several authors have highlighted the role of verbal exchange in specific types of learning situations. Schwartz (2005) describes how teachers prompt students during guided reading sessions, while Sipe (2001) notes the meshing of assessment and teaching while helping students negotiate invented spelling of words during writing workshops.

Adaptive teaching. An established body of research has attended to the “varied, interdependent, and overlapping” (Boyd, 2012, p. 28) nature of instructional purposes. Nunan (1996) argues that while lesson plans provide a general framework, or “roadmap” for instruction, the minutiae of teaching is significantly more fluid, organic, and complex, as well as highly dependent upon contextual factors that include interactions, classroom dynamics, grouping, resources, monitoring, and formative assessment. Adaptive practitioners are mindful of the complex thinking processes that shift on a moment-by-moment basis according to these factors. Anecdotal evidence from mainstream classrooms (see Duffy & Hoffman, 1999; Goldenberg, 1992; Heydon et al., 2004; McIntyre et al.,

2006; Parsons, Davis, Scales, Williams, & Kear, 2010) and from language-learning classrooms (Bailey, 1996; Nunan, 1996) has shown that effective teachers align and realign instructional aims through collaborative, dialogic exchanges. Williams and Baumann (2008) have described adaptive teaching as follows:

Excellent teachers demonstrated instructional *adaptability*, or an ability to adjust their instructional practices to meet individual student needs. For successful teachers, this flexibility appeared to be second nature; they were able to sense and respond to diverse students and their changing needs. (p. 367; italics original)

Parsons et al., (2001) have noted that while adaptive teaching has become more prevalent in pedagogical literature, early researchers have also indicated adaptability as a key characteristic of effective teaching, a habit of mind of the most capable practitioners. Glaser (1977) and Snow (1980) were two pioneers, each of whom positioned adaptive instruction as a means by which to teach “individuals *within* classrooms” and defined adaptive instruction as directing the needs of individual learners in the larger scope of broad curricular goals. According to Corno, (2008) though this early theoretical work “skirted the issues faced by practicing classroom teachers,” (p. 162) they paved the way to increasing understanding about the role of teachers in mediating the challenges of individual learner needs. She further states that “teachers should adapt their instruction to individuals, while placing equal emphasis on guiding students to adapt *themselves* to whatever instruction they receive” (p. 162; italics original). Anders, Hoffman, and Duffy (2000) specified thoughtfully adaptive teachers as “thoughtful opportunists” who continuously adjust instruction according to student need. They also cite the early work of Pressley, Allington, Wharton-McDonald, Block, and Morrow (2001), who

highlight effective teachers who “rather than adapt children to a particular method, teachers adapted methods they used to the children with whom they were working at a particular time” (p. 208).

Extant literature on adaptive teaching has distinguished adaptation practices into “macro” and “micro” adaptations, the former a practice by which instructional modifications are offered to students grouped by a certain intellectual trait, i.e. “gifted” students (see Au & Blake, 2003; Sapon-Shevin, 1994). “Micro” adaptation, the focus of the inquiry at hand, is defined as “continually assessing and learning as one teaches—thought and action intertwined” (Corno, 2008, p. 163). Empirical studies on the effects of teacher-mediated, extemporaneous interventions on learning outcomes have been limited, however. Considering that in the course of practice, teachers make microadaptations on a constant basis as they interpret and respond to dialogic exchanges, there is certainly a need for further study that illuminates the relationship between teaching that responds to individual learner differences and educational outcomes. This was an important conclusion of Cronbach and Snow, (1977) whose early work has influenced the significance teachers attach to addressing individual learner differences in their practice. Contemporary research has delineated the relationship between adaptive expertise and dialogic intervention. Gambrell, Malloy, and Mazzoni (2007) write that adaptive teachers “are empowered to identify and select evidence-based literacy practices to create an integrated instructional approach that adapts to the differentiated needs of students” (p. 17). These microadaptations, according to Corno (2008) “are critically important for the nuanced line of theory we care about today. They

cognitive approaches to SLA and characterizes it as the presentation of information that is just beyond the learner's present levels of understanding. One cogent example derives from the work of Pica (1994), for example, who found that when teachers give a priori clarification or feedback during dialogic interactions, it often leads to more comprehensible outcomes for students. Similarly, Van den Branden (2000), in a quasi-experimental study of negotiation of meaning of reading comprehension tasks, found that primary students displayed significantly higher comprehension scores when offered the opportunity to negotiate meaning of unfamiliar terms and phrases with the classroom teacher.

Instructional moves. Many researchers wishing to better characterize dialogic interactions have discussed instructional moves in the classroom. Frey and Fisher (2010) conducted a series of close observations of teachers in small-group interactions, specifically how those teachers checked for student understanding and issued cues and prompts when students revealed "a misunderstanding, misconception, overgeneralization, or oversimplification" (p. 86). These researchers categorized types of questions that naturally emerged during guided discussions of literature as follows:

Question type	Purpose	Examples
Elicitation	To unearth misconceptions and check for factual knowledge	Who...? What...? When...? Where...? Why...? How...?
Elaboration	To extend the length and complexity of the response	Can you tell me more about that? What other information do I need to know?
Clarification	To gain further details	Can you show me where you found that information? Why did you choose that answer?
Divergent	To discover how the student uses existing knowledge to formulate new understandings	Why does the water look blue in a lake but clear in a glass? Do butterflies and moths have anything in common?
Heuristic	To determine the learner's ability to problem solve	Would you use the word parts or context clues to figure out the meaning of this word? If I were looking for information about spring in this book, where could I look? How do you know when you have run out of ways to answer this question?
Inventive	To stimulate imaginative thought	If you could, what advice would you have given George Washington during the winter at Valley Forge? Who would you recommend this book to?

Table 2.1 Types of Questions to Determine Student Knowledge (Adapted from *Identifying Instructional Moves During Guided Learning*, by N. Frey and D. Fisher, 2010, p. 88. *The Reading Teacher*, Vol. 64, No. 2. October 2010).

One type of question particularly relevant to facets of instructional density is “Divergent”. Divergent questions, though according to the authors occur less frequently, are “among the more thought-provoking of questions asked by teachers during the study” as they “require the learner to consolidate concepts about two topics to create a new relationship” (pp. 88-89). The teachers in the seminal study were arguably using divergent questions to foster connections between disparate elements of the curriculum, as is evidenced in the body of scholarship whereby I.D. originated. For example, Morrow, Tracey, Woo, & Pressley (1999) cite a planned activity during which teachers spontaneously prompted students to demonstrate knowledge about digraphs and vowel sounds within the context of a piece of literature. This type of questioning is lauded in literature about reading instruction for its capacity to engender critical thinking.

Thinking critically. Several authors have underscored the critical relationship between dialogic questioning and higher-level thinking. The crux of the success of teachers who use instructional density, as the early literature suggests, is their ability to place a more demanding cognitive load onto the student during interactions ripe for doing so. According to Fisher and Frey (2014) “classroom discussions are not merely conversations, but also the co-construction of knowledge. We know when this kind of classroom discussion gives birth to critical thinking” (p. 84). They also remind us this kind of work is “a complex series of instructional decisions that must occur quickly” (Frey and Fisher, 2010, p. 85) so

that students are guided through the thinking process rather than just “told” a correct answer. Black and William (1998) discuss effectiveness of dialogic interactions in terms of their ability to be “thoughtful, reflective, focused to evoke and explore understanding, and conducted so that all pupils have an opportunity to think and express their ideas” (p. 144) while Reilly (2009) discusses how “such intellectual activity requires flexibility and the capacity to work with what is given while being responsive to emerging understandings” (p. 376).

Professional Development Practices

The following section is an overview of professional learning practices that were implemented for the purposes of this inquiry. The collaborative group of novice and experienced teachers sought to enact instructional density into their teaching through cycles of peer observation, sustained collaboration, and reflection about practice. I begin with some general principles of what makes professional development effective. I also discuss how content knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge are factors that influence a practitioner’s ability to use instructional density. Finally, I discuss the role of coaching and professional collaboration in the improvement of practice as well as the need for these activities to be sustained over time.

General principles. Some general principles for the collaborative inquiry were provided by Darling-Hammond, Wei, and Andree et al. (2009), who summarized key findings from the National Staff Development Council (NSDC). They revealed that (a) effective professional development is intensive, ongoing, and connected to practice; focuses on the teaching and learning of specific academic

content; is connected to other school initiatives; and builds strong working relationships among teachers, (b) public schools in the United States have begun to recognize and respond to the need to provide support for new teachers, (c) U.S. teachers report little professional collaboration in designing curriculum and sharing practices, and the collaboration that occurs tends to be weak, and (d) the United States is far behind in providing public school teachers with opportunities to participate in extended learning opportunities and productive collaborative communities. The present inquiry, which sought to examine how teachers collaborate around a specific pedagogical construct, was designed to assimilate those types of collaborative practices that speak to the needs of both novice and veteran teachers. The collaborative group, which was comprised of 3 novice and 2 veteran teachers, was formed on the assumption that, according to Opfer and Pedder (2011) “teacher learning must be conceptualized as a complex system rather than as an event” (p. 378) and therefore incorporated several aspects of what literature has revealed have the most likelihood of contributing to professional growth and creating productive learning communities.

Professional development and subject-matter content. Sawyer (2004) tells us that, “the best teachers apply immense creativity and profound content knowledge to their jobs, both in advance preparation and from moment to moment while in the classroom” (p. 12). Wharton-McDonald, Pressley, and Mistretta Hampston (1998) indicate that effective teachers, in their use of instructionally dense practice, fluidly matched their subject matter knowledge to student input as the need arose. They also had a sufficiently knowledgeable repertoire of their

content matter so that goals could be layered effectively. Many researchers have noted the need for professional development over the career span that helps teachers recognize the relationship between content, pedagogy, and curriculum. Doubek & Cooper (2007) conclude that teachers provide more effective instruction when they have a deep knowledge of their subject matter and that this knowledge may influence student learning. Corcoran (1995) also cites the impact of ongoing professional development on subject-matter knowledge and pedagogical skills and that it is a critical element in changing teaching practice. Many researchers have based these findings on evidence that some teachers lack strong content-specific teaching skills. For example, Reynolds (1995) concluded that, “beginning teachers have surprisingly few content-specific pedagogical understandings” (p. 214). And as Paine (1990) notes, novice teachers possess “an underdeveloped sense of the role of content and context” (p. 20).

Other research (Ball & Cohen, 1999; Feiman-Nemser & Parker, 1990; Goddard, Goddard, & Tschannen-Moran, 2007; Little, 2003) suggests that the most effective professional development addresses specific academic subject matter and the real-life challenges of teaching it in specific contexts. According to Guskey and Yoon (2009) note that discussions about “best practices” have “dominated professional development in recent years” but that despite numerous attempts to link certain activities or designs concretely to learning outcomes, many effective professional development practices were “determined by the specific content involved, the nature of the work, and the context in which the work took place” (p. 497). They further explain that these findings corroborate the conclusions of the

National Staff Development Council (2001) that effective professional development is a thoughtful adaptation of classroom practices to specific academic content and other contextual factors. Shulman (1986) has clarified the importance of professional development that enhances content knowledge and distinguishes it from understanding pedagogical content knowledge. While content knowledge can be understood as a grasp of one's academic subject area, pedagogical content knowledge comes to bear on how successfully content knowledge is transmitted.

Pedagogical content knowledge. Grossman, Schoenfeld, & Lee (2005) argue that “some aspects of subject matter understanding are critical to pedagogical content knowledge, and so deserve to be addressed within courses related to the teaching of subject matter” (*in* Darling-Hammond & Bransford, Eds., p. 206).

Pedagogical content knowledge (PCK), is defined as:

The most regularly taught topics in one's subject area, the most useful forms of representation of those ideas, the most powerful analogies, illustrations, examples, explanations, and demonstrations—in a word, ways of representing and formulating the subject that make it comprehensible to others. Pedagogical content knowledge also includes an understanding of what makes the learning of specific topics easy or difficult; the conceptions and preconceptions that students of different ages and backgrounds bring with them to the learning of those most frequently taught topics and lessons (pp. 9-10).

Wilson, Shulman, and Rickert, (1986) note that PCK is the unique province of teachers, and that it is critical in presenting specific subject matter content in ways that acknowledge cognitive needs and backgrounds of individual students. Cochran (1991) echoes this understanding of PCK: “It concerns the manner in which teachers relate their pedagogical knowledge (what they know about teaching) to their subject matter knowledge (what they know about what they teach, in the school

context, for the teaching of specific students” (p. 5). Pedagogical content knowledge was a topic germane to understanding how instructional density was enacted in practice, especially for those participants who were at the early stages of their career. Inexperienced teachers do not yet possess a fully developed range of content knowledge to draw upon, nor do they fully assess their students’ ability or prior knowledge, motivation, and a host of other factors when making pedagogical decisions. This was true even in cases where individual teachers had sufficient content knowledge, i.e. an advanced degree in their subject matter (Grossman, 1989). In designing the current study, it was important to consider these potential gaps in both content and pedagogical content knowledge in coaching the novice participants on the use of instructional density.

Collaborative practices. The present study was designed on the principle that teachers must have access to one another’s practice. In order to engage in productive, authentic conversations about what happens in the classroom, it is critical for those conversations to occur around the context in which teaching occurred. Historically, a prevalent theme in literature about teaching and learning has been the pedagogical, intellectual, and emotional detriments of practicing in isolation. Dan Lortie’s (1975) seminal work provides some context for the origins of the privatized classroom, moreover how the modern structures of schooling place teachers in isolated “cells” with limited opportunities to participate in teamwork that allows them to mutually adapt instructional practices of all kinds. This tradition of isolation, he argues, occurs at the outset of the teaching experience in which novices are typically assigned to the mentorship of one individual. The effect is that,

by and large, new teachers are socialized into particular ways of thinking and doing rather than into a larger ecology that taps the diverse talent in a school setting. This tradition of isolation has persisted well beyond the era in which Lortie first made insights about the problems associated with it (see Fullan and Hargreaves, 1991; Ginsburg and Clift, 1990).

Decades after Lortie's seminal work, Parker (1998) noted the deleterious effects of privatized, behind-closed-doors teaching that predominates the educational landscape. She notes the academic culture that creates natural barriers between the work of teachers and that, "lacking firsthand information about each other's work, we allow the artifacts of the student survey to replace that facts that can only be known in person" (p. 142). Despite compelling evidence that meaningful collaboration is a pathway to marked improvements in student achievement, according to DuFour (2004), "teachers in many schools continue to work in isolation" (p. 3). Without opportunities for meaningful pedagogical discourse, we miss out on sharing resources (physical, intellectual, and emotional) and gaining more intimate knowledge of the craft of good teaching. For example, Bransford and Derry et al. (2005) envision a structure of collaboration in which "the various skills and interests provided by members of a learning community offer access to distributed expertise that can be skillfully used to support the learning of all participants in that community" (p. 64).

The present study was organized around a series of observations in which teachers learned about a pedagogical construct and then supported one another in developing it based upon the unique contexts of one another's classroom work. The

inquiry did not focus exclusively upon those observations but also on the collaborative exchanges that occurred as a result. It was undergirded by the premise that, according to Daloz (1986) adult learning occurs when existing schema are challenged against the lenses and perspectives of knowledgeable others. This view provides a valuable backdrop to the inquiry because it by suggesting that through the mediums of observation and collaborative exchange, teachers can provide windows into their own practice and the complex thought processes that factor in. Del Prete (2013) describes the reciprocal process of peer observation (referred to as “teacher rounds”) and what it brings to bear upon the collective nature of knowledge development:

Round participants stand to gain in developing acuity in close observation; in learning the value of descriptive rather than normative accounts of classroom activity; in grounding interpretation and assessment in observed evidence and contextual knowledge; in developing habits of reflection, personalization, and thoughtful inquiry over and against cursory judgment; in deepening understanding of the complexities and possibilities of practices as well as the work of particular learners; in the development of their own insight, practice, and expertise, including their repertoire of ways to understand and respond to different situations and different needs; and in their experience of professional learning community” (p. xvi).

Many scholars have cited the need for communities of practice to be teacher-driven. Cochran-Smith & Lytle (2009) cites the capacity of local, context-oriented practitioner collaboration to “foster new kinds of social relationships that assuage the isolation of teaching” (p. 37). According to Louis (2008), in recent years much attention has been focused on the relationship between school climate and student achievement, namely how small learning communities of teachers learning in and from practice. Much of this attention has derived from a body of research about the

professional learning community, or “PLC” (see Brophy, 2002; DuFour, 2004; Patterson, 2006; Schmoker, 2005). There has been wide agreement on what constitutes the core characteristics of a productive learning community. Roy & Hord (2006) have identified core characteristics of productive learning communities as ones that involve collective work, a focus on reflective inquiry, and sharing of common practices and feedback.

Peer coaching. Throughout the course of the inquiry, a part of my role was to provide instructional coaching to the participants. Through collaborative dialogue, I guided them toward discovering new ways of infusing facets of instructional density into their practice. Costa & Garmston (1994) designated three common types of coaching used for the purposes of professional development: *technical coaching* which emphasizes the learning and transfer of new skills, *collegial coaching*, which is a broader term that underscores the how teachers reflect on their practice in the context of professional dialogue, and *challenge coaching*, which illuminates issues of instructional design and delivery. Among these three types of coaching, I found my role to be most aligned with that of technical coaching as I helped my participants identify areas of their instruction that presented opportunities to be more instructionally dense. Technical coaching, according to Hargreaves and Dawe (1990) “amounts to a significant intervention in the professional development of teachers and in associated processes of implementing curriculum reform and introducing new approaches to instruction” (p. 231). These researchers also situated coaching as a remediation to the problems associated with professional isolation. They explain that isolation cultivates anxiety teachers have about their

own effectiveness. Over time, the persistence of a culture in which teachers are immersed in the immediacy of their own work lessens the likelihood they will welcome alternative approaches to teaching.

Shanklin (2006) delineates the characteristics of effective literacy coaching, a form of professional development that was relevant to the study at hand (see Table 2.2). Though I was not in the formal role of literacy coach during the period of study, it was my role to coach participants in the use of instructional density in the context of reading and literacy. Prior to and during the inquiry, I served as mentor and co-mentor to the novice participants and my new role as coach would place me in a different relational dynamic. It was important therefore to become knowledgeable about effective attributes of coaching in order to clarify my role to the participants and provide them a useful experience.

Characteristics of Effective Literacy Coaching	Role of Literacy Coach at the Building Level
Involves collaborative dialogue for teachers at all levels of knowledge and experience in a building.	Is careful to include all teachers regardless of knowledge and experience in professional learning.
Facilitates development of a school vision about literacy that is site-based and links to district goals.	My lead, or is a member of, the school literacy committee. Helps a school determine qualities of excellent literacy instruction that it wants to strive for. Answers questions of and advises the school principal about literacy learning. Facilitates teacher study groups. Leads organizes other professional learning opportunities around literacy instruction.
Is characterized by both evidence-based student learning and teacher learning.	Helps teachers examine student work, suggests assessments, models and gives assessments, interprets data, may enter data, assists in Response to Intervention efforts. Evaluates coaching efforts and other professional development offerings.
Is a form of on-going, job-embedded professional learning.	Works to embed professional learning in the context of the school. Works alongside teachers during the day. Implements sound practices for adult learning. Helps teachers keep professional learning going after coaching cycles end.
Involves classroom observations that are cyclical and knowledge building over time.	Understands gradual release of responsibility. Helps teachers develop means to reflect upon their own teaching and make improvements. Understands differences in the literacy strategies needed for particular content disciplines.
Is supportive rather than evaluative.	Helps teachers uncover areas where growth is needed. Assists teachers in being reflective about their own teaching. Understands gradual release and approximation of new learning.

Table 2.2 Characteristics of effective literacy coaching & links to the role of the literacy coach.

Some of the characteristics provided a foundation for my coaching role, in particular that coaching activities should involve collaborative dialogue amongst teachers with varying levels of experience so that multiple perspectives are introduced. Such a focus also regards teacher knowledge and decision-making as fundamental to how collaborators hone their own beliefs and values. Secondly, the coaching role allowed me to engage in ongoing, job-embedded professional learning with my participants. Throughout the study I encouraged teachers to work

instructional density into their existing schemas, the nuances of which would not be compatible with less teacher-driven activities. I structured the inquiry around observations of practice, which according to Coggins, Stoddard, & Cutler (2003) has the potential for greatest impact. This design is also most functional when the coach has significant knowledge and experience with the given content area. Finally, it was important to clarify to participants that my coaching role would not be an evaluative one, but rather a supportive one. This facet of coaching, according to Shanklin, allows practitioners to freely experiment with implementation of new strategies without the impendence of negative evaluation.

Coaching is also a valuable tool in terms of assisting teachers in learning new procedures for managing their curriculum. Hargreaves and Dawe (1990) present the tenets of peer coaching and its capacity to help us understand “the effects of teacher isolation and the problem of curriculum implementation has helped stimulate growing interest and initiative in strategies of curriculum implementation and professional development which brings teachers together in working relationships with each other” (p. 227). Kauffman & Johnson et al. (2002), also examined the trenchant problems many teachers, but especially novices, had with managing their curriculum. Like those teachers, my participants expressed similar sentiments at the outset of the study. They cited the feeling of being left alone to manage their curriculum under the weight of so many other demands was detrimental.

The need for sustained professional development. The majority of contemporary research on professional development notes the need for

professional learning to be sustained over time. Cochran-Smith & Lytle (2009) illuminate the differences between the current emphases on a hierarchical model whereby professional development experts present in short-term sessions that position the classroom teacher as receiver of privileged knowledge. These models do not account for the complexity of real classrooms, nor do they allow teachers significant amounts of time for implementation, experimentation, or further inquiry. Garet, Porter, Desimone, Birman & Yoon (2001) cite the importance of duration as follows: “longer activities are more likely to provide an opportunity for in-depth discussions of content, student conceptions and misconceptions, and pedagogical strategies,” and second, “activities that extend over time are more likely to allow teachers to try out new practices in the classroom and obtain feedback on their teaching” (pp. 921/922). Darling-Hammond, Wei, Andree, Richardson and Orphanos (2009) also cite the critical need for duration in professional development activities. In their review of literature for the National Staff Development Council, intense, longer-term efforts contribute to greater gains in both teacher and student learning because such efforts incorporate applications of new learning to practice. They also note that sustained activities “are often supported by study groups and/or coaching,” thereby enhancing the duration of professional learning with opportunities to discuss and improve upon what has been learned.

Guskey and Yoon (2009) note that the bane of professional development, the short-duration workshop, is not ineffective in and of itself, rather only when it does little to sustain long-term knowledge or strategies about effective teaching. The most effective workshops or summer institutes, according to research (Birman,

Desimone, Porter, and Garet, 2000; Corcoran, Fuhrman, and Belcher, 2001; Holloway, 2000; Kennedy, 1998) had a sufficient time element that allowed teachers to follow-up, receive sustained support, and especially to engage in opportunities to adapt the new learning to the particulars of their own classroom contexts. Darling-Hammond (1996) also cites the conditions by which learning is most likely to occur and sustain itself over time but despite what we know about that, “staff development in the United States is still characterized by one-shot workshops rather than the more effective, problem-based approaches that are built into teachers’ ongoing work with colleagues” (p. 6).

The Novice to Expert Continuum

This section gives an overview of literature related to the stages of professional growth. Given that the participant group was comprised of two veteran and three beginning-stage teachers, it was important to consider the knowledge, behaviors, attitudes and dispositions, and professional concerns that present themselves at different points along the career spectrum. In this section, I discuss distinctions between novice, experienced, and expert practitioners and professional attributes that correspond with each. I also revisit issues of professional development and elaborate upon specific needs of teachers at different career stages. The literature in the following section informed my thinking as I coached the participants on using instructional density in their practice.

Developing aptitude. Many educational scholars have provided valuable syntheses of the differences between novices and those more experienced, though Gallup Rodriguez and McKay (2010) note that research on the latter is scant.

Gatbonton (2008) defines the novice as one who has less than 2 years of teaching experience. Defining experienced and expert teaching is more complex, however. Using time-related criteria is often adequate in defining an experienced teacher, and most literature identifies them as those who have approximately 5 years or more of classroom experience. But as Tsui (2003) cautions, years of experience does not equate to expertise. In designing the present study, I was concerned with some of the practical skills and knowledge, habits of mind, and classroom behaviors of my participants, who were in different career stages, that would impact their use of instructional density. I was aware that the beginning-stage teachers in the study were still working out routines and procedures, managing their curriculum, and working out issues of classroom management and discipline, to name a few. In studying my own use of instructional density and that of the other experienced participant, it was important to be guided by the needs of those who had already mastered the aforementioned aspects of teaching.

Hammerness, Darling-Hammond, & Bransford, et al. (2005) explain that new teachers must learn to not only “‘think like a teacher,’ but also to put what they know into action” and acknowledge that they must learn to “*do* a wide variety of things, many of them simultaneously” (p. 359). The task of thinking like a teacher calls for new ways of collaborating that acknowledge the complexity of teaching in a subject matter that is multi-dimensional. The seminal scholarship of Pressley et al. (2001) found that, “exemplary educators are able to make their instructional theories conscious, they are then able to discuss and reflect upon them. These discussion and reflections provide avenues for greater understanding of the

relationships between educational theory and practice, and thus further facilitate instructional effectiveness” (in Tracey & Morrow, 2012, p. 6). One goal of the present study was to bring ways of thinking and doing into conversations about teaching. By observing classroom practice and providing focused feedback on a particular aspect, instructional density, I was able to bring about conversations that revealed how experienced teachers think.

The work of Shulman (1986) provides a pragmatic way to begin understanding the complex relationships between teachers’ understandings of content and pedagogy and how they influence classroom instruction. He argues that in order for teachers to move from the stage of novice to becoming effective, they must develop competency in (1) content knowledge, (2) pedagogical content knowledge, and (3) pedagogical knowledge. The first he describes as an understanding of the concepts embedded in a discipline, the second as the ability to convey understanding of content through multiple models of teaching for student understanding, and the third as the skills needed to manage a classroom, communicate effectively with students, and assess student learning. Shulman’s framework has a wide range of utility in understanding the relationship between teacher knowledge and student learning. In addition, it has been used to orient schools toward effective professional development practices, which will be discussed later in this section.

Another consideration of beginning-stage teachers moving along the continuum is their grasp of classroom routines and classroom management. Leinhardt and Greeno (1986) studied the schemata of experienced teachers and

identified mastery of routines as critical to their being effective. These teachers were able to command student attention with ease, which allowed for their cognitive energy to be spent attending to tasks associated with student learning. Findings also revealed that these teachers spent comparatively less time than novices on transitioning from one activity to another. They were also able to present more concepts and ideas in less time than novices, moving efficiently through their objectives. An important characteristic in the pedagogical content knowledge domain is that of managing a classroom of students. For example, Swanson et al. (1990) found that novices tend to be unaware of misbehaviors that occur during instruction but when they are, often express frustration about not knowing how to handle them when they arise. In contrast, experienced teachers are able to effectively manage a variety of incidences. These researchers also noted that many novices, when asked to reflect on incidences of misbehavior, were unable to recall them.

Experience and expertise. Some research has set out to carefully ascertain the differences between novice, experienced, and expert teaching. While it was not an aim of this study to position the more experienced participants as “experts,” it was important to outline the characteristics of such teachers. Hattie (2003) identified five significant dimensions of excellent teaching. Expert teachers can (1) identify essential representations of their subject, (2) guide learning through classroom interactions, (3) monitor learning and provide feedback, (4) attend to affective attributes, and (5) influence student outcomes. The present study was concerned with the first and second attributes. Expert teachers demonstrate deep

representations about teaching and learning and are able to use and organize a sophisticated set of content knowledge. According to Hattie (2005) “Experts possess knowledge that is more integrated, in that they combine subject matter content knowledge with prior knowledge; can relate current lesson content to other subjects in the curriculum; and make lessons uniquely their own by changing, combining, and adding to them according to their students’ needs and their own goals” (p. 5). This capability was evident in the effective teachers described in the original research by Pressley et al. (2001) and offers another way to define instructional density. They are able to spontaneously relate their work to deeper principles about teaching and learning as well as quickly recognize classroom events that will help them capitalize on teachable moments.

The second dimension describes teachers who are able to guide learning through student interaction. They create a classroom environment in which procedures and routines do not hinder productive learning, rather the learning climate is such that error is welcomed, student questioning is high, and observable engagement is a norm. In contrast, novice teachers are less flexible because of their lack of extensive practice. They have not automatized procedures and routines and must attend to more practical matters. Berliner (1986) describes these routines as “shared, scripted, and virtually automated pieces of action,” (p. 5) and as ones that allow students *and* teachers to attend more deeply to the subject matter inherent in the lesson.

Curriculum and the novice. Because the use of instructional density occurs at the intersection of the planned and enacted curriculum, it was important to

explore differences in how novice and experienced teachers approach a menu of content items in daily, short-term, and long-range manners. According to Hogan, Rabinowitz, & Craven (2003) there are clear differences in how teachers organize their thinking and engage in the task of planning their curriculum. They also note that the scope of a curriculum is sufficiently broad in a given subject area, creating significant challenge to practitioners regardless of their level of experience.

Intended curriculum. Some researchers have found that novice teachers conceptualize their classes differently, and thus approach lesson planning differently. According to Housner and Griffey (1985) novices tended to regard their classes as a whole as opposed to thinking of a class as a collection of individual students who present with varying learning needs. By contrast, experienced teachers regard their students as individuals and thus require more specific information about their skills and abilities as they plan lessons. In another study by Borko and Livingston (1989), researchers found that novices concentrated their efforts on short-term planning and tended to contain a narrower range of more scripted and rehearsed types of instructional strategies. They often felt behind in their lesson planning as well, and planned only slightly ahead within a unit of study. The tendency to rely on narrow curriculum planning was detrimental in other ways as well. Novice teachers became flustered when classroom situations or student questions deviated from their pre-planned scripts. These researchers also found that at times, novices provided inaccurate information or examples to students.

Enacted curriculum. Yet another distinction between novice and expert teachers was how they enacted the curriculum they had planned. Some research has

identified the complexity in schemas of the most effective teachers. While novices focus on short-term planning and rely on scripted, rehearsed instructional strategies to deliver content, experienced teachers represent teaching in much more sophisticated ways. Effective teachers are able to respond to subtle classroom events and focus on what individual students say and do to demonstrate their levels of understanding. Compared to novices they also adjust their instructional techniques with ease as the need arises. This feature of teaching was highly germane to the present inquiry. That novices consistently demonstrate less flexibility in responding to different situations that are natural to the act of instruction (see Borko & Livingston, 1989; Westerman, 1991; Shemp et al., 1998) presents an opportunity for them to strive toward more instructionally dense teaching. Novices were less responsive in communicative interactions, that is, they did not use conversations to help students forge deeper connections to the subject matter. They were also less skilled in techniques and strategies to assess prior knowledge, or in connecting prior learning to current subject matter. Experienced teachers, on the other hand, could fluidly enact a number of techniques and strategies that were suited to the situation. They used verbal communication in the classroom for a host of purposes such as conveying expectations, asking focused questions, and assessing student knowledge. Verbal discourse techniques present a marked difference in the habits of novice and experienced teachers.

Adaptive expertise. Adaptive expertise is a characteristic of effective teaching and shares marked commonality with instructional density. Corno (2008) explains that in teaching adaptively, “Teachers read student signals to diagnose

needs on the fly and tap previous experience with similar learners to respond productively” and “create a symbolic space at the center of the teaching ground, a space for easiest teaching” (p. 161). Adaptive teaching is an area of research that is driven by the need of practicing teachers to account for individual learning differences that present themselves in the classroom. Glaser (1977) and Snow (1980) recognized that adaptive instruction was an answer to the dilemma of teaching individuals within groups and that teaching matched to the strengths and deficits of students would produce strong improvements in educational outcomes. But even when differences in experience are accounted for, still some teachers adapt more than others. Randi & Corno’s (1997) implementation research finds that some teachers are reluctant to change their teaching practice. However, these researchers cite the types of professional development that are more likely to foster adaptive teaching. Based on their observations that the most adaptive teachers “did not ‘implement’ particular ‘models of differentiation’ as if blindly following a mantra from staff development” (p. 170), they organized a series of careful observations and collaborated with practitioners as they learned to become more adaptive. The subjects of their research were observed to continuously and deliberately adjust their practice from lesson to lesson and moment to moment within the various parts of their curriculum. This mindset of enacting and adjusting curriculum to contextual situations was evident in the practice of highly adaptive teachers.

Berliner (1986) provides a compelling logic for illuminating what expert teachers do differently. Their exemplary performances are opportunities for novices to benefit from “the cases—the richly detailed descriptions of instructional events—

that should form a part of teacher education programs” (p. 6). He identifies other important reasons to study expert teachers in a comparative fashion to novices. These kinds of studies, he argues, present useful information on the habits and schemas of effective teachers to novices that would not otherwise have an emic perspective.

Support and challenge. Literature has established that novice, experienced, and expert teachers differ in remarkable ways. Therefore, they also differ in what kinds of activities are needed to foster professional growth. In designing this study, it was necessary to account for these kinds of differences so that all participants could benefit. New teachers require extensive support as they expand their knowledge and skill base. The daily challenges that are inherent to the profession can be overwhelming for the novice. Thus, professional development must activities must be designed to acknowledge and support practical concerns. Chisman & Crandall (2007) cite classroom-level experimentation as critical to the development of expertise. For teachers with a number of years of experience, participating in action research is one way to provide the rich, contextual experiences that will allow them to fruitfully reflect on established knowledge and skills. And because teachers move from experience to expertise in part through reflecting on their practice and being open to experimentation with what works and what doesn’t in their classrooms, they benefit from opportunities to engage in activities that offer such challenge. Richards and Farrell (2005) argue that professional collaboration and reflection activities are particularly beneficial for experienced teachers, especially

ones that place them in a mentoring or coaching role. The present study built on the established mentoring relationships that began before the period of study.

Much of the research regarding professional development emphasizes the roles of mentoring, coaching, and peer observation as useful tools for all levels of experience. Levin & Rock (2003) suggest that opportunities to observe then collaboratively reflect on classroom observations have the capacity to challenge existing paradigms and schemas. Reciprocal observation of colleagues also carries significant benefit for those involved. The potential for improving instruction lies in experienced teachers to step into new roles and novices to gain the wisdom and insight from mentors. Vracar (2014) suggests that pairings of new and experienced teachers are especially beneficial. They support interactions between colleagues and provide opportunities for reflection. Observations create shared experiences that have the potential to generate richer discussions about teaching and learning.

Conclusion

The development of instructional density requires a multifaceted approach. The literature presented in this chapter guided my understanding of the complex relationship between content and classroom practice. Instructionally dense teaching requires a deep examination of planned and enacted curriculum as well as openness to self-reflection. The participants in the study, comprised of novices and those more experienced, stood to gain richer, broader, and more efficient instructional approaches. By observing one another's practice and then immersing ourselves in authentic conversations about instructional density, we were able to ease tensions between managing the many aspects of our curriculum. We were also able to engage

in collaborative practices that honored our individual needs as professionals and life-long learners.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY, PROCEDURES, AND STUDY CONTEXT

Introduction

This exploratory case study examined how a small group of novice and experienced language arts teachers learned to employ instructional density in their teaching practice. Instructional density is a habit of mind of teachers who through careful planning and thoughtful interactions with students, help students forge meaningful connections between numerous and sometimes disparate elements of curriculum (see Wharton-McDonald, Pressley, & Mistretta Hampston, 1998). Instructional density occurs both in planning lessons that layer elements of the curriculum and during dialogic exchanges with students that help them make connections to the curriculum. Given the paucity of literature that directly addresses this facet of effective teaching, and despite what these researchers underscore as a practice of exemplary teachers, instructional density is also not a prominent or recognizable term in pedagogical literature. It was therefore necessary to explore the *what* and *how* of its application in the classroom as I transferred it from the descriptions of primary classrooms to my own context, the middle level language arts and reading classroom. The present study sought to understand the process by which its participants thoughtfully implemented it in their practice. The case study was a sustained, intensive examination of how instructional density functions practically in different classroom contexts. Specifically, the project explored (a) teachers' experiences with navigating the many components of their curriculum, (b) how they enacted instructional density into their ways of thinking and doing in the classroom, (c) what the participants learned about instructional density as a result

of observing colleagues' practice, and (d) how they constructed meaning of instructional density through collaborative exchange. The exploratory case study was guided by the following research questions:

Primary research question:

- In what ways do middle-level reading teachers enact instructionally dense practice?

Subsidiary questions:

- How do differences in content knowledge inform the process of using instructional density?
- What is the role of collaborative discourse in generating the enactment of instructional density?

Study Design

Research approach. The case study was designed on the foundations of practitioner inquiry and its potential for knowledge generating. Both approaches underscore the cyclical processes of research and practice. The term “practitioner research” embodies a range of inquiry types, but according to Cochran-Smith & Lytle (2009) shares common functions, one of which is “the practitioner himself or herself simultaneously takes on the role of the researcher” (p. 41). Other features include the professional context as site for study, community and collaboration, the de-emphasis of distinction between inquiry and practice, and systematicity involving data collection and analysis. Elliott (1997) differentiates this type of research from other types of educational research and describes it as follows:

1. It is directed towards the realization of an educational ideal (e.g., as represented by a pedagogical aim.

2. It focuses on changing practice to make it more consistent with the idea.
3. It gathers evidence of the extent to which the practice is consistent/inconsistent with the ideal and seeks explanations for inconsistencies by gathering evidence about the operation of contextual factors.
4. It problematizes some of the tacit theories which underpin and shape practice (i.e. taken-for-granted beliefs and norms).
5. It involves practitioners in generating and testing action-hypotheses about how to affect worthwhile educational change (p. 18).

One of the purposes of my qualitative, exploratory case study was to form a community of teachers around a problem of practice. According to Duffy and Baumann (2001) collaboration is one variation of practitioner inquiry and can take on a variety of forms. They cite a commonality with other types of practitioner research, however, that these methodological approaches should allow room for the perspectives and questions to evolve as the research progresses. My aim was to form community through the sharing of practice and through recursive cycles of observation and reflection, in order to come to a better understanding of our experiences enacting instructionally dense classroom practice. According to Brydon-Miller & Maguire (2009) these types of collaborative research experience contextualize problems of practice and have knowledge-generating capacity that brings about meaningful change.

General principles of case study. Yin (2009) defines the case study as “an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon

and context are not clearly evident” (p. 18). Yin & Davis (2007) further distinguish the case study from other forms of research by noting its use when certain contextual conditions lend relevance to the phenomenon of study. Yin (2009) delineates steps in enacting a case study research methodology (see Figure 3.1). The first stage, *planning*, involves developing research questions and determining if they align with fundamental elements of the case study design. My case study was designed around the primary research question *In what ways do middle-level reading teachers enact instructionally dense practice?* In the *designing* phase, the researcher identifies the unit of analysis as well as the particular type of case study design. My case’s unit of analysis is the collaborative discussion around the enactment of instructional density. The *preparing* stage involves honing skills as a case study investigator, developing a case study protocol, and obtaining Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval. I became familiar with case study methodology during qualitative research methods courses in my work in the CPED program. IRB approval was granted in May 2015 (see Appendix B). The *collecting* of case study data requires the researcher to follow case study protocol in gathering and maintaining multiple sources of evidence. The data for my case study consisted of teacher interviews, field notes, teacher round observation sheets, other artifacts, and transcribed audio recordings of post-observation reflection sessions. These items are described in detail later in the chapter.

The final steps, according to Yin (2009) are *analyzing* case study evidence and *reporting* case study findings. Fetterman (2010) describes this analysis as an “attempt to discover patterns within the text and seek key events recorded and

memorialized in words” (p. 104). Merriam (2009) suggests that analyzing data is a process of sense-making and perhaps more importantly, the process of answering research questions by attending to thematic elements of the data that respond to them. I will use a process of coding the transcripts, field notes, and observation sheets. The final phase, *sharing*, refers to defining an audience, composing textual and visual materials, and displaying adequate evidence by which the audience can draw conclusions. The audience for my case consists of secondary teachers and administrators.

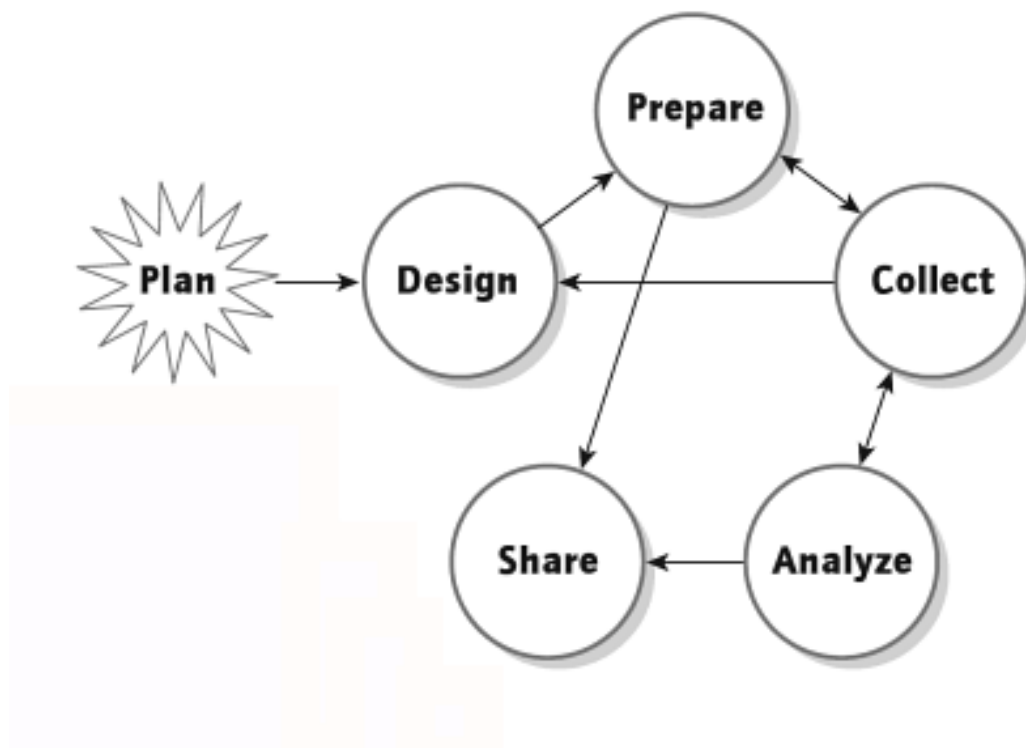


Figure 3.1. *Case Study Research Design Model*

Exploratory case study. Yin (2009) cites some general components of case study research design: 1. a study’s questions; 2. its propositions, if any; 3. its unit(s)

of analysis; 4. the logic linking the data to the propositions; and 5. the criteria for interpreting the findings (p. 27). The decision of the researcher to deem a case study “exploratory” is grounded in the second component and is appropriate when a topic of study is without pre-existing suppositions. My case study fits the parameters of exploration in that the enactment of instructional density, especially as it applies to translation from primary classroom practice to that of the middle school classroom, was a novel construct for the participants. Yin (2009) also cites the importance of stated purpose in such a case study methodology. The purpose of my case study was to explore the enactment of instructional density, however, the primary research question does not presuppose the particulars of how it was enacted. Wilford (1992) further explains that a sound exploration begins with a degree of rationale and direction. For the purposes of this exploration, my participants had a general sense of how primary teachers had used instructional density. I began the inquiry by providing them a set of literature that would guide their preliminary understanding.

According to Merriam (2009) “the case study offers a means of investigating complex social units consisting of multiple variables of potential importance in understanding the phenomenon” (p. 50) and that case studies are bounded in the time and place of real-life contexts. Conducting a collaborative qualitative inquiry, specifically an exploratory case study, allowed participants to negotiate meaning as they engaged in iterative cycles of observation and reflection. The research for this case study took place in a single site, a large suburban middle school and the participants’ classrooms therein. Interviews and observations were conducted within that site over a 8-month period.

Self-study. I treated each participant as an individual “case,” and this included myself, the principal researcher, as I observed my own practice and reflected on my use of instructional density. Throughout the inquiry, I observed my own practice and participated in both the pre- and post-interviews. Samaras & Freese (2009) explain that research in the area of reflection and reflective practice has had significant influence upon the development of practitioner self-study. According to Schon (1987) and Zeichner & Liston (1996) teachers can become more reflective by problematizing their teaching, and Cochran-Smith & Lytle (1993) explain that teachers systematically studying their own practice have spurred a number of new qualitative research possibilities. Some researchers, however, have indicated the paradox of engaging in self-study and that while the term implies individualistic focus, they assert that it must involve “collaboration and ‘critical friends’ or trusted colleagues who provide alternative perspectives for reframing, support, and validation” (LaBoskey, 2004a; Loughran, 2007 *in* Samaras & Freese, 2009, p. 8). I considered this paradox as I engaged in my own case, and involved my colleagues in observing and reflecting upon my practice.

Researcher role. My relationship with the participants began during the 2014-15 school year, the second year of operation of the school site, which had opened in the 2013-14 school year with grades 6 and 7. At that time, the 7th grade reading/language arts (RLA) department consisted of one veteran teacher and her two mentees, one first-year teacher and one second-year teacher. The district in which the research took place has a robust mentoring program in which first-year teachers are paired with experienced veterans at their school sites for collaboration

and support. Substantial training is provided to mentors and mentees in the form of day-long workshops conducted by district personnel. Mentoring program participants are also required to submit documentation that serves as evidence of collaboration in goal setting and ongoing communication. This facet of the relationship was critical in providing the participants regular access to one another.

In the following school year, a first-year RLA teacher and myself were hired to fulfill staffing needs of the 8th grade level as the first student cohort advanced. My role during the course of study was as mentor to the other newly hired first-year 8th grade RLA teacher and informal, co-mentor to the two 7th grade RLA teachers. Despite the participants' involvement with the mentoring program, and despite that one of the suggested activities was to mutually observe classroom teaching of mentors and mentees, only one of the participants had voluntarily done so before the course of study began. During the period of study, I continued to mentor the participants using the relationship I had built prior to collection of data.

Participants and Participant Selection

Participants for the case study were not selected randomly but rather on the basis of their common teaching position. All members of the study, including myself, comprised the 7th and 8th grade RLA department at the large, urban middle school in which we taught during the 2014-15 and 2015-16 school years. The participants were assigned to teach 7th or 8th grade language arts and reading courses for the duration of the study. The sampling strategy of selecting participants was based on the general principle that, according Kemper, Stringfield, & Teddlie (2003) "the sampling strategy should stem logically from the conceptual framework as well as

from the research questions being addressed by the study” (p. 275). Participants were also selected purposefully in that, in Patton’s (1990) view, purposeful sampling is a hallmark of qualitative research and “qualitative inquiry typically focuses in depth on relatively small samples, even single cases, selected purposefully” (p. 169). The sampling was also a convenient one, given that it was an accessible and available one. The participants were accessible to me as a practitioner in my role as a member of the RLA department and mentor and co-mentor to participants.

Molly. Molly, the youngest of the participants, was in her second year of teaching when the study began. I served as her formal mentor during the 2013-2014 school year and was paid a small stipend by the district for performing mentoring duties. Our relationship could be described as one of “low-intensity support ” (Stansbury & Zimmerman, 2000) in that I provided procedural support that did not impinge on my assigned teaching duties. I oriented her to the norms of the building, our common curriculum, lesson planning, student discipline, and a number of other practical matters as the need arose. We enjoyed a friendly and collegial relationship and I occasionally provided personal and emotional support that is vital function of mentoring beginning teachers (see Boreen, 2009; Harrison, Dymoke, & Pell, 2006).

Molly graduated from a large, Midwestern high school and attended a small Midwestern private college where she completed her initial teaching certification. Undecided on a major until her sophomore year, she finally arrived at a career in teaching, her belief that it would be a rewarding one. Molly was hired to fill a vacant position at the district’s newest middle school as the first 8th grade class moved into

place. Molly taught three sections of regular 8th grade language arts, one section of language arts that was co-taught with a special education teacher, and two sections of a course known in the district as 21st Century Reading Skills. The latter course was designed for students whose performance on norm-based reference tests demonstrated a need for additional reading support. Asked about her how she anticipated teaching would be rewarding, she reported that “I’ve always liked to read and I don’t think many kids like to read and they kinda just have that mindset that it’s like, stupid or boring and uncool. So I guess to kinda change those mindsets” (Interview #1, 10-28-15). This desire to engender enthusiasm for reading was evident in what she described about lesson planning. She began each class session with a block of time in which her students could read silently without interruption. She reported that this activity embodied the *practice* of reading and that it accomplished what would not otherwise be accomplished by her students outside of school. Molly expressed frustrations with managing lesson plans in the larger context of her curriculum. The lesson planning she had been exposed to during teacher preparation had emphasized the planning of units but the curriculum she was provided for her two courses was not organized around units of study. She also expressed frustration with giving due attention to certain aspects of the curriculum, for example she did not address grammar enough in daily lessons and at times had her students writing more than reading. This imbalance was influenced by which state assessment was on the horizon; Molly designed writing prompts for her students more heavily in the fall as the state writing test approached.

Molly struggled with “trying not to get into a rut and do the same thing all the time” (Interview #1, 10-28-15), a tension that is characteristic of novice teachers. Feiman-Nemser (2012) explains that beginning teachers have a small repertoire of instructional strategies they favor but must learn to expand upon and refine them in order to keep student interest high. She cited having contact with more experienced teachers and having them share their activities and materials would help her diversify her approach.

In my initial interviews with participants, I asked them to discuss their general dispositions toward peer observation. Molly had participated in a few observations of other teachers in the building as part of the building’s professional development initiative. But while she appreciated the observations because they gave her exposure to other instructional strategies, she felt she could not just “sit back and watch, you had to be like writing the whole time” (Interview #1, 10-28-15). This statement reflects the structure of the protocol—observing teachers completed an exhaustive form that addressed a considerable assortment of pedagogical domains (see Appendix C). She was also open to the idea of being observed as long as it resulted in authentic and useful feedback about her teaching.

Kathryn. Kathryn was another of the three novice participants in the study. She attended a large Midwestern public university after high school and earned a secondary language arts certification. In the initial interview, she discussed how she arrived at a career in teaching and that although she always knew she wanted to teach, it took her some time to land on a particular subject area. While she had considered teaching math, language arts, she reported, was a good fit because she

valued critical thinking and “you can’t really do that in math. You can connect learning to their life experience but not in the same way” (Interview #1, 10-20-15). She reported her love for the language arts she couldn’t imagine teaching anything else. Kathryn came to Moljner Middle School in its first year of operation with a year of experience teaching in a private school. The year prior, she had taught in a small parochial school where her courses included 6th and 7th grade language arts and one section of British Literature for high school seniors. That experience, though rewarding in how it stretched her in areas of lesson planning, was difficult because of the number of sections she planned for and the range of material within each. She felt she was just behind her students in the reading, particularly in the section of British Literature. This is a characteristic problem of beginning teachers, according to Kauffman & Johnson (2002). She also described the contrast between her private and public school experience. Kathryn reported that “I felt like I had a pretty good handle on how to structure and organize a classroom but suddenly behavior was something that I never had to deal with so management became a much bigger issue” (Interview #1, 10-20-15). However, in her third year of teaching when the study began, she felt she had a better handle on matters of discipline and that she had shifted back to an emphasis on lesson planning. In terms of curriculum, she found the district’s guidelines to be both specific and vague. The specific aspects were in the reading materials such as which novels and textbooks to use, but she found the curriculum to be vague in that it didn’t specify how to fit everything in on a quarter-by-quarter basis: “It never tells you how to stack all those things on top of each other and to teach them throughout the course of the quarter” (Interview #1,

10-20-15). She also expressed frustration that the district curriculum guide was not aligned with what was happening in language arts at the building level. She felt it was important for language arts teachers to “be on the same page” as students moved through the three grade levels. Kathryn’s inclination to align her curriculum vertically across grade levels is consistent with what many researchers have lauded as a means to facilitate team cohesion and the cultivation of support within a building (see Koppang, 2004; Puente, 2015)

Among the three novice participants, Kathryn came into the inquiry with a stronger understanding of instructional density. In our initial interview, she characterized teaching reading as a holistic endeavor. She enjoyed being able to tap different disciplines as she engaged students with her content. For example, she expressed her frequent layering of non-fiction texts with elements of social studies and science. Kathryn was also remarkable for her ability and willingness to articulate deeper purposes she held for teaching and learning. She frequently voiced the importance of critical thinking skills and conceptualized that as a backdrop for her teaching.

Like Molly, Kathryn had also participated in the building’s required peer observations. She came to the study with an enthusiastic disposition about observation and was excited to see what her language arts colleague were doing in their classes instead of other content area teachers. She was frustrated that she had not been able to observe her own colleagues prior to participating in the inquiry. She felt that observing her fellow 7th grade teachers would be a more practical way to have discussions about the building’s language arts program. Throughout the

period of the inquiry, Kathryn taught three regular 7th grade language arts courses, one section of co-taught language arts, and two sections of a Tier 2 reading skills course for students who were behind their grade level in reading.

Darlene. Darlene was in her second year of classroom teaching when the study began. She graduated from an urban Midwestern high school and attended a community college for two years before earning a Bachelor of Arts degree in English with a specialization in Irish literature from a prestigious Midwestern Jesuit university. Darlene worked in a variety of jobs and for a period of time pursued a career in culinary arts before deciding to use her degree in a teaching capacity. She came to actual classroom teaching through an alternative route to certification. She attended a private Midwestern college and earned a Master of Arts and concurrent license to teach reading and language arts in grades 7-12. When asked what attracted her to teaching, she laughed and stated that “I always loved to read, but always said I would never be a teacher. I always hated people who asked me if I was gonna teach, um... But I didn’t know what I wanted to do” (Interview #1, 10-26-15). Her desire to teach was grounded in her love of literature and the love of the classroom environment. She recalled nostalgically college courses in which there was rich back-and-forth discussion and that if she ever did have the desire to teach early on, it would be at the college level. After certification, Darlene was hired for the middle school’s opening year and taught four sections of 21st Century Reading and two sections of Junior Greatbooks, an Honors reading course for students who are at or above their grade level in reading comprehension.

My relationship with Darlene began when I started teaching at Moljner Middle School. We had contact with one another during our building's language arts and reading department meetings, which were held approximately once monthly. Participant Shelley was assigned as her formal district mentor, however, as Shelley was also assigned to mentor Kathryn, Shelley's time and resources were stretched thin. Darlene felt she had insufficient contact with Shelley to assist her with daily concerns. I encouraged Darlene to reach out if she needed additional support and our relationship developed from there. We had increasingly frequent communication and shared materials and resources both in-person and through district e-mail. I also provided emotional support during times Darlene struggled with the demands of managing curriculum and student discipline, prevalent themes that were intertwined through many of our formal and informal conversations about teaching.

In terms of her experience with the district's curriculum, Darlene said that when she thought back on the curriculum map "I know there's a million things that I haven't gone over" (Interview #1, 10-26-15). She resented the overwhelming number of items to be covered over the course of the year for her reading classes, and at the same time, dissatisfied with the lack of guidance offered for her Honors sections. In fact, she stated that "There's no guidelines whatsoever for Honors" (Interview #1, 10-26-15) beyond the set of textbooks that contained short stories and other non-fiction reading passages. Despite these frustrations, Darlene presented with a strong grasp of the mechanical requirements of analyzing literature. She often cited how she organized lessons around having students find

text evidence to support their responses, finding main ideas and supporting details, and identifying meaningful quotes. And though neither of her curriculum maps gave explicit guidance on incorporating writing into reading activities, it was something she did routinely and with a sense of purpose.

Darlene relayed the many obstacles she encountered in disciplining students while teaching, an emblematic concern of beginning teachers (see Ingersoll, 2003; Ingersoll & Strong, 2011). Her openness to engaging in cycles of peer observation was centered around a desire to see classroom management of experienced teachers. She too conveyed disappointment with the building's peer observation program. She offered one example in which she observed a class session of students working in a computer lab and no actual teaching had occurred (Interview #1, 10-26-15). Darlene had also not been given the opportunity to observe her own reading and language arts colleagues and how they managed discussions of text: "You know, there's not me trying to wrangle ten different boys when we have... when we're trying to do some kind of intellectual discussions over a text, like I have to do so much behavior stuff that it's really hard to actually get that to work in this classroom" (Interview #1, 10-26-15). During our initial interview and subsequent sessions, this participant marked tension with understanding her purpose but not being able to realize it across many challenging circumstances.

Principal investigator. I was at the beginning of my ninth year of teaching when the study began. Like Darlene, I had completed an alternative route to certification after earning a Bachelor of Journalism and working in a variety of jobs. After my initial undergraduate degree, I knew that I ultimately wanted to teach, and

after gaining some experience such as a year AmeriCorps, some short and long-term substitute teaching, and other I attended a Midwestern Jesuit university to complete a 7-12 language arts teaching endorsement. I was hired for my first certified teaching position by the same school in which I completed student teaching, which was a large urban magnet middle school. There I taught 8th grade language arts for 8 years before transferring to the district's newest middle school.

Before I became a certified teacher, I taught with a provisional license and one of my early assignments was a long-term position in which I taught sections of language arts and social studies. I became familiar with cross-curricular planning, as the curriculum was designed for continuity between those two subject areas. I carried this experience to my first formal teaching position. I had learned to approach planning from an instructionally dense perspective, though it wasn't until several years later and in a doctoral seminar course taught by Dr. Kathy Wilson I learned that this facet of instruction had a name. Like the other participants, I felt tension with adequately addressing the many elements of the curriculum. It was natural for me to become enchanted with instructional density not only as a mindset of cross-curricular planning, but as a means of layering content to efficiently teach a large body of material. Like the other participants of the present study, I too felt overwhelmed by the sheer number of standards and curricular elements that were part of our curriculum map, and especially in light of my duty to prepare 8th grade students for state assessments in areas of both reading and writing.

During the study, I taught 3 sections of regular 8th grade language arts, one section that was co-taught with a special education teacher, and two sections of 8th

grade Honors language arts. My teaching role was aligned with Shelley's in that her 7th grade students moved into my sections their 8th grade year.

Shelley. Shelley, the most experienced of the participant group, self-reported as the rare type of person who knew she wanted to teach from a very young age. Shelley has been teaching for more than 20 years and began her career immediately after college. She attended a small, private Southwestern liberal arts college and then transferred to a large Midwestern public university where she completed her teaching certification. She was attracted to the profession by her love of literature, and stated that she was "spiritually and genetically wired for it [teaching]." She approached her love of teaching language arts with a sense of humor, telling me "I mean I was correcting people's grammar in middle school (Interview #1, 11-2-15).

Shelley was hired to teach at Moljner Middle School in its foundational year. She taught three sections of regular language arts courses, one co-taught section of the same, which was comprised of regular and special education students, and two sections of Honors language arts. My relationship with this participant began in the summer before my first school year began. We met a number of times to discuss the building's Honors language arts program and she assisted me with various procedures and routines as I acclimated to a new school site and teaching of Honors courses. During my first year at Moljner, we had regular contact with one another in meetings related to our shared content areas. The following summer, we collaborated to align our Honors curriculum, specifically creating multi-genre writing project we wrote and piloted for these students during the inquiry period. She was an ideal candidate to participate in an inquiry of this kind, as she exuded

confidence about her teaching and welcomed visitors to observe her. She was the most flexible of the participants in allowing observations, even without advanced notice. Shelley was eager to share her knowledge and was highly reflective about her ways of thinking and doing in the classroom, providing the study what Hogan, Rabinowitz, & Craven (2003) deem “rich descriptions of teaching behaviors stemming from expertise” (p. 29).

Shelley’s dispositions toward her curriculum and her students demonstrated a refined sense of purpose for her work. She regarded her students as “different people based on family dynamics, culture...” and that they “bring different experiences different ideas, which I think dramatically impacts how they interpret literature, how they write, I mean that’s why I love language arts because it really is life applicable” (Interview #1, 11-2-15). According to Housner & Griffey (1985), Shelley’s understanding is characteristic of highly experienced teachers who organize their thinking around individuals rather than whole classes.

Shelley shared her approaches to lesson planning during our initial interview. When I asked her if she was a long-range planner, she easily and enthusiastically articulated the process she uses to map out a year. She described in detail how she creates long-range plans that allow for enough “wiggle room” in the event students need additional support with a given topic or theme and that she “zig zags” back and forth through her content over the course of a year (Interview #1, 11-2-15). She explained that from the beginning of the year, she knows what precisely what content will be presented in a given quarter and even by the week. Borko and Livingston (1989) cite this as a distinction of highly experienced

practitioners—their propensity is to plan ahead by highlighting the main components of the lesson while storing the remainder mentally in terms of timing and pacing. Shelley’s practice of “zig-zagging” through content is aligned with how Bjork (2011) describes “interleaving,” a practice whereby experienced teachers engage and re-engage students with concepts and skills, circling back to reinforce what has been learned. Shelley explained that in her planning, she overlapped reading and writing activities within units so that both were given due attention. She also demonstrated a marked sense of flexibility, at times and as the need arose, adjusting her lesson plans from one class to another.

Like the other participants, Shelley indicated the concurrent specificity and vagueness of her district’s curriculum for language arts. She explained that while it is a “nice guide” (Interview #1, 11-2-15), it is both too broad and too specific at the same time. Additionally, she acknowledged that it was not as helpful for her mentees and that the year prior, she and the other members of the 7th grade language arts team had taken the initiative to create a sort of “pacing guide” that tailored the curriculum to their individual need. But unlike the other participants, Shelley felt that by the end of most school years, she had indeed “covered” the majority of the curriculum.

Participant	Teaching Experience	Course(s) Taught	Teaching Certifications Area(s)
Principal Investigator	9	8 th Grade Regular Language Arts 8 th Grade Honors Language Arts	7-12 Language Arts
Kathryn	3	7 th Grade Tier 2 Reading Skills 7 th Grade Regular Language Arts	7-12 Language Arts
Shelley	21	7 th Grade Regular Language Arts 7 th Grade Honors Language Arts	7-12 Language Arts
Darlene	2	7 th Grade 21 st Century Literacy 7 th Grade Honors Reading	7-12 Language Arts
Molly	2	8 th Grade 21 st Century Literacy 8 th Grade Language Arts	7-12 English

Table 3.1 Study participant demographics and teaching experience.

Research Site. The research was conducted at the newest middle school within a large, Midwestern urban district. This site, located in the far northwestern quadrant of the city, opened in the 2013-14 school year and serves a total of approximately 620 students in grades 6, 7, and 8. The facility is a comprehensive neighborhood school set in a suburban area with a slightly more affluent demographic profile than other schools in the district. I had access to this site as one of its 8th grade language arts teachers. During the period of study, I also served as mentor and co-mentor to the newest language arts teachers in the building, a member of the Principal Staff Advisory Committee, as well as team leader of the Student Improvement Team (SIP) leader in the area of writing. An institutional

approval letter for conducting the inquiry was granted by the district's Department of Research. Table 3.2 displays the basic membership profile of the school with the latest data available from the state's most recent State of the Schools Report. Table 3.3 shows gives detailed information about student membership.

	6th	7th	8th	Total
2013-2014	169	207	0	376
2014-2015	204	217	199	620

Table 3.2 Moljner Middle School Grade-by-Grade Membership

Years	American Indian/ Alaskan Native	Asian	Black or African American	Hispanic	Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	White	Two or More Races
2013-14	2	3	100	51	0	190	30
2014-15	6	10	163	79	0	316	46

Table 3.3: Moljner Middle School Student Membership by Race and Ethnicity

The school's demographic profile is predominately white, but with a significant number of Black/African American students. Other demographic characteristics are charted in Table 3.4 (below). Student performance is measured throughout the school year by both district and state assessments in the areas of reading, writing, mathematics, and science. The latest data available from the state's most recent State of the Schools Report are indicated.

Years	Percentage of Students Receiving Free and/or Reduced Lunch	Student Mobility Rate %	Percentage of Students Proficient on State Reading Exam	Percentage of Students Proficient on State Writing Exam	Teachers' Average Years of Teaching Experience	Count of Teachers with Master's Degrees	Percentage of Teachers with Master's Degrees
2013-14	46.01	7.18	79	N/A	11.27	17	65
2014-15	45.81	7.58	76	72	9.14	23	53.49

Table 3.4: Moljner Middle School site contextual demographics.

Data collection. The following section will describe the collection of data.

Data sources included field notes of classroom observations and retrospective notes and reflections from personal interviews, artifacts related to lesson plans of the observation sessions, transcriptions of audio recordings from all post-observation and whole-group reflection sessions, and field notes.

The research began with several preliminary steps. The University of Nebraska-Lincoln's Institutional Review Board (IRB) granted permission for the study in early May 2015 (see Appendix B). The school district's IRB granted approval later that month (see Appendix D). Recruitment began in the fall of 2015. I conducted an initial information session, the purpose of which was to orient potential participants to the topic of study. I provided each of them an article from which the original concept of instructional density derived and presented a PowerPoint that contained additional information. Participants had the opportunity to discuss their understanding and ask related questions. Approximately two weeks later, each participant signed a consent form (Appendix E) that was read and

administered by a colleague not involved with the inquiry.

Before the formal observations began, I reiterated to participants that my role in classroom observations would not be an evaluative one, but rather a coaching one. Because the study was designed around reciprocal classroom observations, participants may have had uneasy feelings that accompany such observations. I was sensitive to this possibility in the study design and therefore hinged the exploration of instructional density on the collaborative exchanges that occurred after the rounds of observation. Wragg (2013) delineates the range of approaches to peer observation and explains that the purpose, timing, and context of such should largely determine which methods are employed. In designing this inquiry, I planned for 6 observations of each participant that were approximately 30 minutes apiece. I conveyed to each participant beforehand that the formal observations would be for the purpose of identifying evidence of, and opportunities for, instructional density in their practice. While the majority of observations involved myself, the principal investigator, as observer and coach, each participant also had the opportunity to observe or be observed by another participant. I did not participate in these discussions but rather attended the post-observation sessions to audio record and take field notes.

Classroom observations. I conducted a series of classroom observations of each participant, approximately once monthly during the period of study, November 2015 through May 2016. I observed each participant a total of 5-6 times, and each participant observed Shelley and myself once toward the beginning of the study.

After each observation, I met with the participant that day or the day following to discuss the observation and collaboratively reflect upon the use of instructional density therein. The work of Del Prete (2013) provided a backdrop for this study design. He cites close classroom observations as powerful change agents and their capacity support collaborative learning. Round participants can develop practical acuity by “grounding interpretation and assessment in observed evidence and contextual knowledge” (p. xvi). The enactment of instructional density is realized, in part, during the dialogic exchanges between teacher and student that are highly dependent on contextual factors of classroom life. Many scholars have underscored the need to more explicitly acknowledge the complexity of the classroom environment (Cohen, 2001; Schoenfeld, 2011; Shulman, 2004). This complexity, according to Del Prete (2013) can be remediated by attending to the nuances of teacher decision making “in the moment.” The rounds of observation and reflection were designed to help participants illuminate one another’s decision-making processes both in purposeful incorporation of instructional density and extemporaneously while teaching.

The rounds of observation began in November of the 2015-16 school year after participants had attended a preliminary information session and signed consent forms. Pre- and post-interviews and post-observation reflection sessions were recorded using a hand-held recording device and later transcribed by the principal investigator. Participants were informed that audio recording could be stopped at any time during these sessions. Table 3.5 shows the research activity, its location, and the relationship between activities and research questions.

Activity	Location	Related Research Questions	Type of Data
Preliminary Information Session	Principal Researcher Classroom	How do practitioners negotiate meaning of instructionally dense practice through collaborative discussion as they enact it in practice?	Field notes
Initial Teacher Interviews	Participant Classrooms	How do differences in content knowledge inform the process of using instructional density?	Audio recordings
Classroom Observations	Participant classrooms	In what ways do middle level reading and language arts teachers enact instructionally dense practice?	Field notes Retrospective notes
Post-Observation Reflection Sessions	Participant classrooms and conference rooms	How do practitioners negotiate meaning of instructionally dense practice through collaborative discussion as they enact it in practice?	Field notes Retrospective notes Audio recordings
Post Interviews	Participant Classrooms	In what ways do middle level reading and language arts teachers enact instructionally dense practice? How do practitioners negotiate meaning of instructionally dense practice through collaborative discussion as they enact it in practice?	Audio recordings Retrospective notes

Table 3.5 Research activities and data generated.

Interviews. I conducted two interviews of each participant. In the initial interview (see Appendix F), I generated foundational information that was based on my research questions. I used a semi-structured interview approach that, according to Roulston (2010) allows researchers to use a prepared interview guide with a number of pre-planned questions. The questions were open-ended and allowed me to ask follow-up questions to seek further information or clarification. Data yielded

during interviews is essential to case study methodology, according to Yin (2009) who also suggests that the most effective interviewing style is fluid rather than rigid. Each interview was approximately 30-40 minutes in length. I began with a set of background/demographic questions about educational and teaching experience and then asked a number of questions related to each participant's experience, opinions and beliefs about enacting curriculum in the classroom and challenges therein. The post-interviews were conducted in the spring of the 2015-2016 school year (see Appendix G). These interviews generated information about how each participant's understanding of instructional density had evolved throughout the course of the inquiry, their experiences with the observations, and how they would use instructional density moving forward. These sessions were audio recorded and took place in the respective classrooms of each participant.

Field notes. Fetterman (2010) cites the importance of field notes in recording useful observational data and Yin (2009) suggests that a researcher's field notes are the most common feature of a collection of data. The field notes for my case study (see Appendix I) were generated during the classroom observations. After each observation, I recorded retrospective notes and added to them after each post-observation session. This kind of documentation, according to Merriam (2009) includes "the researcher's feelings, reactions, hunches, initial interpretations, speculations, and working hypotheses" (p. 131). The field notes provided an abundance of data throughout the research process as I observed the participants reflecting upon their use of instructional density.

Artifacts. Yin (2009) cites the triangulation of data, or collecting multiple sources of data, as an essential component of case study methodology. I used a collection of related artifacts to inform my study. The study participants willingly shared with me a variety of artifacts related to the observations such as handouts, worksheets, printouts of PowerPoint presentations, and other materials used for instructional purposes.

Data Analysis and Validation

Data Analysis. I began the process of analysis by preparing the data. An initial step was to transcribe the audio recordings of the interviews and post-observation reflection sessions. I then organized the data set chronologically by the date each observation had occurred and included the corresponding field notes, transcriptions, and any related artifacts gathered from the observation. I read through the data a number of times, first to get a sense of how the contents might relate to my research questions. I wrote extensive notes and narrative comments on the interview and post-observation transcripts that reflected my own insights and questions. I then began the process of open coding, which Strauss & Corbin (1998) define as naming and categorizing data, an analytic process through which “data are fractured, conceptualized, and integrated to form theory” (p. 3). Using an emergent approach (Merriam, 2009) I created categories for my second examination of the data. The length of the codes ranged from two to six words and each code was descriptive enough to identify themes that emerged. In my third reading of the data, I began assigning individual items from the data set to the codes. I ascribed a color to each code and began highlighting related items from my field notes of the

observations, interviews, and post-observation discussion transcripts. Establishing the codes and assigning segments of corresponding data allowed themes to emerge. This constituted the constant comparative method of analyzing qualitative data which, according to Conrad, Neumann, Haworth, & Scott (1993) “combines systematic data collection, coding, and analysis with theoretical sampling in order to generate theory that is integrated, close to the data, and expressed in a form clear enough for further testing” (p. 280). The results of the data analysis are found in Chapter 4 of this document.

Data validation. I employed several strategies to validate my qualitative data set. First, the data were triangulated so that, according to Glesne and Peshkin (2006) there was corroboration among the data sources, generating trustworthiness. The triangulation of data is a procedure whereby the researcher converges multiple sources of information in order for themes to emerge. For my study, triangulation of data sources was accomplished through the collection of pre- and post-interview transcripts, field notes taken during classroom observations, retrospective notes, artifacts, and other related documents.

I also validated the data set by prolonged engagement in the field. Creswell & Miller (2000) explain that through repeated observation, researchers are able to establish trust with participants, bringing about familiar and comfortable relationships, those that naturally bring create a proclivity for openness and disclosure of information. These authors also note that constructivists “recognize that the longer they stay in the field, the more pluralistic perspectives will be heard

from participants and the better the understanding of the context of participant views” (p. 128).

Another validation strategy was that of member checking, a common procedure in qualitative research methods. Member checking allows participants the opportunity to review data for quality and accuracy, a practice that ensures their thoughts and feelings are not misrepresented. Because the nature of narrative inquiry is according to Clandinin & Connelly (2000) concerned with human experience, which is by nature subjective and transforms over time, there is ample room for interpretive error. Therefore, member checks are considered to be “the most crucial technique for establishing credibility” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 314). I invited participants to review their pre- and post-interview transcripts as well as the brief biographies included in this chapter. Participants were encouraged to omit any words or passages that were not aligned with their intent.

Finally, I employed the use of thick, rich descriptions to further validate my findings. These descriptions lent credibility to what I had observed by providing a rich and realistic contextual background. According to Denzin (1989), “thick descriptions are deep, dense, detailed accounts” (p. 83). They provide readers the experience of having been where the researcher has been and experienced what the researcher has experienced.

The following chapter details the results of my study.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

Introduction

This chapter is organized into six major sections. I first provide narrative accounts of each participant's experiences with instructional density. As the principal investigator, my role was to observe the classroom practice of each participant including myself and to examine how each used instructional density. In addition, I provided coaching to participants in ways they could enact instructional density. Qualitative results from interviews, field notes, collaborative discussions, and related artifacts provide thick, rich descriptions. Within each narrative I address the primary and subsidiary research questions. The individual results are rendered from the participants' experiences throughout the course of the inquiry. The research questions are as follows:

Primary research question:

- In what ways do middle-level reading and language arts teachers enact instructional density in their practice?

Subsidiary questions:

- How do differences in content knowledge inform the process of using instructional density?
- What is the role of collaborative discourse in generating the enactment of instructional density?

Molly

Planning enactment. Before attempting to characterize how participants used instructional density in their daily and long-range planning, it was important to first understand how each approached lesson planning as well as how they understood the concept of instructional density. This was an important consideration that undergirded my role as instructional coach. I found it valuable to gauge each participant's understanding of instructional density so that the coaching I offered was suited to her level of knowledge and experience.

In our initial interview, Molly expressed a limited grasp on conceptualizing her curriculum over the course of a year. In fact, based on our early conversations, she told me that she did not map out her curriculum to guide to determine what would happen in each of the four quarters of the school year. Molly's planning was guided by two documents corresponding with the 8th grade courses she taught: Language Arts (see Appendix K) and 21st Century Reading (see Appendix L). She described how she occasionally checked the district's curriculum guide to "see if there's something I haven't really hit yet" (Interview #1, 10-28-15). Because Molly did not have an articulated strategy for attending to different elements of the curriculum, she was not able to explain how she balanced these, only indicating that grammar was a neglected area. This was likely due to her lack of experience with long-range planning, something novices may find challenging. This participant also seemed to interchange the fundamentals of lesson planning—developing and helping students achieve learning objectives, sequencing and pacing, etc., with the ordering of daily activities. She explained that after periodically checking for what

she hadn't yet addressed from the curriculum map: "I mean I start with SSR. I've been doing stations lately so figuring that out and, um, I try to have like 3 different parts like reading, and then like a writing activity, or, and then just kind of ending with something else" (Interview #1, 10-28-15). Though "chunking" a class period into shorter segments is good practice, particularly for adolescents who are taxed by prolonged demands for sustained attention, I also wanted to challenge the linearity of Molly's thinking and nudge her toward conceptualizing her lesson planning in a more cohesive fashion. Specifically, one of my goals with this participant was to help her find ways to forge connections between these different activities and address more standards within each one.

The rudiments of layering. In one of my early observations, I saw evidence of Molly's moving from one activity to activity as an organizing principle for the class period. After silent reading for the initial 20 minutes of class, the students had completed a short exercise from the basal grammar book in which they identified adjectives. From there, they moved into a group activity that was meant to review plot happenings of the novel students were reading together (see Figure 3.2), *The Shadow Club* (Shusterman, 2002).

Shadow Club Member	Unbeatable	Reasons for hatred
Jared		
Cheryl		
Randall		
Jason		
Karen (O.P.)		
Abbie		
Darren		

Figure 4.1 The Shadow Club character chart graphic organizer

Molly created the graphic organizer that corresponded with this activity. The students configured themselves into small groups and after a period of time, shared their responses in front of the other students with the organizer displayed under the document camera. During our post-observation reflection session, I made the following recommendations:

1. Enrich the graphic organizer activity with a short discussion of specific plot elements—exposition, rising action, falling action, climax, and resolution which correspond with one of the reading standards for this quarter.
2. Add a column to the graphic organizer that asks students to use an adjective that corresponds with a character trait. This minor adjustment would connect the grammar lesson to the review activity as well as reinforce the idea of characters having specific traits that influence what happens in the plot.
3. Create a simple PowerPoint slide, poster, or other visual that describes basic standards of speaking such as facing the audience, speaking loudly and clearly, and making eye contact. Review this with students before they present their work to the class.

Moving toward cohesion. My focus in this and subsequent observations was to challenge Molly's lesson planning so that it was more cohesive and not a disjointed series of activities that were not thematically tied to one another. I wanted to help her capitalize on elements of the lesson she had created, such as the graphic organizer in Figure 3.2. In our post-observation session, she explained that in creating that piece, she was attempting to ameliorate misunderstanding with what was happening in the story, stating there was "some confusion with what the students were reading and since they were like, sharing the information, I thinking

sometimes when the information was incorrect that was my main concern” (Personal Communication, 11-10-15). At the same time I wanted to push Molly to plan richer lessons, I also encouraged her to consider the knowledge students brought as they encountered a new plot. In our conversation, I conveyed that it was wise to clarify basic plot events and characters, especially at the beginning of the story. I explained that students would be more likely to engage with the novel if initially they had a working comprehension. But it was also important to help Molly understand how she could achieve this objective while simultaneously layering in other aspects of her curriculum. For example, when students presented their findings, she could have labeled those, or even referred to them verbally, as parts of the exposition or rising action of the story. This would have naturally led to prompting the students to make predictions about future plot events, which we also discussed briefly.

My second recommendation for this lesson was to connect the short grammar lesson to the activity that reviewed the story. I suggested that Molly add a column to the graphic organizer that required students to generate an adjective, or character trait, that described each character. By doing so, she would reinforce that skill in the sense of asking students to *apply* the knowledge. She could also use this as a jumping off point to push students to generate more descriptive character traits, which would add an important element of descriptive writing to the lesson. I explained how this would also reinforce her original objective, which was to assure students had a solid working comprehension of the exposition of the story. During our discussion of this lesson, I asked Molly what she had planned next for this novel.

She explained that the students would continue to read and as a culminating assignment, would “get to an activity where they’re acting like they’re a character in *The Shadow Club* and they like write from their journal entry (Personal Communication, 11-10-15). I explained to Molly that this assignment would constitute a R.A.F.T. writing—Role of the Writer, Audience, Format, and Topic (Fisher & Frey, 2007) in which students take on the role of a character, consider the audience and format of the writing, and carefully determine an appropriate topic. I also explained that she could use the present lesson as a bridge to that later activity by helping students more deeply consider character traits in how they would fashion a piece of writing from an individual character’s perspective. I also reminded Molly that she could briefly address the skill of *point of view* in that future writing lesson because it would necessitate writing in the first person. I added that she could contrast this with the point of view of the novel, which was written in a third person limited point of view.

Creating visuals. I made a final recommendation for this early lesson I observed. I encouraged Molly to create a simple visual for times in her lessons she asked students to present or share their work. During this lesson, students had formed themselves into small groups (2-3 students), completed the graphic organizer, and then shared a portion, which Molly displayed under the document camera. Because the state’s standards for middle school include the development of speaking and listening skills (see Appendix A), Molly could easily attend to this standard by reviewing the visual before students presented. By encouraging students to speak loudly and clearly and face the audience, she would also assure

that shared information was efficiently and easily communicated. As a final note, I suggested that attending to the speaking standard could also translate into a formative speaking grade, adding a level of richness to the lesson that would likely elevate student performance. Later in this participant narrative I describe additional coaching related to Molly's use of visuals.

Toward cohesion. In a later observation, it was evident that Molly made a positive change toward connecting disparate aspects of her lesson. When I asked her how she had planned for instructional density, she described how she reviewed the parts of speech using a Madlib™ activity in anticipation of an assignment that would require students to capitalize proper nouns. In our post-observation session, I praised her the grammatical spin she put on the assignment rather than simply telling students to capitalize certain words, or not addressing this aspect of the lesson at all. On this particular day, the students had read a short story from the literature anthology about an older gentleman who had willed a grove of trees to his descendants. Molly used a popcorn-style reading approach in which students read aloud a short section and then chose another student to continue reading. As the story concluded, she briefly summarized verbally what had happened in the story and began introducing the post-reading assignment with PowerPoint slides; these I had shared with her via email the school year prior as a corresponding activity. The assignment asked students to create a newspaper headline that summarized the events of the story. She began by displaying a series of funny newspaper headlines to get the students thinking about how to write headlines. She then proceeded to a slide that gave some basic directives on writing a headline, which included the

capitalization of proper nouns. Molly was able to verbally make this connection for the students by referring to the grammar activity they had completed at the beginning of the class. Despite this progress, there were still many areas of the lesson that presented opportunities.

I first addressed the specifics of how Molly had reviewed the short story once the students finished reading it. She asked a question: “So real quick, what could he not sell?” (Field Notes, 11-17-15), elicited one student response, and then began explaining the assignment. I encouraged Molly to slow down this portion of the lesson and plan for a more intentional review of the story given that the students would be asked to summarize for a formal, graded assignment. I explained that she could do so with the plot diagram, something I encouraged in part because elements of plot diagram are one of the standards to be addressed during this time of the year, as well as that it would help students conceptualize the narrative arc of a story. I shared with her that I keep a poster of the plot diagram in a prominent place in my own classroom and refer to it often while we are reading. I made a handful of additional recommendations that would create more instructional density in her lesson plan:

1. Require students to incorporate 2-3 new vocabulary words from the short story into their summarizing activity. This would reinforce recognition and application of new words.
2. Be explicit about what it means to summarize a story. Review the 5-W’s—Who, What, When, Where, and Why and have a discussion of main idea in writing a summary.
3. Add an element of writing instruction by discussing an author’s purpose for writing a newspaper headline, the audience for such, and more explicit addressing of guiding principles of the headline as a genre of writing.

4. While students are working, provide access to the “Rules for Writing a Newspaper Headline” slide students can refer to.

I was pleased that Molly was learning to forge relationships between different content elements in planning her lessons. In a later observation, she demonstrated this area of growth again by using her bell work as an anticipatory set to later class work. She displayed a photo of a dog and asked students to write a caption so that she could later introduce captions in a lesson on text features.

Dialogic enactment. Having an instructionally dense practice is in part the willingness to engage in dialogue with students during the act of instruction. It is the constant recasting and reframing of what is said to the content at hand. Much of my coaching with Molly after a classroom observation consisted of changing her mindset toward this end. Besides the uncertainties and discomfort that come with the territory of being a new teacher, Molly had a reserved disposition in the classroom. While she presented as a friendly and naturally soft-spoken individual, this less assertive demeanor was often a hindrance to engaging spontaneously with students. I surmised early on that a major focus of our post-observation coaching sessions would be to highlight opportunities for interaction she may have missed.

Taking the scenic byways. One of my earliest observations about this participant was that there were very few deviations from what she had planned. Her reluctance to veer from her lesson to respond to student comments or inquiries resulted in missed opportunities for helping them connect to her language arts or reading content. I decided to first address her physicality in the classroom. During our second post-observation session, I began by coaching Molly on being more of a

presence in her classroom. She had a marked tendency to stand near the whiteboard at the front of the room. I encouraged her to move freely about the classroom space, both while she was giving direct instruction and while students were working. I explained that her proximity would, especially for some students who may be reluctant to express themselves in a whole-group setting, invite student interactions. Specifically, I suggested that while students were taking notes, to make a quick roundabout of the room to check in with individuals. In one of my final observations, Molly had accomplished her goal of using better proximity and it proved to be a valuable tool with formative assessment. While circulating, she discovered that students had misunderstood the idiom “head over heels.” As a result, she was able to address the whole group and correct their understanding. After establishing the importance of physical proximity in this and subsequent collaborations, I steered my coaching efforts toward other opportunities for verbal interaction she had missed based on my classroom observations.

One such opportunity presented itself when a student had asked what *color blindness* was, as one of the characters in the novel was described as being color-blind. I pointed out that this seemingly simple question was in actuality an opportunity to help the student engage with content more deeply. Because the question was posed in the context of whole-class instruction, it was also a chance to share information with the other students. I suggested that she respond by framing “color” as an adjective and “blindness” as a noun—both parts of speech she had covered in the initial activity of the day. She also might have asked what a character’s color blindness might bring to bear on the plot of a story, specifically

how the author might purposefully insert such details as foreshadowing or as a technique to move the plot forward.

Creatively improvising. During this same lesson, Molly had invited students to share written responses to the text. Many of the students failed to punctuate their responses, misspelled words, wrote incomplete sentences, or did not use other basic conventions of English. During our post-observation session, I relayed the importance of addressing those errors even though it might require her to deviate from what was planned, or extend a given activity. I explained that doing so was indeed instructional density; students engaging in a comprehension activity while simultaneously reviewing proper conventions of writing would accomplish more than one objective at once. Because the novice participants engaged in observations of the more experienced ones, they were provided a context and example for such interactions. In an observation of one of my classes, Molly noted how I spontaneously defined words and indicated their part of speech or the nature of their prefixes or suffixes as they arose in conversation. For example, in one instance I wrote the abbreviation of “doctor” on the board and explained to students how to abbreviate its plural form (Personal Communication, 11-19-15) before returning to our planned activity. My hope was that Molly would be able to use that frame of reference to develop her own instruction to be more fluid.

I also emphasized how Molly could respond to student comments with connections to the content. For example, in her lesson on text features, a student shared a humorous caption he had written for the photo she had displayed to get them thinking about captions. I suggested that Molly respond with “Hey that was

great you did it in present tense” (Personal Communication, 12-8-15). By indicating the student had written a caption in the present verb tense, she would be reinforcing a grammatical item of the curriculum as well as strengthening the student’s grasp of the nuances of that writing genre. In a number of our conversations, I explained that even student comments or questions that were “off-topic” could be used to strengthen their knowledge of content. During that same lesson on text features, a student asked Molly: “Do italics come from Italy?” Her response was to laugh and say, “I’m not sure” (Field Notes, 12-8-15). During our post-observation session, I suggested that next time such a question arose, she cast a question back to the student such as: “How would you find out? What resource might you use?” (Personal Communication, 12-8-15). In coaching this participant, it was important to give thoughtful rationales for such advice. I explained to her that veering away from the planned lesson to respond to students, in this case perhaps even displaying a website that offered word etymology, she could not only encourage intellectual curiosity, but convey a sense of honoring and valuing student queries.

Responding to student questions. On another occasion, a student asked Molly a question in an impromptu fashion and seemingly disconnected from the topic at hand, the happenings in a short story they had finished reading. He asked her, “Would you rather take a million dollars or would you take one penny doubling for 30 days?” (Field Notes, 11-17-15). Molly responded by laughing lightly and moving on with her lesson. In our follow-up conversation I suggested that with questions of this nature, Molly could respond by reframing the question back to her

content, for example, asking how the main character in the story might respond to such a choice. In general, Molly demonstrated few instances of asking students follow-up questions or probing further to gauge their understanding. By the end of the period of the study she did, however, express a change in her thinking about responding to students: “Um, but usually if they ask me a question I don’t know I’ll just like Google it with them so we can all, I don’t know just so at least they get an answer so they’re not just like, so I at least value their question” (Interview #2, 5-12-16).

In a later observation, a male student lamented over the length of a play the class was previewing. The piece would have to be read over several class periods with students volunteering to read their assigned parts. During our post-observation session, I suggested to Molly that she use such comments to achieve her purposes, for example, asking the student why plays may appear to be longer than other types of text found in a literature anthology. This may have lead to a conversation about the dramatic genre and any number of other relevant discussions. By tapping into student comments, even those that are on the surface negative, she would be able to assuage a sense of complaining while still connecting the comment to content.

Talking the talk. Another coaching effort consisted of helping Molly to enrich her dialogue with the terminology of her content. Like the other novice participants, her tendency was to provide direct instruction without the habit of mind that lends nomenclature to a variety of discrete elements of the curriculum. Table 4.1 offers several examples of coaching opportunities toward this end. On the

left were instances wherein Molly explained something during direct instruction without referring to it in precise terms of the discipline.

Instructional explanation	Curricular item
Discussing characters in a story by given name only	Static and dynamic characters
Referred to some information underneath a photograph in a text	Caption
Asked students to “recap” what had happened in a story	Summarize
Student asked about term “sexism”	Suffix; noun
Prompted students to shorten a longer statement	Paraphrase
Student question about the meaning of an unfamiliar word in a text; Molly responded by stating “It says down here.”	Footnote

Table 4.1 Coaching notes related to using terminology of the content area

Molly was aware of her propensity to adhere to a clearly defined path in terms of delivering content. She stated that “being in the moment is kind of tough for me, just [because] I’m such a planner and I like to stick to things and be organized (Interview #2, 5-12-16). It was a challenge to shift her thinking away from this singular focus, and in our coaching sessions together, I tried to convey the importance of balancing momentum with the planned curriculum with a willingness to deviate from it.

Content knowledge. Molly expressed confidence with her level of content knowledge in some aspects of trying to enact instructional density. For example, she reported that she was more consciously integrating skills that across differing elements of the curriculum. A key area of her growth was being able to teach a grammar skill and then incorporate it into a reading or writing lesson. Molly was also able to articulate a clear understanding of the relationship between her experience and her knowledge of content. She reiterated that she didn’t always have

at her immediate disposal all of the connections a more experienced teacher would. However, she did feel confident that content knowledge would naturally develop over time (Interview #2, 5-12-16). One way this would come about, she noted, was increasing familiarity with the reading materials in her classes. She felt that not being able to anticipate specific points in a given text on was detrimental to helping students make meaningful connections. She shared with me that often, she was just ahead of her students in the given reading material.

While Molly felt that she would continue to grow in the area of instructional density, her comments about it also indicated a misunderstanding of the difference between content knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge (PDK). At several points throughout the inquiry, she expressed dismay at being “in a rut” (Interview #2, 5-12-16) with planning the same kinds of activities over and over again. While she stated that, “Sometimes, I don’t even feel like I have enough content knowledge for planning,” this statement indicates she did not have a sufficiently broad repertoire of classroom strategies from which to draw.

Pedagogical content knowledge. It is widely acknowledged that subject matter knowledge shares equal importance with pedagogical content knowledge (PCK), what Shulman (1986; 1987) deems a major component of teaching expertise. PCK is how teachers fashion subject matter to make it comprehensible to others. Some of the coaching I provided to Molly during the course of study was not directly related to instructional density but rather to how she attended to these practical, logistical matters. On several occasions, my coaching was to nudge her toward tweaking the organization and flow of activities in her classroom so that more of her

energy could be directed at student interactions. During one particular observation, Molly had an opening activity in which students were tasked with choosing 3 vocabulary words from a displayed PowerPoint slide and relating them, in a sentence, to the content of that quarter's assigned novel, *Between Shades of Gray* (Sepetys, 2011). There were a total of ten designated vocabulary words for that section of the story, necessitating the list to continue onto a second slide. While this was an instructionally dense activity in that it required students to practice using new vocabulary while reviewing the story, it quickly devolved into a hectic scenario. The students repeatedly called out requests for her to switch between the two slides, and there were many questions asking for clarification on the initial instructions. And while she had reminded students to refer to vocabulary notes they had taken in a previous lesson, it was clear that several had not taken the notes, or they were illegible or otherwise unusable. I recognized another problem, however, that some of the definitions provided to students were neither precise nor written in a manner that was developmentally appropriate (see Figures 4.2 and 4.3).

This resulted in numerous questions about the meanings of certain words. Most of the students made an earnest attempt to complete the task even in the ensuing chaos. Molly closed the activity after approximately 5 minutes, instructing students to begin getting textbooks from the shelf as a transition to the next major activity. I made several recommendations of how the bell work could be orchestrated better and in a more efficient way so that both she and her students could attend to the lesson's purposes rather than getting bound up in logistical complications:

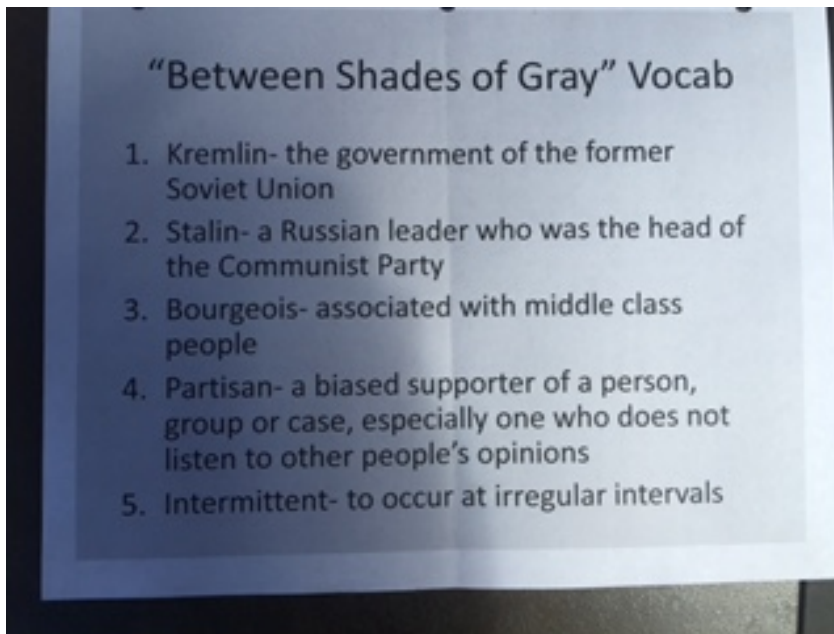


Figure 4.2 Vocabulary Definitions Slide 1

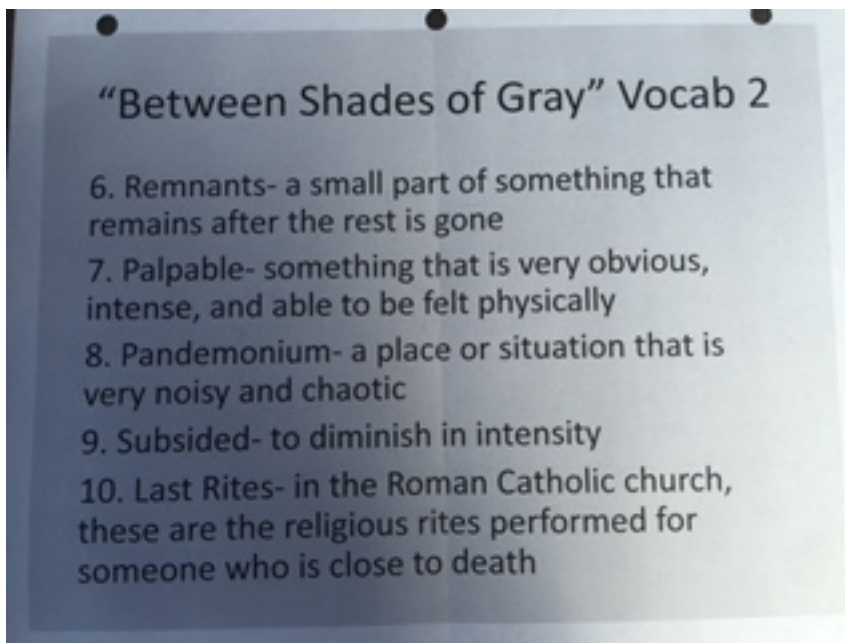


Figure 4.3 Vocabulary Definitions Slide 2

1. Re-fashion the vocabulary definitions into more age-appropriate terms. Include each word's part of speech along with the definition so that students can use it precisely in their own sentence.
2. Place a printed list of the revised definitions at each table for students who may have missed the notes in a previous lesson. Use the screen to

instead display the instructions for using the vocabulary to write sentences.

3. While students are working on the task, circulate the room and read some of their sentences. Use this time to answer questions about particular words, indicate if they are being used incorrectly, and check for use of standard English conventions.
4. Allot a brief period of time for students to share their sentences with the larger group. This will accomplish the underlying purpose of reviewing the story and give students an opportunity to clarify any confusion. It will also provide the opportunity to reinforce vocabulary skills as well as praise students for exceptional sentences.

In our collaborative discussion after this observation, I explained to Molly that even though these recommendations were not directly related to instructional density, following them for future lessons would be more conducive to its enactment. I explained that a clearer focus on organizing principles of instruction would also be less taxing on students' working memory. For example, if students had easy access to printed materials and a visual display of directions, they could concentrate their efforts on completing the task thoughtfully instead of their work being compromised by confusion. In turn, Molly's energy would be freed up to attend to student work rather than the clarification of instructions.

Collaborative discourse. Molly's reserved demeanor sometimes presented a challenge in terms of our discussions. Her tendency was to offer brief responses to questions and it was a struggle for her to provide longer elaborations, however, Molly was open and receptive to any feedback I offered. While we collaborated, I was also sensitive to how she might perceive my feedback about the observations. I reiterated to her more so than to other participants my role was not an evaluative one. But despite her reserved nature during our post-observation discussions, Molly

cited them as key to helping her grow professionally. In our final interview, she stated that she enjoyed talking to experienced teachers (Interview #2, 5-12-16) and that she learns a lot by doing so. She specifically cited the value of having certain habits of her teaching pointed out to her, even ones that didn't directly relate to instructional density. Without the observations and collaborative discussions, she wouldn't have had the opportunity to reflect on her classroom performance.

Kathryn

Planning enactment. Kathryn demonstrated a strong grasp of instructional density before the period of study began. Though she hadn't actually heard the term prior to reading the literature I provided, I gathered that she had the mindset in place to enact it in her practice. I also had the hunch our coaching sessions would be productive due to her openness and willingness to learn even more. She told me in our initial interview that it [instructional density] was "something I do a lot anyways" (Interview #1, 10-20-15) and that she enjoyed being a reading teacher because of its opportunities to be a holistic endeavor. I also gathered initial information about her approach to lesson planning so that I could determine what coaching needs she might have. Kathryn used curriculum documents for 7th grade 21st Century Reading (see Appendix M) and 7th grade Language Arts (see Appendix N) She described her struggles with managing a large curriculum load as follows:

I find our curriculum very vague and specific at the same time. Yeah, there are some elements of it that are, like, super specific, in like reading materials you should choose from. But then, um, it also seems very vague to me because it, well it doesn't tell you exactly how to fit everything in you have to do per quarter. So it's like, okay, specifically you have to teach these prefixes and suffixes. And you have to teach a novel like this, and you have to teach all these different genres per quarter and here are suggestions for stories you can teach in your book, but it never tells you how to stack all

those things on top of each other and to teach them throughout the course of the quarter” (Interview #1, 10-20-15).

It was evident that Kathryn needed some specific guidance on how to juggle all the elements of her curriculum. Based on our conversations prior to the period of the study and the relationship I had with Kathryn, I knew her to be a conscientious lesson planner. She had participated in a curriculum writing project within our building in the summer before the school year began. She did so voluntarily in an effort to create long-range plans as well as align what she was doing with the other 7th grade language arts and reading teachers. Being a novice teacher in her third year, Kathryn was impressive for ability to share insights typical of a more experienced teacher. In our initial interview, she conveyed the understanding that it would be advantageous for students if the curriculum guide were enacted in a similar fashion among teachers in the building. She stated that she was “okay with the district being more vague” (Interview #1, 10-20-15) as long as her close colleagues shared the work of bringing more specificity.

Instructional density and the writing workshop. For this reason, I tended to provide more coaching on the dialogic aspects of instructional density. Nevertheless, there were still opportunities for Kathryn to learn about how an instructionally dense mindset would benefit her planning. One area of her teaching Kathryn expressed the most concern about was the writing workshop. Kathryn even stated, “I hate teaching the writing process. I really do” and that she felt it was her “weak area” (Interview #2, 5-12-16) in terms of instructional density. In early November, I observed one of Kathryn’s classes as her students began their work on

a descriptive essay. It was evident that she had not clearly established a way to conduct such a workshop. On this particular day, she had 4 guests in her classroom in the form of 7th grade writing mentors, a group of students who are proficient writers and provide academic mentoring to students who need additional writing support. She began the lesson by briefly reading through a set of techniques for writing an introduction she had posted on the screen (see Figure 4.4).

- **Begin with an attention grabber.**
- **State your topic sentence.**
- **List your 3 key ideas.**
- **Transition to the first body paragraph.**

Figure 4.4 Introduction Strategies

Kathryn then invited her students to sit in small groups while they wrote and the mentors circulated about the room, providing occasional assistance such as reading paragraphs of students who requested them to do so. While some of the students did arrange themselves into small groups, many of them worked independently. The atmosphere in the classroom, however, was not conducive to sustained concentration. Most of the students engaged in conversation, many banged or tapped on the tables, some were out of their seats or throwing bits of paper, and others were seated but wholly inattentive to the task at hand, one student even working on a puzzle. Kathryn moved about the room, occasionally picking up a student's notebook and offering guidance, at one point writing a starter sentence for a student. I observed that when she turned her attention—and her

body posture—toward an individual student, new behavior problems would erupt elsewhere in the classroom.

In our post-observation reflection session, Kathryn was eager for feedback on how she could structure a writer's workshop. She felt that most of her instructional density would come in the form of conversations with individual students as she did short, informal evaluations of their work. For example, if a student had used a particular literary device, she would be able to notice it and call a student's attention to it by naming it. She felt it important her students were able to distinguish between similes and metaphors, particularly in making the vivid comparisons that are characteristic of the descriptive writing genre. If she were better able to attend to their writing during the workshop the reinforcement would serve a dual purpose. In this sense, she demonstrated understanding that instructional density is layering multiple purposes into single activities. She explained that "We've been doing descriptive writing so they were describing a situation and so, um, being intentional with asking them 'Okay, well how could we do a comparison here? Do you remember what a comparison using like or as? Oh yeah! That's a simile! Do you remember what the one that doesn't use like or as? Oh that's a metaphor!' So just making them like recall those words and information and then helping them to write one" (Personal Communication, 11-10-15). Based on her desire to have these conversations with students, I geared my coaching toward helping her plan more thoughtfully so that the classroom environment allowed for them.

I made a number of suggestions, the first being a consideration of grouping. I explained that, in my experience, it was more appropriate to group students in the brainstorming phase of the writing process so that they could help one another generate ideas. Doing so might lend more productivity to their independent writing time, as they would have a working set of ideas from which to draw. When I asked Kathryn how she determined who would work together, she explained that students were grouped according to the similarities in their topics. She acknowledged that the writing process, and the time she allotted students, had been unproductive. In a previous class, the students had spent over an hour brainstorming ideas (Personal Communication, 11-10-15). I also wanted to honor her instinct to have students share their writing with one another. I suggested that she structure her lesson plan to allow for time to share and that it should also have a structure the students could easily follow, for example, students could re-visit the introduction strategies presented at the beginning of the lesson.

An additional suggestion had to do with being more explicit about her expectations for the writing workshop. When I began observing this lesson, it was apparent she had not established such expectations. Therefore, I suggested she display visually some clear norms for students to follow while working independently. This would allow her to accomplish her own aims: creating an environment that would be conducive to working with students individually and tailoring her instruction to their level of writing skill.

Grouping with a purpose. In a later observation, it was evident that Kathryn had thought through the purposes and functions of group work in planning that

day's lesson. The students had finished reading a fiction selection and were preparing to complete a study guide that would ask them to provide textual evidence of what they had read. As they began their work, she told them, "You may ask ME questions" (Field Notes, 11-18-15). When I asked her explain her thinking about this, she stated "Well that one I was just trying to make them be a little bit more independent because we really did a lot of modeled and shared and guided throughout the rest of that, where I was letting them work with each other and stuff. So I wanted them to not work with their peers because many of them just pull information from their peers" (Personal Communication, 11-18-15). Kathryn's comments about this facet of planning showed her understanding of the gradual release of responsibility model (Pearson & Gallagher, 1983) that shifts responsibility for learning from the teacher to the student over time. Her instinct to assure all students were gaining proficiency with certain skills demonstrated her desire to treat them as individual learners, something an experienced teacher does reflexively. She went on to explain that if she arranged independent work time, she could better assess who was still struggling. For example, during this lesson a particular student was not able to find a direct quotation to support her response. Kathryn was able to work with her individually to assess the nature of her misunderstanding and provide a tailored intervention.

In working with Kathryn during our coaching sessions, I found other evidence of her willingness to adapt her lesson plans to the needs of individual students as well as whole classes. During one observation, the students were engaged with a paired reading activity. One was a historical piece on the evolution

of candy and sweets in America while the other was a non-fiction text describing the detrimental effects of sugar on the human body. As an after-reading activity, her original plan had been to have the students do some writing: “So they had to write about how ideas have changed and the other one was pretending you were writing an article for your school newspaper and talk about the role of sugar in our lives... that one was way too complex for my group” (Personal Communication, 10-27-15). She modified the activity by providing a graphic organizer (see Appendix I) that she had not for a previous class. She explained that they needed an additional step before they could conceptualize the writing task.

Learning to layer. Kathryn also demonstrated thoughtful planning in other ways, specifically as they apply to instructional density. When I asked her about her goals for that lesson, she readily shared a number of goals related to the skills students would practice. One was identifying main ideas and their supporting details, something they had been focusing on in the first quarter of the school year. Another was the skill of summarizing a text, though at this point in the school year the designated curriculum indicated a shift to more sophisticated forms of writing, i.e. a newspaper article. She had also emphasized the vocabulary set of the two articles in the form of note-taking and a verbal review, and had reviewed the use of context clues to determine word meanings.

Kathryn used two primary instructional resources for her sections of 21st Century Reading. One was an online program, the license for which had been purchased by the school district. The program provided students reading materials and enrichment activities according to students’ individual reading lexile levels.

Over the course of a week, students logged into this program and read their articles and completed the corresponding activities, some of which required them to write short responses. Her other primary resource was a monthly scholastic magazine subscription that contained a variety of fiction and non-fiction pieces. Each issue contained bold, appealing images, easily identifiable text features, suggestions for writing prompts, colorful insets and sidebars, and short engaging activities at the end of each selection. In general, Kathryn expressed a more positive disposition of the latter, citing that its contents were of high interest to students. She did report, however, the complications of planning around the use of the monthly magazine when issues didn't arrive to the building on time: "It does create situations where it's hard to plan. This one, this one's October so our November magazine was late... And so [Darlene] and I were like, okay, do we pull other materials or do we do something else now because she was planning on teaching something from the November magazine but it's not here yet?" (Personal Communication, 10-27-15). This also presented a challenge to aligning the monthly magazine with how the district mapped out the curriculum per quarter, something Kathryn accounted for as she created monthly and weekly plans.

We discussed at length her use of this resource, and some specific ways it could be a tool for instructional density. First and foremost, since it contained fiction pieces whereas the other online resource did not, she could use it to bring some balance to her curriculum. She felt that it was unfair for the struggling readers in her class to spend disproportionate class time on non-fiction texts, and that an increasing emphasis on the skill of finding text-based evidence (using specific

information from the text to support responses) was tiresome for students. She reported that “the reading curriculum is even set up to be focused on non-fiction, like we’re not supposed to teach novels in the reading class” (Personal Communication, 10-27-15). She did, however, feel comfortable with the fact that she did not read novels with her students since they would be doing so in their language arts classes on alternating days. Nonetheless, she was pleased that the monthly magazine contained short fiction pieces that the students were eager to read. I encouraged her to find ways to reinforce other skills in her curriculum using the magazines, especially where it could provide a contrast to non-fiction texts. Also, the magazine consistently highlighted many different text features such as captions, section headings, and the like. Text features can help struggling readers “chunk” a text into more manageable sections, and Kathryn could layer this into her instruction along with the actual contents of the pieces. This could be accomplished without receiving an advance copy of the magazine, which would allow her to adapt if an issue arrived late. I did realize during this conversation, however, that not having familiarity with curricular materials might be a detriment to enacting instructional density. In our final interview, Kathryn shared that what she was able to plan came largely from experience, “like when you are teaching a novel for the first time you just are trying to get through it versus like this year being the second time I taught novels for this like, my teaching was much better because I didn’t have to think about, like my growing goes with the kids, like I wasn’t just worried about comprehension. We could go deeper because I was more familiar with it” (Personal Communication, 10-27-15).

Dialogic enactment. In many of my observations of Kathryn's classroom practice, I noted that she used, frequently and naturally in context, high-level vocabulary during the course of her teaching. For example, she told a student "Thank you for expounding on that!" (Field Notes, 11-18-15). When we discussed this style of teaching, Kathryn explained her thinking as follows:

But I agree I feel like they need to hear those words and so I don't hold back at all. I use large words all the time, in fact we did a DIY vocab. thing the other day and I said something was *deteriorating*, and then the kid was like, "Oh, can I use that as a vocab. word?" And I was like, sure! It wasn't from our story but they used it as one of the words I said was the vocab. word (Personal Communication, 11-18-15).

It was clear that Kathryn had a sound understanding behind her use of high-level vocabulary words. In fact, in a later conversation she revealed that her strength with vocabulary has strong personal origins and that because she herself enjoys studying vocabulary, focuses more on that in her teaching. Nonetheless, it was a habit of mind that served her purposes, as incidences of students "picking up" and using her vocabulary in their work reinforced the practice. From this point, I geared my coaching toward helping her also use content language more frequently and intentionally while talking to students. I had a hunch that this would be an easy task for her since she had already developed that habit with other vocabulary. I observed that she did have the tendency to connect what students said back to her content. In an early observation, a student shared that a story's character was "embarrassed and humbled" and Kathryn replied, "Mmmm... those are great adjectives!" This natural propensity to recast student comments or questions with the language of the discipline occurred often, however, I wanted to highlight some instances where it did not. For example, later in the lesson she asked the same

student for a word that was the opposite of “humble.” During our post-observation session, I suggested she refer to this as an *antonym* in addition to calling it an *opposite*.

Incorporating grammar. During this particular lesson, Kathryn was using instructional density by displaying a list of adjectives on the board while students listened to an audio recording of a play from the literature anthology. She explained that she was connecting an initial grammar review to the plot of the play, specifically asking the students to assign adjectives to describe individual character traits. In this way, she was adding a layer of complexity to her instruction. As the audio recording came to an end, Kathryn announced “The End!” and invited students to shout out adjectives that described the main character in the scene. At times she even pressed students to say more descriptive words, i.e. happy vs. joyful. I provided the following suggestions in our post-observation discussion:

1. Use the term *resolution* to refer to the end of the story. This connotes a resolution of the story’s conflict and refers students back to the arc of the plot diagram.
2. Keep a small space of your whiteboard free so that you can visually display discussion items while teaching, for example, you could have drawn a Venn diagram when you asked students to compare and contrast two of the characters.
3. When you push a student to offer a more descriptive adjective, use terms like *connotation* and *denotation*, for example, happy and joyful are *synonyms* but have different connotations.
4. Instead of referring to your list of adjectives as “words that describe personalities,” refer to the list as “character traits.”

Talking the talk. By my next observation, it was evident Kathryn was becoming more adept at the skill of using content terminology. In fact, her

conversation with students and the way she elicited information was reminiscent of the expert teachers in the original article about instructional density (Wharton-McDonald, Pressley, & Mistretta-Hampston, 1998). In this lesson, she was preparing students to read a new non-fiction piece about the sinking of the *Titanic*. Within this short activity, Kathryn was repeatedly observed to tap student knowledge in a variety of ways. She began by giving each student a vocabulary handout and a highlighter, and she worked her way down the list of words. For more challenging words such as *claustrophobic*, she invited students to a choral recitation, which reinforced they would use them with phonetic accuracy. She also instructed students to highlight key words within each definition, modeling the task for them under the document camera and using the phrase “key word”. She often referred to the various “prefixes” and “suffixes” of individual words, helping them form understanding through word knowledge.

About halfway down the list, she asked: “Any predictions what the article ‘Attack at Sea’ might be about?” In this way, she was connecting vocabulary to the text and using to help students make predictions about the text, something that would enhance comprehension as they started to read. I also observed that when she called upon a student to speak, she said, “Would you read the definition nice and loud?” which encouraged students to speak so that everyone could hear and was a subtle connection to the curriculum’s speaking standards. She made frequent associations between the words and the contents of the stories, past and present. For example, she asked “What is a past vocabulary word that means ‘opulent’?” and followed up with “What else could be described as opulent in this story?” For some

words, she hinted at multiple meanings: “Which definition of the word ‘hull’ do you think we’re gonna use in this story?” I also observed that she repeated individual words often, at times asking students to connect the new vocabulary to their own experience: “Raise your hand if you’re a clever or *inventive* person” (Field Notes, 12-2-15). Kathryn concluded this lesson by instructing students to put an asterisk next to 4 of the vocabulary words they would be responsible for learning as they did subsequent activities related to the story. I observed only a couple instances where Kathryn did not use her content terminology and in our post-observation session I pointed these out to her.

Challenges. Kathryn agreed that in certain classes, it was more challenging to enact instructional density in verbal exchanges with students. She felt that, especially in her co-taught language arts class in which she had several students with learning disabilities, their ability to concentrate for long periods of time affected what she could do. In addition, she felt that when she interrupted her lesson to probe students further or explore a mini-lesson, it derailed instruction and was difficult to get the class back on track.

Content knowledge. In terms of having the necessary content knowledge to enact instructional density into her practice, Kathryn expressed confidence. But she also confided that she was so comfortable with the curriculum that felt the material for 7th grade was “boring” (Interview #2, 5-12-16). She thought back to her year spent teaching British Literature and seemed to long for the challenge inherent in that material. She also expressed that despite how comfortable she felt with the content, she would still like to grow in the area of lesson planning. She wanted more

time with certain reading materials so that she could embed opportunities for richer discussion or to help students make connections across the curriculum. This would include being able to anticipate student responses and act accordingly. And like the other participants, Kathryn lamented about neglecting certain aspects of her assigned curriculum. She stated that “I focus really hard on a couple different areas and then there are a couple that I really missed, so becoming more balanced using it [instructional density] all the time...” (Interview #2, 5-12-16).

As a novice, Kathryn was still developing a sense of how to organize and present her curriculum to a variety of learners. In several of our conversations, she described the trials and errors of finding what worked for different classes and even different students. Toward the end of the study, she reported experimenting with “doing a lot more visual things in class” (Interview #2, 5-12-16), even color coding certain materials to provide comprehensible input to her lowest readers. I saw first-hand Kathryn’s use of visuals during one of my later observations. At the beginning of the year, she noticed that her struggling readers had difficulty with inferential thinking. This was especially true when it came to inferring the meaning of new vocabulary, a skill that significantly complicated their understanding of texts. She experimented with showing a National Geographic “Picture of the Day” (<http://photography.nationalgeographic.com/photography/photo-of-the-day>) and asking students to make inferences and predictions about the image. She described the scaffolding she used, first conducting the activity as a class and eliciting student responses that were shared with the whole group, then transitioning to a more independent style wherein students would generate 2 inferences and 2 predictions

before sharing them with the larger group. By the time I observed this practice, students were making 3 inferences and 3 predictions, some students even more, in their reading journals. This strategy was so successful that eventually Kathryn was able to easily swap the photograph for a paragraph of text. I found it remarkable that Kathryn had such a sound sense of pedagogical content knowledge. In our coaching session, I encouraged her to continue using this knowledge in her practice from year to year. In terms of instructional density, I told her to consider occasionally using photographs that directly related to a given text so that they were more directly related to specific skills she was teaching.

Collaborative discourse. Throughout the inquiry and in our discussions following the observations, Kathryn was a willing participant and eagerly opened up about her practice. I found her to be exceptionally thoughtful when it came to talking about instructional density and she was earnest about wanting to enact it in her practice. She was also open to the feedback I offered, which made our conversations productive. In our final interview, Kathryn contrasted the feedback she had received during formal evaluations and “coaching visits” by the administration to the work we had done together. She appreciated that the coaching I provided was specific and offered more tangible benefits. She explained that “most of the feedback we get like in coaching visits is all like, ‘Good job! You’re awesome!’ and I’m like, ‘Okay great that means nothing to me.’ And so, um, feedback of like well, ‘Maybe you could have done this or maybe you could have said this’ I feel like really gave me the opportunity to change and grow” (Interview #2, 5-12-16). She corroborated this statement by telling me that the discussions were especially

useful when she could carry what she had learned into a subsequent section of the same class. At the same time, she felt that she was only “scratching the surface” of what she had to learn about instructional density (Interview #2, 5-12-16) but expressed enthusiasm about enacting it in her third year with the same curriculum. She also cited the value of having an experienced teacher in the same content area offer critique of her teaching, as opposed to how evaluation was traditionally conducted within the school site—an administrator from a different background who had not been in the classroom for a significant period of time.

Kathryn related our collaborative discussions to her deeply held principles of vertical curriculum alignment. She and her 7th grade colleagues had spent considerable time working together to share strategies, activities, and other resources and this was key to easing her tendency to feel overwhelmed by the curriculum. She shared that even though she and her colleagues had different sections to teach, they were able to find common resources and discuss how they could be modified to suit one another’s purposes. The collaborative exchanges that occurred during the course of the present inquiry she cited as useful in opening access to 8th grade reading and language arts classrooms. Kathryn observed her 8th grade colleagues in the course of the inquiry and appreciated the opportunity to see what was happening. She told me that “Some of the reason we have kind of a good collaboration between 7th and 8th has been because of this and I think there’s some of like [Shelley’s] frustration with 6th to 7th and how there’s zero talking between those two grade levels” (Interview #2, 5-12-16).

Darlene

Planning enactment. Before the study began, Darlene described to me her approaches to lesson planning. Generally speaking, she had a good sense of the relationship between her content and materials she used to teach the content. She explained how a skill or set of skills was the starting point and that she then chose appropriate resources—mostly in the form of non-fiction articles, to support them. Because she taught only reading classes and not language arts classes, her planning emphasis consisted of reading and not writing skills, though she did incorporate some writing occasionally. Darlene had use of two primary resources provided by the district. The first was a monthly magazine scholastic magazine subscription that she shared with Kathryn, which contained a variety of pieces that she felt were of high interest to her students. The second was an online, leveled reading program that her 21st Century Reading students were required to use on a twice-weekly basis. Though this program adjusted itself to an individual student's reading lexile level, the classroom teachers still exercised control in selecting which articles students had access to. For Darlene, this meant hand-selecting pieces that related in some way to the sequence of skills laid out by the curriculum map.

When I asked about her goals for students pertaining to comprehension, she told me that it was most important for them to discern a main idea and its supporting details. It was apparent that Darlene conceptualized her lesson planning along these lines. She followed a basic formula which consisted of reading a non-fiction piece, locating the main idea and determining textual evidence that supported it, learning of new vocabulary, and other skills she felt were appropriate

to the piece. For example, in one of my early observations she had prepped students for a play by teaching them about characterization before they read. But Darlene had a number of concerns about her curriculum, which she expressed in our initial interview and frequently throughout the course of our work together. She had the following concerns about: (1) the sheer scope and magnitude of the curriculum precluded her from covering skills adequately, (2) pervasive uncertainty about how much to focus on each skill, and (3) the unrealistic and unclear expectations of the curriculum map. In sum, these concerns left her with a feeling that she was “never doing the right thing” (Interview #1, 10-26-15).

Teaching reading. In working with each participant, it was important to gather as much information as possible about struggles with the curriculum so that my coaching on instructional density could be most useful. Besides feeling uneasy about how to manage her curriculum over the span of a school year, Darlene felt “completely unprepared to do reading” (Interview #1, 10-26-15). She had not received explicit, ongoing instruction in the teaching of reading strategies for struggling readers, and much of the exposure she had to breaking down and analyzing literature came from her own experience as an English student. Nor had the lesson planning she practiced during teacher training prepared her for the real-world demands of a variety of different classes. She expressed a desire to remediate these deficits in her knowledge, but noted that, ironically, the school district offered a free Masters program in reading through a local university but that in order to qualify one had to teach for a minimum of three years: “But I have to do it poorly for 3 years before I can do that? Like I have to do a bad job before I can learn how to do

my job right. I am completely unprepared to do reading,” (Interview #1, 10-26-15). Finally, Darlene was frustrated at being left to navigate the vast terrain of uncertainty largely on her own. She often cited the potential benefit of having access to experienced colleagues. At the time our work together began, she had not had the opportunity to observe or be observed by any of her closest colleagues who taught in the same content area.

I focused my coaching work on helping Darlene expand her understanding of instructional density. I wanted her to conceive it as not only a way to loop back through her content and help students anticipate new content, but as a way to connect the elements of the curriculum. In my first observation, there was evidence of her approach to planning and her emphasis on textual evidence and vocabulary instruction. After a period of silent reading in which students had time to read a book of their choice (most of them novels), students received a vocabulary sheet that had a list of definitions for the story they would be reading the following class period. She read through it with them, stopping briefly to discuss each word. The next activity was a quiz, one that asked them to find textual evidence to support the main idea of something they had read previously. Her plan was for students to return to the vocabulary worksheet after completing the quiz. Darlene’s plan to help students preview the vocabulary was wise and demonstrated her belief that multiple exposures to new words would help them “stick.” My impression of the first observation, however, was that Darlene moved students through elements of the lesson plan in a somewhat mechanical fashion, treating them as distinct elements with little connection (Field Notes, 10-28-15). In our first coaching session,

I first elicited her understanding of instructional density, which she described as “it would be sort of layering so not just teaching vocabulary, maybe when I introduce a lesson... I would, like a historical background to a story be included in that” (Personal Communication, 10-28-15). She did understand that instructional density involved layering, and it was evident that she used stories for the purposes of teaching several skills at once. The challenge was pushing her to think about instructional density as a way to inter-connect these elements.

Darlene explained that after introducing the vocabulary, she planned on doing a lesson about characterization to prepare students to analyze the relationship between Ichabod Crane and Brom Bones in *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow*. I encouraged her to incorporate the new vocabulary list (see Appendix J) to achieve this purpose. For example, she could use the characters in a story they had read previously to generate characterizations, then in a later lesson compare and contrast traits to those characters in *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow*. I also recommended using the vocabulary words, particularly the adjectives, to ask questions about certain character traits. During the same conversation, Darlene questioned whether instructional density could be achieved with any literary element, and my response was positive. I offered her a number of examples of how different aspects of a lesson could be layered and interconnected. She had her own examples, one being her approach to teaching writing. Even though her curriculum didn’t designate formally teaching the writing process, when students were assigned short written responses, she required the following:

Their essay questions just tell them to give a short written response. But we always put not necessarily the conventions but like the

requirements for a good written response. Like, you have to start with an intro sentence. You have to include text evidence from the story. You have to have a page number for reference cuz that's something they're also going to have to use in language arts. So I try to include that stuff as well for like... I still have my requirements just because it should be across the board" (Personal Communication, 10-28-15).

Learning to layer. As time went on, Darlene had intensified her expectation about the written responses, telling me that "If [they] don't have a capital letter starting their response, I won't even grade it. I'll give you a zero and I'll tell you to resubmit it" (Personal Communication, 12-1-15). I praised Darlene for the high expectations she held, especially when they derived from what she knew was best for students. It was not only indicative of the mindset necessary to enact instructional density in practice, but I also believed it would help Darlene overcome the anxiety she expressed about "never doing the right thing" (Interview #1, 10-26-15). I verbally praised her instinct to fold in the mechanical aspects of writing, even when the pre-fabricated curriculum materials had no such focus. In fact, the artifacts I collected for this lesson heavily emphasized the skill of finding text evidence. One of the worksheets (see Figure 4.5) consisted of 7 multiple-choice items, 6 of which included the term "text evidence" stated directly in the question (see Appendix J).

B. Which quote provides the best text evidence to support the topic sentence you chose in part A?

- Ⓐ When Mr. Van Ripper asks Ichabod why he wouldn't go to a party at the Van Tassels', Ichabod replies, "Well, Brom Bones will be there. He said if he caught me near Katrina, he'd flatten me like a pancake." (p. 13)
- Ⓑ Katrina tells Ichabod, "That must be Brom Bones, come to take me riding. His black horse Daredevil is the finest in the valley!" (p. 13)
- Ⓒ Describing Brom, SD2 says, "Just then, a man—so broad-shouldered that he must turn sideways to fit through the door frame—struts into the room." (p. 13)

C. Which of the following best explains why the text evidence you chose in question B is relevant?

- Ⓐ It implies that Brom and Ichabod are both in love with Katrina.
- Ⓑ It portrays Brom Bones as a bully who uses threats to get his way.
- Ⓒ It shows that Brom has a sense of humor.

Figure 4.5 The Legend of Sleepy Hollow Text Evidence Worksheet

The final question task of the worksheet was in the form of a written response in which students were to write about the relationship between Ichabod Crane and Brom Bones and in the paragraph, cite at least one piece of text evidence. Darlene had given several lessons on the skill of citing text evidence, both in previous class sessions as well as during this observation. She introduced the lesson by reviewing the skill (see Figure 4.6).

SCHOLASTIC
SCOPE

Core Skills Workout
REFERENCE: Using Text Evidence

Name: _____ Date: _____

How to Use Text Evidence

When you write about something you have read, you need to use **text evidence**—that is, details from the text—to support the points you are making. You can use text evidence in the form of a **direct quotation** (the author's exact words) or a **paraphrase** (a restatement of what the author wrote). You also need to explain **WHY** that text evidence is **relevant**.

what does it mean to restate something?

what does "relevant" mean?

Here are some tips for using text evidence:

<p>1. Quote or paraphrase.</p> <p>When using a direct quote, copy down the exact words from a sentence. Surround a direct quotation with quotation marks.</p> <p><i>must have " " around it</i></p> <p>To paraphrase is to put something written or spoken by someone else into your own words. You don't change the meaning of what the other person wrote or said, just the wording. A paraphrase is <u>not surrounded by quotation marks</u>.</p>	<p>2. Make it clear where your evidence comes from.</p> <p>Identify who wrote or said what you are quoting or paraphrasing. This is called "citing your source." Include a page number.</p> <p>Words to help you:</p> <p><i>according to (the author), (the author) claims, suggests, states, writes, reports, describes, implies, explains, argues, declares, observes, notes, reveals, remarks</i></p>	<p>3. Explain why your text evidence is relevant.</p> <p>Include a sentence that makes it clear how the text evidence supports your idea. Reread the information you quoted or paraphrased and ask yourself, "So what?"</p> <p>Words to help you:</p> <p><i>(the author) says this because, this proves that, this exemplifies how, this confirms, demonstrates, describes, explains, illustrates, implies, suggests</i></p>
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Figure 4.6 How to Use Text Evidence

It was during this observation that I began thinking about the relationship between prescribed curriculum of this kind and the enactment of instructional density. Some of the materials seemed lopsided and heavily skewed toward the finding of text evidence to support claims. Even though this resource was provided

by the district, and provided new teachers a lifeline in terms of planning, using it exclusively would certainly preclude a large swath of material being covered. Admittedly, Darlene relied on these materials because they “took some of the work out of planning” (Interview #1, 10-26-15). It became clear that she and the other novice participants might need some nudging to see these materials more proportionally to the larger scope of their work.

Venturing out. By the next observation, I was pleased to see that Darlene had created her own study guide to accompany the next phase of the work with *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow*. She explained that she wanted to also discuss other literary elements such as foreshadowing and certain literary devices (Personal Communication, 11-12-15) and that she combined some of the questions in the packaged curriculum with her own. Students worked in small groups to generate their responses and then each group took turns presenting their findings to the larger class. During our post-observation discussion session I suggested she layer in the speaking standards in her curriculum document. Specifically, I told her that a simple statement such as, “Remember our speaking standard is to speak clearly and loudly enough so everyone can hear you” (Personal Communication, 11-12-15). As long as students are presenting information, they can practice the skills associated with public speaking.

By the time I had conducted a few observations, Darlene was able to better articulate how she was using instructional density to plan her lessons. A reading lesson about a ship, the *Lusitania* yielded a number of skills: the teaching of narrative non-fiction and contrasting that with other non-fiction, the historical

context of World War I, the tone and mood created by the author, how the author tried to convey empathy in the story, new vocabulary and the use of new vocabulary in different contexts, making inferences about text, and writing a subjective summary. The latter skill was a new one, and Darlene provided some scaffolding by having students identify items they would include in an objective summary. In addition to all of these skills, she even inserted a mini-lesson on text features, paying particular attention to the captions underneath some of the photographs that accompanied the article. While I was pleased to see that Darlene was able to layer in so many different skills, I did not attribute this solely to her use of instructional density. As a year progresses, and as students are exposed to more and more content of a particular course, they should naturally be presented a more sophisticated rendering of the curriculum as they master increasingly difficult skills and concepts.

I also recognized that Darlene was perhaps becoming more comfortable with using instructional density as an anticipatory tool. She regularly supplemented her lessons with short videos, which she described as key to generating student interest about a topic.

Dialogic enactment. Some of my coaching work with Darlene involved helping her bring content to life in conversations with students. In terms of using the language of her discipline, Darlene needed less guidance than other participants. She had a knack for using precise terminology, both intentionally and repetitively. In one of my observations, she was teaching students how to paraphrase direct quotations. She used those terms multiple times as she taught her way through the

lesson (Field Notes, 5-5-16). She verbally clarified directions using appropriate terms and tended to name things very specifically, even classroom materials. This itself is evidence of instructional density. Teachers who know how to saturate their spoken words with content terminology help students acclimate and familiarize with it on an ongoing basis. An area of growth for Darlene, however, was in eliciting student questions. This aspect of dialogic exchange enters students into conversations about content. It is also a diagnostic tool for teachers. Asking students questions probes their understanding of content so that the teacher, and the ensuing conversation, become bridges to better understanding. This was a challenge for Darlene due to several factors. As a newer teacher, she felt she lacked the classroom management skills that would allow her to stop instruction to have dialogue with students. Indeed, in my observations of her teaching there was little room for such interaction. I also witnessed first-hand the struggles she encountered disciplining students. Often her classes were very unruly, making it difficult to accomplish tasks in a smooth fashion. In one instance, the classroom erupted into chaos once it was time for students to settle down and work independently. I observed numerous incidences of students shouting across tables to one another, banging on the tables, tipping back in their chairs, and badgering her to use the restroom. She confided that this was her “least manageable class” (Personal Communication, 11-12-15) and that only 6 of the 31 students were able to meet minimum expectations such as reading the required text. This severely limited the particular activities she could execute as well as the pace at which she could present materials. When I observed this section, she explained:

“I wanted to go over all the questions because I knew they would have problems with it, like we were supposed to go over the questions as a class and then have them actually write their paragraph by themselves. But they can’t do it. They just can’t get through it. I don’t even do that much instruction. I hardly ever do, like I had them take notes once for maybe like, I mean like slides, and we talked about it, 20 minutes. And it was like the worst 20 minutes of my life. They just get so ansty, and they can’t sit still, and they can’t be quiet. It’s, it’s so hard to get them to do anything” (Personal Communication, 11-12-15).

Barriers to instructional density. Darlene’s frustration was palpable and during some of our sessions I sensed that talking about instructional density was secondary to her other, more pressing needs. I did suggest that she schedule a whole-group restroom break in the middle of the block. She thought that this would cause more problems, as escorting a large, unruly group of students into the hallway would cause a disruption to the other classrooms. I suggested she ask the administration for support, but she was reluctant and thought it best to handle the situation on her own. By the end of the period of study, Darlene acknowledged that in certain classes, she would have to attend to fragile attention spans in order to enact instructional density. I thought that this was a valuable insight for her and though she wasn’t at the point of having solved the problem, she recognized it as one.

Another challenge Darlene and I discussed was incorporating more vocabulary into her classroom talk. This was a reasonable demand when it came to lessons designed around the monthly scholastic magazine subscription. When she planned lessons from this text, all of the students moved through at the same pace and from the same working list of words. While she was teaching, I encouraged her to use these words as much as possible. In one instance, she asked students to tell

her what the word *bitterness* meant. They offered a couple of options but none that were precise enough to encapsulate the denotation or connotation of that word. In our coaching session, I suggested that as she elicits words, she put them on the whiteboard and label them as synonyms. I also suggested she label the words with the part of speech. Darlene was enthusiastic about this idea but reminded me that when students read passages from the district-provided online program, students were not working with shared lists of words, making it difficult to use them during teaching.

Interrupting the flow. On another occasion, Darlene and I discussed the inherent complications reading teachers face in deciding how or when to interrupt the reading of a text. When reading a particular text, it is difficult to know when or how often to pause the reading to ask questions or make predictions or clarifications. During my last observation, Darlene had been reading a non-fiction piece and paused to ask the students what the word *bitterness* meant. One student offered *resentment*, another *anger*, and a third *salty*. In our coaching session, I wanted to help Darlene see the opportunity for learning these kinds of student responses presented. The student who offered *salty* was actually offering a slang term that young people use to describe someone who is mouthy or disrespectful. This was an opportunity for Darlene to recast the term as slang, a term relevant to teaching word knowledge, as well as a mini-lesson on connotations as well as parts of speech. I suggested she contrast the words *bitterness* and *salty*, the former being a noun with a suffix and the latter being an adjective and then invite the student to re-fashion one of them to match the other. By doing so she could even take the

opportunity to mention parallel structure in writing by creating a list of the words in a sentence. I also suggested she create visual “word families” on the white board while she was discussing with students.

Later in the lesson, and as Darlene continued to read aloud a section of the text, I noticed that she paused, but did not stop, on the word *flourish*. She pronounced this word with some emphasis but then continued reading. When we discussed how she decided what to stop for, she agreed that sometimes forward momentum was better than a disjointed reading experience but that emphasizing a word with the volume of her voice might subtly suggest to students a word worth paying attention to. I offered two additional coaching items for this observation.

Students began this class by practicing identifying a direct quotation on a worksheet that contained a short reading passage. While students worked, Darlene remained at the front of the room, keeping her attention on the students. I suggested that she always circulate the room while students were working so that she could check on individual students. This kind of proximal control also cuts down on disruptive behaviors and for some students, makes them feel more comfortable about asking for help. I explained that if she was closer to students, she could initiate more of the conversations that are critical to being instructionally dense (Personal Communication, 5-5-16).

Finally, I noted that when she first began reading aloud, a handful of students had a strong reaction to a detail in the text. One student even called out, “Dang!” (Field Notes, 5-5-16) and laughed aloud. I asked her if she had considered stopping to ask why that student responded the way he did. She had not considered doing so,

and I explained that this would be an opportunity to help the student connect his reaction to a detail from the text. This would serve the dual purpose of making sure the rest of the students had the chance to understand and enjoy that bit of detail. Much of my coaching work with Darlene consisted of pointing out these opportunities to her. Student remarks that are seemingly routine and commonplace, when conceptualized according to an instructionally dense mindset, are actually springboards for enriching conversations about content. In this case, she could have easily transitioned into asking the student why he made such an *interjection*, then prompt him to push further and make an *inference*.

Classroom management issues. In keeping with my aim to individualize my coaching to the needs of each participant, I wanted to position the dialogic aspects of instructional density as a tool to ameliorate some of Darlene's classroom management issues. In many of our conversations, I pointed out ways she could incorporate behavioral expectations into the routine dialogue of teaching. I encouraged her to, whenever possible, weave in behavioral norms and expectations along with other kinds of verbal direction. For example, when students are transitioning from one activity to another, use the words "quietly" and "quickly" to communicate how students should behave. This would also necessitate occasional, specific praise for students who met the expectations.

By the end of the study, Darlene felt she had improved her moment-by-moment interactions with students. She noted specifically that, "it helps once you've done the lesson once" (Interview #2, 5-18-16). She also felt that it helped her to anticipate what types of questions might be asked, something she was learning to do

because of our coaching work together. Darlene and I discussed a marked contrast between some of her classes. She explained this difference as follows:

...the higher kids just ask better questions. They ask, they're more inquisitive, they... I mean they can connect different topics and, um, I feel bad for the lower kids because that is something they miss out on. They don't have that dialogue with their peers or with me, and unfortunately you know I can, I can field those questions on the fly. You know I think I'm good at that but what I'm not good at is anticipating what questions the higher kids would ask and working those into the lessons for the lower kids so they still get the same experience (Interview #2, 5-18-16).

We discussed this observation at length, and I encouraged Darlene to use this type of questioning to inform her discussions in other classes. Of course, this would not always be possible depending on the order of the schedule, however, with thoughtful planning and record keeping, it could enrich her classroom dialogue in future class sessions.

Content knowledge. Like the other novice participants, Darlene expressed a sufficient level of comfort with her content to be able to be more instructionally dense. She easily rotated the reading skills from her curriculum into daily lessons, though initially this required a shift away from the analysis of literature to which she was accustomed. She felt that she was better able to break down an activity “into a bunch of little things” (Interview #2, 5-18-16), which indicated to me she had developed a mindset toward instructional density. She had learned to question herself when approaching a given lesson regarding ways to provide students a richer experience.

In terms of moving forward with instructional density, Darlene was certain she would continue to develop. However, she did share some reservations. At the

time of our final interview, the administration had begun re-visioning staffing configurations for the following school year, and rumors abounded regarding which teacher would be placed at which grade level and with which course load. Darlene had already been privy to some of these conversations and worried that just as she was familiarizing with her content, would be moved into different sections. If she were asked to teach language arts, for example, she would need a “serious refresher” (Interview #2, 5-18-16) on teaching grammar. This was an area in which she had no formal training beyond the very basics of her own high school English classes. She also expressed uncertainty about how such a change would impact her teaching in general: “Since I’ve done reading for two years I would probably be using my reading skills in my language arts classes because that’s the only basis I have for teaching, um, and I think those, the skills that I have at least so far would have to be worked in... And that’s one of the things I was worried about too. Will I have to teach language arts now? I’m so used to teaching non-fiction texts now, so I’d be nervous to start over” (Interview #2, 5-18-16).

Collaborative discourse. Darlene found a great deal of value through our discussions about instructional density as well as other topics about practice that came up during the course of study. She expressed the same sentiment about instructional density that every other participant did, and that it was something she did more intentionally since learning about it. She explained it as follows: “Through our discussions I’ve learned that it’s something that I do a lot of the time anyway and it’s something that if you’re teaching the way you should be, you’re probably working it in already and maybe it just didn’t have a name before. So a lot of the

practices I was doing before we started having our discussions, just, I don't know, became clearer and more intentional (Interview #2, 5-18-16). She delineated the relationship between the observations and discussions as well, and told me that intentionality with instructional density was partially due to knowing I was coming in to observe for it. She felt that the "discussion was the most meaningful part for me" (Interview #2, 5-18-16), however, because it was helpful to view her practice through the lens of an outsider. In particular, she cited times when she thought a lesson had not gone well, and the class had been difficult to manage. In those cases, she appreciated having an outsider point out what had gone well, and what students got out of the lesson. She also felt strongly that not having those observations in her first year was a setback. She described feeling "completely lost" (Interview #2, 5-18-16), especially when it came to establishing procedures and setting the tone for the classroom. Darlene's comment about the lack of guidance and support she received during her first year was a theme that emerged for all 3 of the novice participants, and one that will be discussed at length in the following chapter.

Shelley

Planning enactment. In our first interview, Shelley described to me her experiences with the curriculum. Shelley taught various sections of language arts that included regular, Honors, and co-taught with a special education teacher. Unlike the novice participants who also taught reading classes in addition to language arts, Shelley worked with the same curriculum document for all of her sections. She described it as "a nice guide" (Interview #1, 11-2-15) but that it would be easy for someone to get overwhelmed by its concurrent specificity and vagueness. She also

acknowledged that for her two mentees, it would be too vague and broad to be helpful. She did indicate that if the curriculum was paced and broken into more manageable segments, it was because she and the other members of her 7th grade content team had spent time voluntarily the summer prior better organizing it into sections that made the most sense for them as a team. Together they decided on the most logical chunking of the different elements by quarter, which included reading strategies, writing genres, and grammar.

When I asked Shelley about how she wrote daily and long-range plans, her response was indicative of an expert teacher as well as one who plans for instructional density. With a distinct tone of pride, she informed me that she could “tell you what I’m doing every quarter and every week” (Interview #1, 11-2-15) because she maps out the curriculum from the beginning of the year. This she also attributed this to her longstanding use of the curriculum. Shelley had been teaching 8th grade language arts in the same district for many years. She also demonstrated how an experienced teacher thinks about students, and explained that she had a good working sense of the knowledge and skills students of a certain age and developmental level bring to her content. She also cited that in her long-range planning, she intentionally built in overlap between different content and skills. This she described as “zig-zagging” over the course of a year. And while her lessons were laid out by quarter and week from the beginning to the end of the year, she did allow for “wiggle room” in the case students weren’t acquiring skills at the designated pace. Later in our interview, I noted this same sense of adaptability when she described lesson planning from class to class. For example, if something went

particularly well in a morning class, or conversely if something was ineffective, she would readily adjust for a later class section. She was highly aware that this adaptability was what made her a successful planner: “my success I think has been just knowing very well what I’m doing, where I’m heading, and being so prepared and so ready that then I can step back and watch what’s happening, and then have the flexibility that I need to change something” (Interview #1, 11-2-15).

The necessity of layering. It was clear to me that Shelley came into the study with a working knowledge of instructional density, though she had never heard the term before. She explained that because of the sheer number of language arts standards at the middle school level, “we better be thinking in layers” (Interview #1, 11-2-15). Shelley the critical nature of thinking in layers as the only way to make sure everything was covered. She also showed an understanding of the two domains of instructional density in describing her approach to planning: “Some of it’s planned. I think a lot of it happens spontaneously” (Interview #1, 11-2-15). Like the other participants, Shelley felt there were areas she neglected, even though her long-range plans were an umbrella for most of the curriculum. One of those areas was public speaking and the standards associated with it. She felt that those had fallen by the wayside over the years but that one way she used instructional density was to look for opportunities to address it more explicitly. The fact that she neglected that area was distressing, because she thought it was a life skill students would need. One way she planned with the incorporation of speaking standards in mind was to offer “quick pieces of instruction” (Interview #1, 11-2-15) as opposed to longer, formal units. Our first conversation about instructional density also

revealed Shelley's strong inclination to acknowledge the multi-faceted purpose of given activities in her planning. When I asked her what she valued about the public speaking standards, she explained it as follows:

...multiple reasons. I mean one it makes our class time efficient because when we are doing small group sharing, or even whole group processing of something, if the whole group can't hear the student then we're wasting our time and I'm constantly asking them to repeat, speak louder, speak clearer. So if I plan that instruction ahead of time, state my expectations, they're more likely to be achieving that level. So if I'm layering and giving them that expectation of a speech Standard, then it has to do with classroom management, classroom engagement, student sense of success..." (Interview #1, 11-2-15).

This comment indicated to me that Shelley was not only able to layer her instruction effectively, but could draw the relationship to certain parts of the content to the bigger picture of her instructional purposes. In my first observation, I saw evidence of Shelley's aptitude with planning in layers. She was introducing students to a writing assignment using an organizational sheet she had created herself (see Figure 4.7). The assignment asked students to create an annotated playlist of songs of their own choosing.

Language Arts 7 Name _____

Writing: **PERSUASIVE DESCRIPTIVE** Block _____

AUDIENCE: peers & Ms. Prem

PURPOSE: Persuade audience to select your **SCHOOL-APPROPRIATE** choice of music to use during class writing sessions or short breaks.


P.O.V. ?

GENRE: Descriptive/Persuasive: Annotated play list of songs with descriptive details.
Detailed paragraph: Topic sentence gains audience's attention and clearly explains the topic of suggested song, to be used during either quiet writing sessions or short breaks.
Concludes with a final statement to summarize the topic and add final persuasion.

Topics to consider are


Your experience with the song *writing about songs for class playlist*
Lyrics: theme/meaning, inspiration
Artist & Genre: style of music
Sound: tempo (pace, beat, rhythm) use of instruments, beat/rhythm,
Vocal quality/range,
Listener's reaction: how one's mind/heart responds to the music
Popularity/appeal
Effectiveness for planned use (writing concentration or break motivation.)

WRITING EXPECTATIONS: project will be taken through the entire writing process. Evaluate for ideas, word choice, fluency and conventions. Final copy should be on clean white paper, preferably word-processed. Design and aesthetics may add to the persuasive appeal of the writing piece.



STEP 1: PRE-WRITE

Creative Title for class playlist: _____



Introduction: _____

Song Use: _____

Song Title: _____

Artist: _____

Music Genre _____

Figure 4.7 Playlist Writing Assignment Graphic Organizer

When we met after the observation, I asked Shelley to describe how she had layered different instructional purposes for this activity. She outlined several of her goals for this assignment:

1. Awareness of audience and purpose: In the writing piece she had assigned prior to this one, it was evident students did not have an understanding of audience nor purpose. When she created the graphic organizer to accompany this next piece, she added lines for both audience and purpose, which were filled in for the students. This was evidence of scaffolding; later she would leave those sections blank and the students would determine an appropriate audience and establish a purpose.
2. Point of view: Also based on her formative assessment of the previous writing assignment, Shelley noticed that many of her students were writing in the 2nd person point of view, which was incompatible with the particulars of that genre of writing. For this reason, she felt it necessary to explicitly address which points of view were appropriate to which audiences and purposes.
3. Writing genre: Shelley also included a line on the graphic organizer that named the genre of writing. This was further evidence of her instructionally dense mindset and her ability to layer in the distinctions between different types of writing instead of simply assigning a particular piece of writing.
4. Descriptive writing: Though she deemed this assignment a “Persuasive” essay in that students would be persuading her to play certain songs during class, she added in an element of descriptive writing. The annotations for each entry would give rich sensory details about the individual songs.
5. The writing process: The graphic organizer she provided contained a large, prominent area labeled “Step 1: Prewrite,” reinforcing the necessary steps of bringing a piece from the beginning stages of the writing process to its final form.
6. Writing traits: Shelley gave students a list of expectations regarding the evaluation of ideas, word choice, sentence fluency, and the conventions of writing. They had access and were expected to refer to a holistic descriptive writing rubric as they evaluated their own writing.
7. Descriptive details: To help students generate rich descriptions of individual songs, Shelley provided a space for guided notes on the graphic

organizer. Here students could record their thoughts about their choice of songs that could be later developed into the full annotations.

8. Spelling: Shelley provided each student a writing folder that contained drafts of their work as well as numerous and various references, one of which was a “Personal Spelling List.” This was a running record of words that students had misspelled even after revising and submitting a final draft of certain writing pieces. They represented words that students struggled with and were individualized to that student. Part of their revision work would involve doing a final check for those spelling words.

Besides her stated purposes for this assignment and the clear evidence of complex layering, I also noted a more subtle purpose. The assignment itself would give Shelley valuable insight into the likes and preferences of her students, which she could use to build relationships, especially through the content. As an added incentive to students, she informed them that the songs from their annotated play lists would be used during quiet work times.

Thematic lesson planning. The district’s curriculum map for 7th grade language arts (see Appendix N) also suggested quarterly themes around which teachers could structure reading and writing activities. The district had provided some training regarding the use of themes, and Shelley used the faithfully to organize her long-range plans. In one of our conversations, Shelley related instructional density to her use of thematic planning:

Well and the way [the district] has language arts set up with quarter themes and the guiding questions and all that, um, I’ve found instructional density to be essential, because those are higher order concepts and involve so much deep thinking, and so much prep work to get them to that point to where they can gradually release, which is where we are now. So I see a lot of these things being totally utilized... Every day I’m trying to have instructional density continue them to think about the theme and this quarter would be self-identity (Personal Communication, 10-28-15).

She went on to describe the first formal speech she assigned to her students. Its topic followed the quarter theme of “self-identity,” as Shelley planned to “infuse that theme of identity in everything we do” (Personal Communication, 10-28-15). She went on to explain that students could choose anything to speak about, but it was more instructionally dense to have them work around a theme so that the activity had the added benefit of helping them get to know themselves. An added layer of complexity to this speech was to relate key personality attributes to a fictional character from a novel.

Integration of reading and writing. My observations of Shelley’s practice and our conversations revealed consistent integration of reading, writing, and speaking skills. This had already been her habit with planning, but she felt strongly that she had become more intentional about it since learning about instructional density. She told me, “I’ve never done that in 20 years that I’ve taught. I’ve never purposely decided that, ‘Hey we can use the book as that exact prompt for descriptive writing’” (Personal Communication, 11-12-15). I was pleased that Shelley had made this important insight about the integration of reading and writing. As I will discuss in the following chapter, it provides students a more authentic experience when writing tasks are a natural outcrop of literary tasks. Shelley had a sense of this even before learning about instructional density, however.

On a number of occasions I observed her approach to teaching the mechanical aspects of writing and how she tied this to literature. I never observed her using the basal grammar book. Instead, she used pieces of writing students were

already familiar with and guided them through the process of locating and amending various errors. These errors were not necessarily indicative of particular grammar skills as designated by the curriculum map, but ones that she most frequently noticed in student writing. On one memorable occasion, Shelley was remediating the use of comma splices, compound sentences that are incorrectly joined by a comma. She created a PowerPoint handout (see Figure 2.8) that contained a variety of sentences that contained comma splices. The sentences she created came from *A Christmas Carol* by Charles Dickens, which they had been reading in class, and the live stage production of which they would be taking a field trip to see in the near future.

Name _____ Group _____

CORRECT THE COMMA SPLICE/ RUN-ON

- ✖ CD 1. The students read the play, they were prepared to see the live production.
- ✖ CX 2. The play version in the book is not as detailed as the production, the stage performance has additional scenes.
- ✖ CX 3. We will enjoy the play and watch carefully, students will be writing a descriptive essay about the production.

WHAT TYPE OF SENTENCE STRUCTURE OR ERROR? S, CD, CX, FR, RO?

- ✖ 4. The truly dedicated and amazing actors of the Nebraska Theater Caravan.
- ✖ 5. While we are seeing the play, we will give our attention.
- ✖ 6. The actors are not professionals, but they have tremendous talent.
- ✖ 7. The kids have tutors and homework since they travel around the country.

SCENE 5

- ✖ 1. What do the servants' actions and words show us about Scrooge?
- ✖ 2. Provide details to support the idea that the Cratchit family supports each other during difficult times?
- ✖ 3. What is Peter's good news considering the poverty of the time period?

SCENE 5

- ✖ 4. **RECALL AND APPLY:**
As Scrooge discovers Tiny Tim's fate, what words of his would likely cause him shame and regret?
- ✖ 5. **EXTENSION**
Why do you think this ghost never speaks a word in the scene?

SCENE 6

- ✖ 1. What is Scrooge excited to discover? What promise or pledge does he make as a result?
- ✖ 2. What does Scrooge ask the boy to do? Why does Scrooge take this action?
- ✖ 3. Contrast Scrooge's interaction with the Gentleman Visitor in this scene and the first time.
- ✖ 4. What is Tiny Tim's famous line that Scrooge repeats?

SCENE 6

Which "spirit" or "ghost" helps Scrooge the most in his conversion? Support your answer with details from the play. (Marley, Past, Present or Future)



Figure 4.8 A Christmas Carol

Some of the sentences described the differences between the written play and the stage production, as well as other items related to the plot and even some lines containing the expectations she had for the students' participation as the audience. The students worked in small groups to revise the sentences. This activity

was highly instructionally dense. Shelley had layered in many important literacy skills, and even served the dual purpose of beginning the process of communicating behavioral expectations as students prepared to leave the building to see a play. On this day, participant Darlene and I observed this lesson together. Darlene was able to identify the complexity of instructional density as follows:

It's almost even kind of a third layer because, even in your first slide here where you're connecting the comma splice and the run-ons you're talking about the play. You could even say that's almost a third layer where you're talking about not quite play etiquette but just like introducing, what, like the history of the play but what it's like going to the play and what the actors have to go through. So maybe it's not just the text itself but it's about the actors and the people in the play" (Personal Communication, 11-19-15).

At other times, she used student samples of writing to teach particular skills. Using the same PowerPoint handout format, her prep work for the lesson involved locating and displaying students' sentences from final drafts of writing that contained errors with sentence fluency. Again, the students worked in small groups to revise the sentences. In our post-observation session, we discussed how this was instructionally dense because of the many purposes it served. It was more engaging for students to see their own writing and that of their peers. It also conveyed to them the importance of ongoing revisions in the writing process, as many of them had let comma splices and run-on sentences slip by in their editing.

Looking back, looking forward. Throughout the period of observation, I found it remarkable how Shelley looped through her content. For her, instructional density was a process of using particular lessons, resources, materials, and texts as learning events that served to reinforce *and* introduce as many skills as possible. She had a strong sense of where her students had been and where they were going;

this included anticipating happenings that were out of her control. For example, as springtime ushered in the season of testing, and wanting to keep moving forward with her curriculum, she created smaller units of study that could be easily worked around a testing schedule and that would also prepare students for what was to come. In late March, her students had just finished up a longer unit on grammar and parts of speech—adjectives. She knew it would some time before they could begin reading their next novel together as a class, so she started the students on an acrostic poem activity. The activity would require them to pay close attention to descriptive words, connecting it to what they had learned about adjectives. She also tied the activity to the upcoming quarter’s theme. In this way, she was reinforcing prior learning as well as setting the stage for future learning while still maintaining rigorous teaching of content flexibly around a schedule of test taking.

Dialogic enactment. The most striking aspect of Shelley’s teaching, and one I felt privileged to observe to consistently, was that her classroom dialogue was exceptionally rich with the language of her content. She rarely had an interaction with students that did not involve a connection back to specific content standards. She frequently and fluidly posed questions to students, and student responses were met in turn with specific feedback and praise. In general, her classes moved at a fast, energetic pace with Shelley in full control. Her classroom presence demanded attention, and she moved about the room quickly and efficiently. I observed that students always seemed to be “on their toes” (Field Notes, 11-2-15) and there was little room for deviation from the task at hand. She made frequent rounds about the

room to do spot checks of student work and verbally addressing problems or issues that were evident.

A particular dialogic strength was in the area of listening and speaking. Shelley had shared with me that this standard was one she feared neglecting. Other subject matter precluded her from assigning a great number of formal speeches, so instead she constantly reinforced the skill through dialogue. For example, as a student prepared to share, she stated “Nice and loud and clear. Always practicing articulation and volume so people can learn from your intelligence today” (Field Notes, 11-2-15). I noted that not only was she reinforcing the speaking standard, but subtly praising the student and establishing a purpose for speaking loudly and clearly. These kinds of multi-layered statements were indicative of her high instructional density.

Shelley frequently encouraged the use of more sophisticated vocabulary. As a habit, she used a recognizable term in conjunction with a less familiar one: “We’re surmising, we’re guessing” (Field Notes, 11-17-15). I observed this on many occasions. While some of the novice participants did this as well, Shelley typically made words more comprehensible by also providing a synonym. If a student used a word that was particularly descriptive, her reaction was to recast the word, name its part of speech or its corresponding terminology of the writing rubric, and praise the student for using it. In one instance a student had read aloud a small portion of his essay. She responded to it by saying, “This person added courage *and* zeal. Love that word choice!” (Field Notes, 4-29-15). In addition, she often referred to the various parts of speech—adjectives, adverbs, nouns, verbs, and the like, briefly stated their

purpose in writing, and praised students for their knowledge all in the same statement. For example, in an impromptu class discussion about adjectives in writing, a student remarked, “Adjectives are used to describe,” to which Shelley replied, “Love that suggestion! They also add fluency and get rid of repetitiveness” (Field Notes, 11-2-15).

Shelley moved efficiently through the activities of each class period. She communicated clearly the expectations and objectives of the day (see Figure 4.9)

4/29/2016

H Fri 4/29 (A)

- ▶ DUE: Section 4 , final M-G #3
- ▶ NEED Portfolios, handouts, novel/journal; [any poems -> class book]
- ▶ OBJ: **Literary Read: M-Gs!**
- ▶ **Literary review section 4**
- ▶ **Assessment section 4**
- ▶ **Introduction of concept project**
- ▶

HMWK: Novel & Journal: Section 5; prewrite of concept project

Discussion NOTES

<p>What it takes?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ What it takes within a person to have a conviction, take a stand, make an effort to impact/make a difference. 	<p>How?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ What are the ways people get involved to make a difference? <p>How does taking a stand SHAPE US?</p>
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Figure 4.9 Daily objectives, activities, and expectations.

One of the ways Shelley accomplished her objectives was by constantly peppering teacher talk with her expectations. It was as much a part of her classroom dialogue than anything else, and for this reason there were few interruptions or

distractions from tasks. For example, instead of offering general praise, Shelley was specific and positive, telling students, “Thanks for your attention” or “Thanks for asking when you don’t know” or “Thanks for raising your hand and waiting your turn” (Field Notes, 11-2-15). In another observation, she asked a student who was off-task, “May I have your full leadership please” as a redirection (Field Notes, 11-17-15). There were numerous other examples of Shelley interweaving positive praise while communicating expectations, such as “This is why you did well on your last grammar test because you’re participating” (Field Notes, 3-22-16). In one of our discussions, I asked Shelley if she typically had to set aside class time to review expectations, especially when students were going to engage in formal group discussions or projects. She explained, “Sometimes I have to remind them, but again they know the expectation and I did not feel I had to reiterate at this point. Maybe a couple of students needed me to restate which I addressed with them individually” (Field Notes, 4-29-16). This was further evidence that behavioral expectations were a strong theme in her classroom dialogue, which was an essential strategy of Shelley’s classroom management. Not only was class time freed up for other, more important activities because students received constant, positive reminders about what was expected of them. This was a marked contrast from what I observed in the classrooms of the novices, who spent considerable time managing the misbehavior of many students at once. Teaching, instruction, and learning were sometimes severely compromised because of classroom mismanagement. I will discuss this aspect of my observations in the chapter to follow.

Before observing Shelley's classes and experiencing first-hand how adept she was at accomplishing multiple purposes through teacher talk, I had not considered this as a facet of instructional density. I will also discuss at length in the following chapter how this aspect of instructional density opens up a space of positive reinforcement and cooperation that itself leads to the enactment of other kinds of instructional density. And though it was not the purpose of this study to determine how dialogic instructional density affects student achievement, it is worthy to note that I observed more evidence of students themselves using specific content words in her classes than in others. In general, Shelley's students were more likely to respond to her using like terminology.

Content knowledge. Clearly Shelley exhibited an abundant measure of control over her content. She had been teaching with relatively the same curriculum (barring occasional revisions by the district) for many years and when I asked her if she had sufficient content knowledge to be more instructionally dense in her practice, she laughed good-naturedly and said, "Yes!" (Interview #2, 5-11-16). But like some of the other participants—Kathryn with vocabulary and Darlene with text evidence, Shelley did seem to skew more heavily toward certain elements of the curriculum. In most, if not all, of my observations, Shelley emphasized the teaching of aspects of grammar that related to sentence fluency in students' writing. She felt strongly that her students' demonstrable knowledge of grammar was critical to their development as writers (Interview #2, 5-11-16). This kind of "curriculum bias," I observed, or tendency to value certain things more than others at least in

what was observable about their practice, I realized could have potential bearing on instructional density. This will also be discussed in the chapter to follow.

Shelley expressed enthusiasm about moving forward with instructional density. She easily understood it as a pedagogical construct, and was eager to extend it beyond her classroom. From my personal relationship with her, I knew Shelley to value collaboration with her peers. She had led the effort to bring her 7th grade colleagues into closer alignment with their shared curriculum, and even expressed frustration at times that there wasn't more alignment between the grade levels. She explained that, "A goal I have for our literacy department building-wide is that we are transparent, we are aligned, we are sharing, we are very aware of what each other is doing" (Interview #2, 5-11-16). Moving forward, Shelley wanted to explore the relationship between instructional density and cross-curricular planning (Interview #2, 5-11-16). She thought there were many opportunities for planning between the social studies and language arts classes, particularly for some of the novels in the curriculum, some of which were historical pieces of fiction that were bound in a particular culture. She wanted more support from social studies teachers with the quarterly themes. I pointed out to her that this may complicate her present level of content knowledge, and that there would be a learning curve in order to be instructionally dense across content areas. But it would be a worthwhile avenue to explore, given that the first-grade teachers in the original study were tasked with connecting across many different areas of curriculum.

Shelley's superb knowledge of her content would certainly ease her into new endeavors in terms of cross-curricular planning. Because her expertise was in

content knowledge as well as pedagogical content knowledge, her strong sense of knowing her students and their developmental stages, and her ability to effectively manage a classroom, she would likely have few barriers to enacting even more instructional density in her practice.

Collaborative discourse. Shelley and I had many productive conversations about instructional density. In fact, she attributed the work of this project to bringing our language arts/reading department into closer alignment. Throughout the study, our discussions were less about coaching her in ways to be more instructionally dense but rather pointing out the ways she already enacted instructional density. Just as the other participants had likewise indicated, she felt that having it pointed out in her practice would help her to be more intentional about its use in the future (Interview #2, 5-11-16). She found it very helpful to have an observation of a class and then meet soon thereafter:

The most meaningful is when we've gotten together afterward, um, because it allows me to see what you saw and to just kind of get affirmation of 'Yes, this is instructional density.' Again it's like kind of with my understanding of the concept and the practice of it was incredibly helpful to meet. And we always met very soon afterwards, usually that very day and so everything was kind of fresh and so it was just very meaningful. I could kind of put that deeper in my memory, like let's try that again, if I had another block, okay let's do something spontaneous to create that. Um, so really I appreciated our feedback sessions the most (Interview #2, 5-11-16).

Shelley's and the other participant's thoughts about the collaborative discussions informed my understanding of how instructional density could be enacted in practice. Whereas the observations were helpful to me personally to find evidence of it in the participants' practice, the feedback sessions were most useful to

them and seemed to generate enthusiasm about continuing to develop this. This will also be discussed further in the chapter to follow.

Principal Investigator

Planning enactment. In my 9th year of certified teaching with the district when this study began, I was not new to the construct of instructional density. I first learned about the term from an assigned reading in a doctoral seminar class and similar to the other participants, recognized it in my own teaching. Like them, I also became more intentional about using it. I had always planned from an instructionally dense mindset. One of my first significant teaching experiences was in a large, urban middle school on the east coast where I served as a long-term substitute for a semester. The schedule in that building was structured in such a way that students had language arts in a morning block and social studies in the afternoon for a shorter block but taught by the same teacher. The curriculum was also aligned so that there was reciprocity between the readings for each subject area, and I enjoyed being able to draw so many connections between the two. I acclimated to the idea of daily planning as a coherent activity between different subject areas. Since then, I have always planned with a cross-curricular mindset. That early initiation into instructional density has stuck, and I credit partially to why I became so enchanted with the term. It put a name to something I had already been doing and what I knew to be excellent practice, but just as the other participants cited, made me much more intentional about enacting it in my practice.

I approach lesson planning on a quarterly basis, rather than by mapping out an entire school year. I am mindful of the skills to be covered during each quarter

and plan my daily lessons accordingly, which leaves enough room to slow down or speed up depending on how quickly students acquire skills. In many ways, the planning domain of instructional density has alleviated tension I feel with addressing all or most of the curriculum. I concur with the other participants that the magnitude of what is to be covered is daunting. This feeling has intensified over the last two years, as my transition to Moljner Middle School also marked a change from what I was accustomed to in terms of scheduling. Whereas in my previous school site I taught the same 3 sections of language arts every day, Moljner was on an A-B schedule, which meant I would see those 3 sections every other day. This made planning more of a challenge. It meant there was just as much to cover in half of the time over the course of a year, and that I would lose the continuity with delivering content on a daily basis. Though I approach planning in much the same fashion, I have been much more conscientious about how many skills I plan to teach within a given lesson.

Familiarity with curriculum. Like participant Shelley, I too have been working with the same curriculum for a number of years. I know in advance what stories, non-fiction pieces, poems, and novels we will read each quarter as well as what types of writing complement those texts. And like Shelley, I have a strong sense of my own theoretical values about the teaching of literature and writing, and it is one that underpins everything I do in the classroom. This theoretical basis is what scholars refer to as a critical literacy approach, and what Shor (1999) describes as “language use that questions the social construction of the self” and examines “our ongoing development, to reveal the subjective positions from which

we make sense of the world and act on it” (p. 2). This theoretical starting point is where I begin my lessons, so that when I plan for reading a particular story from the curriculum map for example, I know it will be with the aim of helping students to understand themselves in larger social contexts. Many of the questions I ask formally and informally are designed to help them connect more deeply to certain characters or situations. I also consider it my task to complicate their thinking while we read and push them beyond surface-level understandings of plot. With critical literacy as the core premise, I am then able to layer skills around it. My general plan is to identify the particular skills from the curriculum map in terms of how well they correspond to what we are reading. This includes literary analysis techniques, literary elements such as figurative language, vocabulary, and grammar. My tendency is to keep everything we learn in the context of that text, and this includes writing. Each lesson I plan has a component of writing, either in a similar genre or about a particular theme that has emerged.

The first self-observation I conducted was indicative of this approach. We were preparing to read a short story called *A Glow in the Dark* by Gary Paulsen, which is a short non-fiction text and a first-person account of a terrifying experience he had while dog sledding on a remote logging road in Alaska. I typically begin a literature lesson plan by identifying vocabulary words I know students won't be familiar with. I prepared a short bell work sheet (see Figure 4.10) that contained the two words in sentences. The students were to use contextual clues to then write a definition for each word. I added a layer of complexity by requiring them to also identify each word's part of speech (Field Notes, 11-16-15). I offered a bonus

question on the sheet that challenged students to write the word in a different form and then identify its part of speech. Another layer of complexity I had planned was for students to, after sharing their initial findings, after students had shared their initial findings, generate synonyms and antonyms for each word.

Thursday Bellwork

Directions: Read the sentences and in the space below, write a definition for each of the words. Identify the part of speech along with the definition. Then, use an alternative part of speech to create your own original sentence.

It is immensely **diffuse** and pretentious, loaded with digressions, its argument buried under masses of fantastic, uncritical learning, the work of a vigorous but quite unoriginal mind.

The jet should be situated between the sparks and the eye, and the observation is facilitated by a piece of ground glass held a little beyond the jet, so as to **diffuse** the light; or the shadow of the jet may be received on the ground glass, which is then held as close as possible on the side towards the observer.

But then, not being married, how could he understand what was required to **sustain** a marriage?

Perhaps his energy would not have been sufficient to **sustain** him against these repeated blows of destiny if, in 1854, the accession to the viceroyalty of Egypt of his old friend, Said Pacha, had not given a new impulse to the ideas that had haunted him for the last twenty-two years concerning the Suez Canal.

Diffuse= ()

Sustain= ()

1. diffusely (adv).

2. sustenance (n)

Figure 4.10 Vocabulary Bellwork

We moved into the next activity, which was for students to do a 10-minute sustained free write describing a time they were fearful of something in the dark. The prompt also required them to use two of the new vocabulary words. The activity had several purposes. One was to help them later connect to how the author reacted to seeing something in the dark he thought was something else. Another was to practice using the vocabulary and still another was to share their stories and in doing so generate enthusiasm and interest in the short story. Finally, I am explicit in communicating to my students often that sustained writing is a practice that pushes them to get ideas out and re-work them as part of the writing process. Our third day of this same lesson involved turning their short free write journal entry into a longer, descriptive piece in a similar style to that of Paulsen's.

Layering text features. Before settling in to read the story, I indicated the small print above the title, which read "*from* Woodsong." My plans for reading a story typically contain this sort of pre-reading questioning. This includes requiring them to find the page number of the story using the index of the textbook, which reinforces the skills associated with using the reference features of academic textbooks. We then examine the title and other relevant text features including images or photographs and in this case, discussed that the short story was an *excerpt* from a book that was a collection of true short stories and that students could infer that from the use of italics on the word *from*. We began our first read of the story after a few students volunteered to share their journal entries. I began by reading aloud, and then elicited student volunteers to take turns reading. I recorded

the questions I had asked (Field Notes, 11-16-15) and interrupted occasionally to ask:

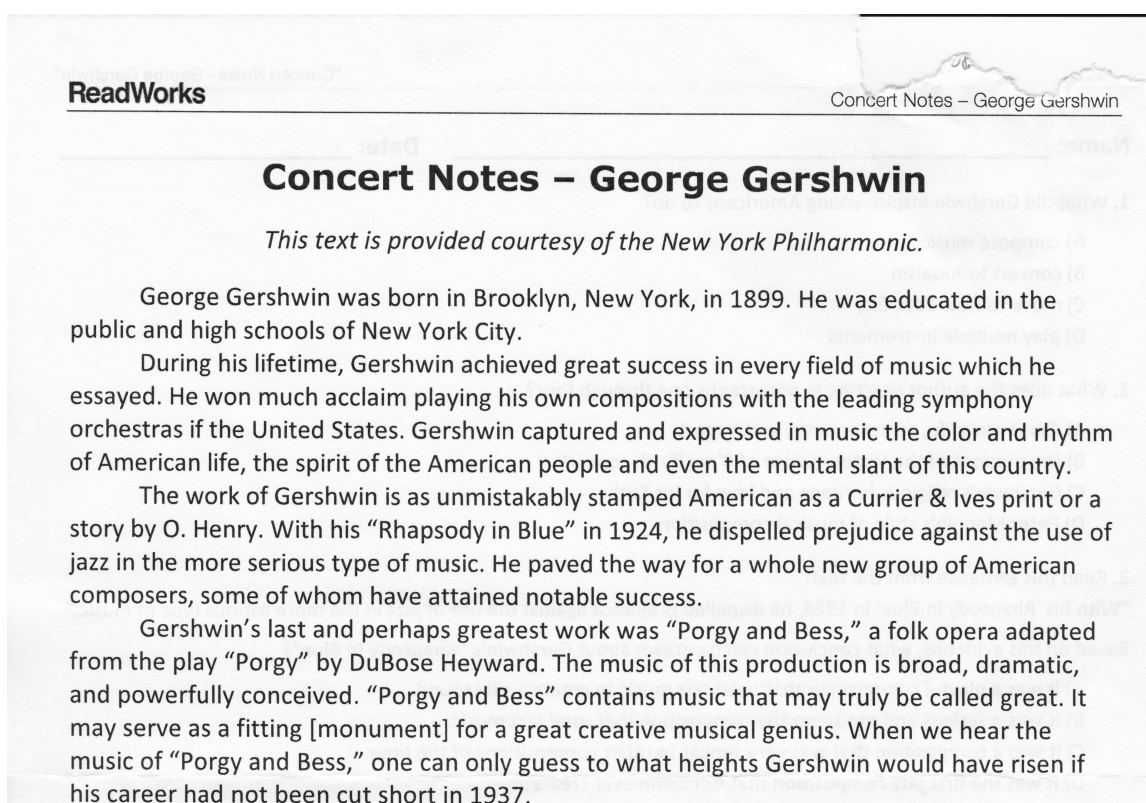
- What point of view is this story written in? How do you know?
- If the narrator is the dynamic character, who are the static characters?
- How does the narrator describe the setting in the exposition?
- What techniques does the author use to build suspense?

After the students read, I provided a study guide that reinforced some of the skills I had addressed in the initial reading. Whenever it is practical, I allot time for students to do a second reading. This gives them the opportunity to have increased comprehension and to look for subtler nuances of the literary techniques used by the author. For this story, their second read emphasized locating specific language that built suspense so that they could replicate the techniques in the writing assignment that accompanied the reading.

Integration of reading and writing. I conceptualize my use of instructional density in planning as a way to layer in many different skills that are designated in the curriculum, which this plan was indicative of. A key facet of the plans, however, is to ultimately lead students toward a writing activity that is based on the text they have read. In this way, I am able to interconnect reading and writing and mutually strengthen the skills within each. Through the process of studying my own practice, I also realized that I was using instructional density toward the ends of what it meant to build critical literacy skills. In subsequent class sessions working with this story, I planned for questions related to the human experiences that make people afraid and how people react to fear. It was my goal for the writing assignment that

students not only wrote descriptively in a similar style and point of view as the author, but to explore their own fears.

Observing my own practice revealed other ways I use instructional density in planning besides the layering of different skills. In a later class session, I was using a resource recommended by our district language arts supervisor, which was an online repository of grade-leveled fiction and non-fiction passages with questions aligned with the state standards (Field Notes, 3-16-16). From the site I had printed a set of passages about the musician George Gershwin (see Figure 4.11).



The image is a screenshot of a digital reading passage from ReadWorks. At the top left, the 'ReadWorks' logo is visible. At the top right, the title 'Concert Notes – George Gershwin' is displayed. Below the title, a line of text states: 'This text is provided courtesy of the New York Philharmonic.' The passage itself is divided into four paragraphs. The first paragraph introduces George Gershwin's birth in Brooklyn, New York, in 1899 and his education in New York City. The second paragraph describes his success in music, his collaborations with leading symphony orchestras, and his role in capturing the spirit of American life. The third paragraph discusses his work as an American composer, specifically mentioning 'Rhapsody in Blue' and his impact on jazz. The fourth paragraph highlights his final work, 'Porgy and Bess,' and its significance as a folk opera adapted from a play by DuBose Heyward.

ReadWorks Concert Notes – George Gershwin

Concert Notes – George Gershwin

This text is provided courtesy of the New York Philharmonic.

George Gershwin was born in Brooklyn, New York, in 1899. He was educated in the public and high schools of New York City.

During his lifetime, Gershwin achieved great success in every field of music which he essayed. He won much acclaim playing his own compositions with the leading symphony orchestras of the United States. Gershwin captured and expressed in music the color and rhythm of American life, the spirit of the American people and even the mental slant of this country.

The work of Gershwin is as unmistakably stamped American as a Currier & Ives print or a story by O. Henry. With his "Rhapsody in Blue" in 1924, he dispelled prejudice against the use of jazz in the more serious type of music. He paved the way for a whole new group of American composers, some of whom have attained notable success.

Gershwin's last and perhaps greatest work was "Porgy and Bess," a folk opera adapted from the play "Porgy" by DuBose Heyward. The music of this production is broad, dramatic, and powerfully conceived. "Porgy and Bess" contains music that may truly be called great. It may serve as a fitting [monument] for a great creative musical genius. When we hear the music of "Porgy and Bess," one can only guess to what heights Gershwin would have risen if his career had not been cut short in 1937.

Figure 4.11 George Gershwin Reading Passage

I knew that few, if any, of the students would bring background knowledge to this topic, something I was aware of during planning and which presented an opportunity. I followed the same general sequence of preparing to read as the

previous observation. We began by examining the heading and sub-heading of the text, a previewing activity that would set the stage for situating the piece within the characteristics of its genre. I began the reading by indicating the heading and sub-heading, two text features that would help students build comprehension. I also posed a series of questions that were typical for my methods of introducing students to a text:

- What is the point of view and how do you know?
- Why does an author select a particular point of view?
- Who is the audience for this piece and for what purpose might they read it?

As we made our way through the reading, I asked comprehension questions along the way to make sure students understood what they read, especially at points that contained complex sentence structures or vocabulary (Field Notes, 3-16-16). This particular reading contained a reference to the author O. Henry, which I noticed when I wrote the lesson plan. I decided to layer in a historical/cultural element that I thought might serve the dual purpose of generating student interest, so I prepared a PowerPoint slide that had an image of him as well as a brief, bulleted list of accomplishments. While they worked on answering the comprehension questions that accompanied the passage, I played one of Gershwin's compositions, *Rhapsody in Blue*. Through observing my practice, I realized that my use of instructional density was for the purpose of extending text references. By doing so, I could help my students generate background knowledge about the world both through and within a given text.

Toward the test. My repertoire of lesson planning during this particular school year was complicated by outside forces. The district's language arts department, in an attempt to provide teachers a set of resources that would align with the new format and content of the state reading test, strongly recommended the use of some new materials. One of them was an exhaustive set of sample items that mimicked some of the reading tasks on the revised state assessment. The introduction of these kinds of materials has always presented a tension in my professional thinking. I do want my to succeed on high-stakes standardized tests and I know some of that success will derive from their familiarity with the presentation of items. Yet I know from experience that these materials quickly drain student interest. I also feel pressure about deviating from my other purposes, even temporarily, to give explicit instruction on passing a test that I have not written. I determined that I could still be instructionally dense, even with using materials I was less familiar with. For a few weeks leading up to the April test, I used the sample items as a short bell work activity and whenever possible, connect the contents of the sample items to our usual content so that even the test preparation could be folded into other parts of the curriculum. In one such instance, the practice item was a paired reading of two primary source documents, both first-hand accounts written by miners during the gold rush of the mid-1800s (see Appendix P). Though these materials were not focused on the skill of recognizing or analyzing primary source documents, I realized this would be a logical tie-in to a later activity, which was already planned. I introduced the content by explaining that we would be reading several primary source documents that day (Field Notes, 4-4-16). The later

portion of the lesson involved reading about the Nuremberg Laws of Nazi Germany. This was a supplementary reading to the *Diary of Anne Frank* play students were reading. We discussed what made a text a primary source document, and this included a brief review of point of view and a discussion of author's purpose. I layered in another connection knowing that the students had studied Jim Crow Laws in their social studies classes. We were able to situate these historical documents as well as talk about other primary source documents they had read. In this way, I eased some of the tension associated with using materials that were not my own, and that weren't directly associated with the curriculum. In the following section, I discuss how I enacted instructional density in dialogue with students.

Dialogic enactment. Engaging in a self-study of my own practice pushed me to examine ways I use dialogue in the classroom. Along the way I observed in my own practice many of the same things I have observed in that of my colleagues. I recorded many instances of using high-level vocabulary when speaking to students, and whenever possible the specific content terminology of my discipline. I also observed myself using instructional density to respond to student questions. Finally, I noted times where I used instructional density to assess what a student knew and extend it, sometimes by providing a visual.

All of the participants, including myself, tended to pepper their teacher talk with high-level vocabulary. As a matter of habit, I also used sophisticated words, but unlike Shelley, did not always make the words more comprehensible by using an accompanying synonym. For example, in an early observation, (Field Notes, 10-21-15) in which I was guiding students through a visual analysis of a piece of art that

accompanied our novel, I used the words *juxtapose*, *foreground*, and *intricacy*. I had used these words accurately in the context of terminology associated with visual analysis, but had not provided a student a follow-up word that would help them understand. In reflecting on this lesson (Field Notes, 10-21-15) I could have provided students a handout that contained a list of such terminology to use as a reference for times we engaged in a visual analysis. This could be used as they generated their own written analysis, the model for which could be my verbal analysis using the words.

In several of the self-observations, I made note of my tendency to verbally name various text features. The 8th grade team, as part of our Professional Learning Community (PLC) was focusing on the identification and purpose of text features such as headings and subheadings, index, table of contents, images and captions, italics, sidebars, and the like. The emphasis on text features derived from assessment data of our students from the previous year. All students at Moljner Middle School take beginning and mid-year predictive assessments in the areas of Reading, Math, and Science that provide data about a student's potential performance on state assessments later in the year. It was determined by the team that 8th grade students had deficits in being able to identify certain text features and their purposes. In two of the observations (Field Notes, 12-15-15; 1-28-16), I required students to use the index to find the page number of a text, for one story by the title and the latter by the author. In the first instance, I improvised my lesson plan by doing a mini-lesson on using an index. This was quick and impromptu and involved my instructing the students to find page R57 of the back of their literature

anthology. We discussed that *R* was an abbreviation for *Reference* and that there were other types of references to be found within an academic textbook. I extended this aside by having them flip through to find other types of reference pages. In this way, not only was I reinforcing their knowledge of types of reference and relating them to other texts besides our literature anthology, but enhancing their familiarity with our own textbook that would serve their purposes as we used it throughout the year. The use of an index was a particular item that a majority of students had missed according to our PLC's test data. We began our PLC cycle that year by creating a pre-assessment that measured our students' use of text features and as a team, collaborated on bringing increased emphasis to this skill in all subject areas. In the latter mini-lesson, I made sure students understood the alphabetical nature of the index and that they could search for a particular text either by the author's last name or the story's title. This included teaching them to omit a story title's article (*a*, *an*, or *the*) when searching by title. I accomplished this by writing the 3 articles on the white board and the mini-lesson also served to review that grammar skill associated with adjectives, something we had already covered the month prior. Though it was not the purpose of this study to determine how instructional density affects student achievement, I did note that my students (Field Notes, 4-4-16) had performed remarkably better on the text features post-assessment. This presents an area for further study, which I will discuss in the chapter to follow.

In seeking evidence of instructional density in dialogue with students in my own practice, I found occurrences of using mini-lessons based on student comments or questions. At times they were very simple asides but ones I felt would be useful

for the rest of the students in the class. For example, during a writing workshop a student has used the word cold in her writing. I asked her if she knew any synonyms for the word, and she replied frigid. I followed up by inviting the rest of the class to generate more words, which I wrote on the white board. After listing the words, I posed the question to students: “What title could I put over these words to show their relationship?” (Field Notes, 1-28-16). In this way, I was reinforcing their familiarity with the term synonym, reinforcing the emphasis on use of text features in the form of creating a title, and honoring the students’ sense of agency in generating a list of descriptive adjectives. Since the students were writing about their experiences over winter break, the list also proved helpful in moving them along in their descriptions.

Content knowledge. Like participant Shelley, I had several years of experience with my curriculum. One aspect of instructional density is the ability to layer in many skills within individual lessons. I am familiar enough with the vast majority of the content to do so. Use of guiding questions and themes put out by the district. This was something I recognized acutely and which would lend itself to more instructional density. There are a couple of areas of grammar that I may need to refresh on, but generally speaking these minor deficits do not hinder me from planning rich lessons.

Conclusion. This chapter described how each of the inquiry’s participants used instructional density in their teaching practice. I delineated the two strands of instructional density in order to provide thick, rich descriptions of how each

participant planned with instructional density in mind as well as enacted it during dialogic acts of teaching. The chapter to follow discusses these results.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative, exploratory case study was to examine specific ways a group of novice and experienced teachers learned to enact instructional density in their teaching practice. My goal was to determine (a) the ways in which middle-level reading and language arts teachers enact instructional density in their practice, (b) how differences in content knowledge inform the process of using instructional density, and (c) the role of professional, collaborative discourse in generating the enactment of instructional density.

The observations I conducted, which included my own practice, along with field notes, post-observation collaborative discussions, and interviews revealed some important themes. Each participant in the study reflected on their practice in terms of planning for instructional density, as well as with enacting it during verbal exchanges with students. As much as possible, we based our efforts on the original descriptions of instructional density provided by Wharton-McDonald, Pressley, & Mistretta Hampston, (1998). Together we explored the *what* and the *how* of enacting it in our practice and were able to bring greater understanding about a pedagogical construct that helps students make critical connections to the different aspects of content in a discipline. Given that instructional density is an obscure term and only appears in a small body of literature, and that that literature is centered around research of primary classrooms, it was important to translate it into the time and place of our practice—7th and 8th grade reading and language arts teaching. The case study provided a sustained examination of how teachers enacted it and

understood that enactment. Specifically, the participants and I explored ways to bring together disparate aspects of our curriculum together in a cohesive fashion and therefore provide our students a richer classroom experience. Though my observations were a critical piece of this exploration, the collaborative discussions in which we engaged were equally important.

I situated the inquiry within the Dimensions of Adaptive Expertise (see Figure 5.1) theoretical frame (Schwartz, Bransford, & Sears, 2005). This model informed my understanding of how participants learned to incorporate instructional density into their teaching practice. Adaptive expertise theory is a constructivist model that describes how practitioners balance innovation and efficiency to achieve adaptive expertise. The study's participants presented with various dispositions and levels of skill along these dimensions depending on their years of teaching, familiarity with their curriculum, and other contextual factors, which will be discussed.

Dimensions of Adaptive Expertise

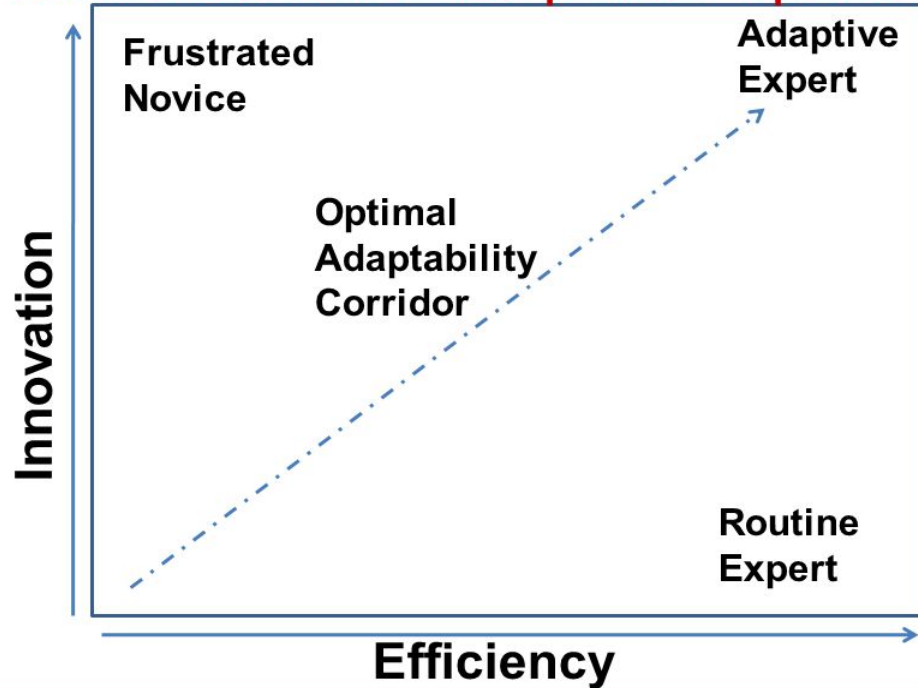


Figure 5.1 Dimensions of Adaptive Expertise

In this chapter, I begin with a summary of how each participant learned to enact a more instructionally dense practice. I then outline several themes that have implications for the practice of both novice and experienced middle-level language arts and reading teachers. These are related to the primary research question and are delineated into the two domains of instructional density: planning enactment and dialogic enactment. I then address the subsidiary research questions in terms of their implications for the professional development of both novice and experienced teachers. Finally, I offer a summary of the thematic findings, a discussion of the limitations of the study, the study's significance, and outline implications for future research.

Implications for Practice: Planning Enactment

Analysis of the data revealed a number of ways participants enacted instructional density in the planning domain. For the purposes of the following discussion, I use the term “curriculum” to refer to Eisner’s (1979) designation as the specific list of contents and related academic materials that are to taught over the course of the year, usually provided by the district, and from which daily “lessons” are derived. The participants’ ability to integrate instructionally dense ways of thinking and doing into their daily lessons was dependent on a number of factors, however. Years of teaching experience, education level and opportunities for professional development, and movement along the dimensions of adaptive expertise were all influential in how each teacher came to understand and enact instructional density. The two experienced participants in the group, Shelley and myself, exhibited the most observable use of instructional density and were able to articulate how we understood its enactment. Our demonstrated aptitude on the efficiency continuum of the framework meant that a firm handle on issues such as classroom management and familiarity with our content allowed space for innovating our practice. The novices, on the other hand, were still struggling in the efficiency domain and experimenting with effective pedagogical and behavioral strategies. At times the struggles novices faced precluded them from enacting instructional density in their practice.

Molly. Molly was the least experienced teaching in the participant group. She began the period of study in her second year of teaching and no additional training or certifications beyond her initial licensing. Molly expressed a number of times

during our conversations that she felt “in a rut” (Interview #1, 10-28-15) with using the same strategies over and over in her classroom. She worried about student engagement but I also sensed she was open to innovating her practice with some guided assistance. For example, Molly used a handful of lesson plans that I had created for our shared content. When this was the case, however, she needed extensive coaching on thoughtfully folding those materials and resources cohesively into the extant form and structure of her lesson planning. It was a challenge to nudge Molly into a space of adaptability. In general, she had a mechanical approach to how she planned and delivered content. Her focus was to move through the lesson, and in most cases from activity to activity, without a sophisticated sense of agency or enthusiasm about the content. Much of my coaching emphasized how she could better interconnect the activities that she planned. After each observation, we discussed how one activity could relate to another, even when she had a limited view of how they were interrelated. In this way, I hoped to complicate her understanding of instructional density in the planning domain. Though she was able to articulate an understanding of how instructional density was a way to layer her lessons with other elements of her content, I observed only modest growth. The parameters of this study were such that she only had a couple of opportunities to observe more experienced colleagues. And though she found tremendous value in all of the observations, moving forward with instructional density would require significantly more opportunities for collaboration and sharing.

Kathryn and Darlene. These participants entered the study with some notable advantages that allowed for more demonstrable growth in enacting instructional

density. Kathryn was in her third year of teaching, one of those years being in a small, private school that had allowed her to hone her lesson planning skills, while Darlene was in her second year but with a Masters degree in her content area. They were also part of a 3-member language arts team that regularly met and had even collaborated on their common curriculum the summer prior to the period of study. This collaboration was necessary, as the sections of 21st Century Reading courses each taught came with a sparse curriculum guide. They relied on one another to create a rough map that would guide them through the content each quarter. And though both also expressed frustration with having limited contact with their mentor, Shelley, they met regularly with one another and shared resources and strategies for their shared content. Both of these participants approached their lesson planning with a mindset of being instructionally dense. Darlene described how she chose non-fiction articles that accompanied the materials provided by the district: “I choose an article that relates in some way to the skill we have been focusing on (summarizing, sequence of events, main ideas, etc.) and try to either choose something that is related to what they are learning in another class or in reading” (Interview #1, 10-26-15). Similarly, Kathryn’s goal in daily planning was to help students see how content areas like reading and social studies were connected. She also wanted to make sure that “activities aren’t just activities but like being more purposeful in what we’re doing” (Interview #1, 10-20-15). Data revealed that both Kathryn and Darlene valued the idea of critical thinking in their teaching. This was remarkable, especially for these novice participants because according to Torff (2005), novices typically focus on direct instructional techniques rather than on

metacognitive strategies. Darlene had a strong bent toward literary analysis, though she expressed disappointment that with the exception of her Honors reading class, she had few opportunities to engage in rich discussions of literature with students. Kathryn appreciated that teaching in her content area was particularly ripe for helping students make meaningful connections between what they read and their life experiences.

During our post-observation reflection sessions, Both Kathryn and Darlene readily described how they had layered each lesson with various skills according to the curriculum from which their plans derived. Data revealed that as time went on, the layering became more complex. Data also helped me understand the relationship between their reliance on the materials they were provided and instructional density. For their 21st Century Reading sections, they had access to two primary resources that were integral to the structure and content of their classes, one an online, leveled reading program and the other a monthly scholastic magazine that contained a variety of mostly non-fiction pieces. While these resources sometimes presented complications to lesson planning, i.e. at times the magazine arrived late, in general they alleviated a great deal of tension and background work that comes with a new teacher trying to find and create his or her own resources. Some of my coaching was directed toward bringing their own creativity and density to the pre-fabricated materials.

In addition, both of these curriculum resources contained writing prompts as part of the structured lesson. I found through our discussions that the designated writing activities were not always as dense as they could be, in other words, did not

emphasize many of the traits students would need to successfully write in different genres. Most of the prompts were geared toward writing in direct response to a text. They may have contained guidance on basic organizational structures, but little else. Data also revealed that the use of these materials was a hindrance to enacting instructional density in terms of its acknowledging the interconnectedness of reading and writing activities.

Shelley. Of all the participants, Shelley exhibited the strongest grasp of instructional density in her planning. She had a long-established practice of mapping out her entire school year by quarter. Shelley was able to successfully “cover” most aspects of her curriculum due to her lengthy experience with it as well as her sense of adaptability. She prided herself on leaving enough space in her plans to go back over skills as she assessed student need. Paradoxically, she also showed the least growth. Because she was such a careful planner, it was difficult for her to innovate in terms of overhauling prepared lessons. This was not a concern of mine, however, because her lesson planning was on par with the design of an expert teacher. It was clear from the outset of the study that Shelley understood how to plan richly with several skills in mind. She also conceptualized the district’s quarterly themes and guiding questions as the umbrella under which all teaching and learning occurred. But through our conversations, Shelley found ways to be even more instructionally dense. She stated that becoming more familiar with instructional density, specifically having a name for the construct, pushed her to look for ways to have denser lesson plans. For example, she re-fashioned a writing prompt when she recognized that her current cohort of students lacked essential

skills to write descriptively. This was a pressing concern, as the district writing assessment was on the horizon. Instead of having students practice the skill with a disconnected prompt, she decided to tweak her plans. “We’re behind in descriptive writing, that possibly when we get to our third quarter novel, that our topic, our prompt which we always kind of get to pick, and they’ve always been kind of random... is possibly to help them analyze the book... describe 3 different scenes or locations in the book” (Personal Communication, 12-8-15). This and other conversations revealed how instructional density could be used to remediate skill deficits while still maintaining the integrity of the content. It also helped me envision possibilities for the enactment of instructional density as the integration of reading and writing. She helped me throughout the study envision ways and means of instructional density, at times pulling me aside to excitedly share something she had done in her class. Other times, however, she had a tendency to designate things that were not actually instructional density but simply good practice. At certain points in the study it was necessary to reiterate the original descriptions of instructional density as it related to practice.

Principal Investigator. Like Shelley, I had many years of experience working with the same curriculum. I had an advantage coming into the study in that I had been exposed to the idea of instructional density as a construct that is in part a way to view the curriculum more holistically and interconnected. Not only that, but coursework in my content area that included an English as a Second Language endorsement and coursework in a Masters and doctoral degree had added to my repertoire an abundance of strategies with which to bring content to life in the

classroom. And because this experience was combined with a strong grasp of classroom management, my practice was characteristic of being in the optimal adaptability corridor, that is, I had created the space for innovation by mastering routines and procedures. Though I am not as adept at long-range planning and tend to map out a quarter at a time, my goal is to incorporate as many of the skills and standards as possible. In reflecting on my own teaching, I observed that I layered into each individual lesson with aspects of reading comprehensions strategies, literary analysis, reading skills, vocabulary, and grammar.

But despite this layering there were still elements of the curriculum I felt had not been adequately addressed by the end of the year. In the observations of my practice, there was little evidence of addressing the speaking and listening standards. This was an area of growth that could be addressed in the planning domain of instructional density moving forward, however. I also identified strengths and deficits in terms of the integration of reading and writing. While I planned writing prompts around the reading we did in class, I learned from observing Shelley that I could be much more explicit in helping students draw the connections between those activities.

Theme #1: Learning to layer. Throughout the course of the study, all participants communicated the difficulty of adequately addressing the different elements of their curriculum. Each described it as concurrently overwhelming and vague, and each expressed tension about neglecting certain aspects of it. This was especially true for the teachers of language arts, whose designated map was a loosely organized set of fiction and non-fiction texts, novels, a list of writing genres,

and an exhaustive list of skills related to vocabulary and grammar acquisition. By and large, teachers were left on their own to select and organize these materials over the course of a year. It became apparent that viewing the scope of the curriculum as interconnected parts necessitates its sustained, intensive examination amongst teachers of the same content area. Enacting the curriculum in a way that is cohesive and shows strong interconnectedness will require a much great emphasis on daily and long-range planning.

It also became apparent through conducting the inquiry that teachers needed better ways to envision *how* the discrete elements of the curriculum, for example, word knowledge associated with roots, suffixes, and prefixes, could be taught within the larger context of the designated reading materials instead of on their own. Both Kathryn and Darlene reflected that word knowledge was one of the discrete elements of the curriculum map they had not prioritized. This is consistent with the work of Datnow & Castellano (2000) who concluded that teachers drop some aspects of the curriculum document because of time constraints. I wanted to help them see that by approaching their curriculum with an instructionally dense mindset, they could address more skills without dramatically altering what they had planned. In what Pressley, Allington, & Morrow et al. (1998) described as “effective-for-locale” classrooms, “a great deal of skills instruction was occurring, [and] it co-occurred with immersion in literature and writing” (p. 21).

Molly needed a great deal of coaching and guidance along these lines. Because she conceptualized her daily plans in terms of activities, I pushed her to re-imagine how those activities could relate to one another. Her tendency was to focus

her planning on low-level assessment of comprehension so that when students finished the day's reading, their assignment involved answering fairly simple questions about character names and basic happenings in the plot. I realized that if she didn't learn to layer in foundational skills and terminology, her students would not progress with the literary tools needed for deeper analysis.

Learning to layer individual lessons also calls for ways to re-think the organizing principle of lesson plan documents. Each of the participants worked from the templates required by the district and which followed the gradual release of instruction model. The lesson plan documents emphasized the mastery of individual skills, and not how to layer multiple skills within a given lesson. With the exception of Shelley who knew she would address all or most of the curriculum document because of her long-range plans, none of the participants including myself had a system for formally tracking or reflecting on the requisite skills and concepts once the school year came to a close. This has implications for students as they move from grade to grade with the expectation of having been at least exposed to certain skills that would be part of the following grade's curriculum. As I will discuss in a later section, this is an area for further inquiry.

Theme #2: Different uses of instructional density. Each participant developed her own way of understanding and enacting instructional density. For Molly, it meant integrating the activities she had planned in daily lessons. By the end of the study, Molly had made some modest progress, and relayed that she was using the literature in her curriculum to extend student understanding of other skills. In our final interview, Molly explained, "I try to consciously think about how to integrate

like the skill or skills that I'm teaching for the day in many different ways throughout the class so if I'm teaching a grammar skill I'm also trying to figure out ways I can, like, have them practice it in their reading or their writing for the day" (Interview #2, 5-12-16). Kathryn used instructional density to remediate what she perceived as her students' deficit in vocabulary, word associations, and parts of speech. For many of her students, these deficits presented a barrier to reading comprehension. She told me that, "...but just being aware of instructional density like going back to words and things that we've already done... more so than I did first semester to reinforce these concepts in a loop sort of way" (Interview #2, 5-12-16). Both Kathryn and Shelley described their use of instructional density as a way to loop through content. They viewed it as a way to embed curricular elements both in anticipation of future content and as a way to review content. For example, early in the study Shelley had not yet formally introduced students to the descriptive writing rubric. Instead, she planned for mini-lessons in which students referred to various aspects of it in anticipation of a more formal, organized lesson she would plan later. Darlene understood and enacted instructional density as a triangulation tool. She explained how she had learned to plan her lessons around a primary skill, but layered in something they consistently struggled with or a skill they had not yet grasped. The third layer of the lesson was usually associated with a different activity, for example, sometimes students would write summaries about a piece of non-fiction. My own thinking about instructional density most mirrored that of Darlene's in that, like her, my plans for reading a piece of literature or non-fiction

involved the layering of skills that were both for review and reinforcement of content involved in other areas of teaching.

Theme #3: Integration of reading and writing. Each participant found ways to forge more meaningful connections between reading and writing activities. In the original literature, the authors cite that in the most effective classrooms, teachers interwove reading and writing in an almost seamless fashion (Wharton-McDonald, Pressley, & Mistretta-Hamptson, 1998; Pressley, Allington, & Morrow et al., 1998). The teachers in these studies were committed to connecting reading and writing opportunities within the broad realm of the content area. Each participant learned ways to fuse the two more intentionally. And in a similar fashion to Theme #2, each participant found her own unique ways to layer skills across areas of reading and writing, even in class sections where reading was more of an emphasis than writing. It was also true for Shelley, the participant who exhibited the most evidence of instructional density, but who still found new ways to draw connections between literature and writing.

Theme #4: Productive collegiality. Whatever their level of experience, all teachers in the study reported an appreciation for having opportunities to collaborate with one another in regards to navigating their curriculum. Specifically, each participant cited the benefit of bringing emphasis to this oft-neglected aspect of teaching. At the beginning of the study and throughout our collaborative discussions, I noted a marked tension when participants described their experiences with the curriculum. The novices, each of whom taught sections of reading, were given a rough curriculum map that indicated a set of skills to be taught each quarter,

but only two resources—one print and one online, that were to be used throughout the entire school year. Molly and Kathryn taught sections of the reading course as well as language arts, doubling the work of lesson planning. This was an arduous task, especially given that the curriculum document for the latter is arguably more exhaustive and detailed. Shelly and I both taught sections of Honors language arts sections but there was not a corresponding curriculum document. Our planning involved selecting appropriately leveled reading materials from the extant document but by and large, created many of our own materials that were more suited for skilled readers and writers. Darlene also taught two sections of Honors reading, but unlike those of us who taught language arts, had no corresponding map from which to select reading materials. In fact when Darlene began her first year at Moljner Middle School, the district had failed to purchase the set of anthologies that were designated for use in 7th grade Honors reading courses, leaving her with no resources whatsoever when she began the year.

In addition to these tensions, Kathryn and Darlene expressed anxiety about the 2016-2017 school year, as an increase in the student population would necessitate some rotating of staff teaching assignments. This shifting meant that one or both of them would be teaching new sections they had not previously taught, requiring them to learn a new curriculum. From beginning to end, a theme that emerged was that the participants in the study both needed and appreciated opportunities to talk about the structure and enactment of their curriculum. Though the present study was designed to consider it in light of instructional density, the participants felt that the collaboration eased their tension.

Implications for Practice: Dialogic Enactment

The study was also designed to identify ways participants used classroom dialogue as instructional density. This is described as “frequently inserting mini-lessons on topics that arose in the course of their lessons” (Wharton-McDonald, Pressley, & Mistretta Hampston, 1998, p. 115). The teachers in the original study were constantly on the lookout for opportunities to teach, in fact, they “constantly used learning opportunities as they arose,” (p. 117). Their dialogue was rich with the terminology of the content with much evidence of higher-level vocabulary in teacher talk. They also frequently tapped student understanding by responding to student questions with metacognitive strategies that helped them elicit a sense of student understanding, and that informed how they would be helpful. In the present study, the teachers displayed varying degrees of dialogic instructional density. Shelley was the most adept at using teacher talk to achieve more than one goal at the same time. I consistently observed her use of dialogue to reinforce behavioral expectations, to use high-level vocabulary and praise students for doing so, and to bring verbal attention to standards and skills she had not yet addressed formally. I recognized an area for growth in her dialogue, however, which shaped the coaching during subsequent discussions. I encouraged Shelley to consider recasting student questions in a more Socratic fashion rather than immediately responding. Engaging in back-and-forth questioning would be more conducive to fostering critical thinking as well as help her assess student understanding. Molly demonstrated the least use of instructionally dense classroom dialogue. Even after extensive coaching that encouraged her to experiment with taking student comments or questions and

relating them back to the content, I observed little progress. Her lockstep approach to moving through the elements of the day's plan rarely allowed for creative improvisation. Kathryn and Darlene were both very open to ways they could use verbal interactions more effectively while teaching. Kathryn used many sophisticated vocabulary words as a habit, but observations also revealed many instances of not using terminology specific to her content. Darlene's teacher talk, on the other hand, was rich with both high-level vocabulary and language of the discipline, but rarely elicited student questions or gave in-depth responses to comments. This was especially true when the classroom management issues demanded her attention.

Theme #1: Guided participation. Both the novice and experienced participants benefited from coaching that attended to how they interact with students. All of the classroom observations revealed missed opportunities for interaction. In simpler terms, these can be called *teachable moments*, as Glasswell and Parr (2009) have designated as opportunities to engage with students around subject matter content to foster deeper understanding. For the novices, I sensed that the missed opportunities sometimes had to do with inexperience in many domains of teaching, not the least of which was classroom management. Much of their energy for teacher talk was spent on attending to frequent misbehaviors and disruptions that often took their attention away from the task at hand. For Shelley and I, whose classroom environments were well-managed and open spaces for rich dialogue to occur, the missed opportunities were easily remediated by having an outside observer point them out. Experienced teachers may become entrenched in

procedures and methods of communicating that have been effective in achieving their purposes.

Theme #2: Questioning. While I observed all of the participants using verbal questioning for a variety of purposes, I rarely observed it as what Fisher & Frey (2010) refer to as *divergent*. Divergent questions are designed to uncover the manners in which a student uses what they know to formulate new understandings, assumptions, or realizations. There was also a marked lack of *heuristic*-type questions, or ones that tap student understanding about strategies to solve problems.

Theme #3: Visual aides in the classroom. Another theme that emerged was even when I observed participants use instructionally dense dialogue with students, it often did not accompany a visual aid that would promote further understanding. In many of the coaching sessions, I encouraged the participants to verbally connect student comments or questions back to the content, but also provide an improvisational visual for that content. A dry erase board that ran the entire length of the wall flanked each of the participants' classrooms. Often the space was taken by posters, homework charts, vocabulary lists, daily objectives, or in some cases, student scribbling and drawings. I coached each participant to leave a section of white board clear for occasions that arose. Not only would they be able to support content visually for students, but it would also serve as a visual reminder for themselves to be open to deviating from the lesson plan.

Theme #4: Extending purpose. The coaching I provided during the study often had less to do with the direct enactment of instructional density. The novices in the

study had pressing concerns, mostly that involved issues of classroom management so that sometimes our conversations were about things that would ultimately lead to enacting more instructional density. For example, during one session I coached Molly extensively on how the mishandled structural aspects of her lesson precluded her from being able to have verbal exchanges with students. It also became clear that the novices did not see their dialogic exchanges with students as opportunities to reinforce behavioral expectations. Some of my coaching was directed at helping them layer their teacher talk with a stream of verbiage related to keeping students on task and focused, thereby engendering the conditions that would allow for other kinds of verbal exchange directly related to learning.

Content Knowledge and Instructional Density

Content knowledge and the curriculum. In this section, I share some considerations in the relationship between content knowledge and using instructional density. The study revealed several barriers to enactment, especially for the novices who were still familiarizing with their curriculum and lesson planning. This has implications for professional development and the support that is critical to helping novices develop a sense of agency in their practice. In Chapter 2, I outlined a number of professional development practices that research has deemed effective in the current era of curricular reform. Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin (1995) cite “knowledge sharing” in creating conditions in which practitioners can acquire and use new knowledge and skills. In the same chapter I also addressed the need for professional development that brings attention to subject matter content knowledge and curriculum design. Darling-Hammond, Wei, and Andree et al. (2009)

report that U.S. teachers spend little time in professional development that is directly tied to “designing curriculum and sharing practices and the collaboration that occurs tends to be weak and not focused on strengthening teaching and learning” (p. 5). The experienced participants, Shelley, and myself had different needs than the novices in terms of having the necessary content knowledge to enact instructional density. While we had years of familiarity with our curriculum, the novices had little. A particular struggle that emerged throughout the study was that their enactment of instructional density was hindered by not having significant time with which to read materials—whether full novels, selections from the literature anthology, or shorter pieces—before teaching them to students. Because they were often just ahead of their students in the content at hand, they often missed opportunities to cast particular nuances or features of the material within the larger context of the curriculum.

The study also revealed that in terms of content, the novices relied on the list of topics and skills conveyed in the curriculum document. It was evident that they were “surviving” from day to day without an overarching sense of purpose about the important ideas of their discipline. Bransford, Brown, & Cocking (1999) describe how experts’ knowledge is centered around enduring ideas about subject matter and can be applied across many different contexts and situations. Shelley, the most experienced participant in the group, organized her content around the quarterly thematic lenses provided in the curriculum document. This guided every aspect of her instruction, and stood in stark contrast to how the novices organized their knowledge. This was very evident in the dialogic aspects of their teaching when they

repeatedly missed opportunities to engage students in sophisticated discussion about issues that arose from a text. For example, I observed few instances of novices helping students connect characters' experiences to their own, a critical piece of content for teaching literature in the middle grades.

The study also considered that the novice participants would have limited but developing conceptions of pedagogical content knowledge, what Grossman, Shulman, & Rickert (1989) describe as the unique province of teachers and includes an understanding of the useful ways to present subject matter content to different learners. Some scholars (Ball and Cohen, 1996; Ball and Feiman-Nemser, 1988) have articulated how curricular materials are a critical feature of pedagogical content knowledge. By the time the present inquiry began, the novices had access to the primary curricula but were still working out their understanding of how to use it, what supplementary materials best supported the standards and were effective for student learning, and how that contents of it would translate across the different grade levels in the building. All of the novice participants relied on supplementary materials—worksheets, handouts, study guides, etc. that were part of the curriculum package provided to them. The experienced teachers, on the other hand, used supplementary materials they had created themselves and by doing so, were able to layer them with more of the standards and skills they were designed to reinforce.

The Role of Collaborative Discourse

The inquiry was also designed to examine the role of post-observation discussions in the development of instructional density. By the end of the study,

there was universal agreement among the participants that the observations and subsequent discussions were the most important factor in their increased use of instructional density. In this section, I briefly outline some facets of the professional discourse that were beneficial to participants. Guskey and Yoon (2009) stress that professional development “should build on the combined expertise of in-house staff members” and that “the most effective way to bring improvement is to have educators in each school meet regularly to explore common problems and seek solutions based on shared experiences and collective wisdom” (p. 496). The present study considered that navigating a large body of curriculum was a “common problem” and one that we could explore and begin the process of ameliorating through observations and focused discussion. In this way, we were relying on “inside” expertise, that is, we considered ourselves and our common content sufficient to examine a problem of practice.

I, along with the participants, regarded our collaboration as useful in part because of our willingness to discuss a range of topics besides instructional density. There were many times in our post-observation sessions the novices used me as a sounding board for many of the challenges and frustrations that come with the territory of being a new teacher. But the discussions had a purpose beyond providing a platform for expressing the loneliness of day-to-day classroom instruction. The discussions honored the complexity of our practice. Through collaboration, we were able to discuss the many overt and nuanced factors that determine how and if instructional density was evident in the classroom. Cochran-Smith (2001) and others have criticized the narrow view often taken by

professional development aimed at improving the quality of teaching. It simply does not acknowledge the sheer complexity of the teaching enterprise. Opfer and Pedder (2011) describe the complexity as “complex systems thinking” and that “there are various dynamics at work in social behavior and these interact and combine in different ways such that even the simplest decisions can have multiple causal pathways” (p. 378).

That being said, the collaborative discourse was also useful because we centered it on a focused topic—instructional density. Because we sustained our work over a period of time and gave focused attention on a construct, the participants had sufficient time to fully consider how it could be incorporated into their practice, and the complications therein. Each of the participants noted that the administrators’ observations that continued to occur as part of the larger picture of teacher evaluation, were neither useful nor desirable. The feedback generated from these was too comprehensive and overwhelmingly positive, lacking any specific areas for growth or providing ongoing support or coaching.

Summary

The present study illustrated how teachers, both novices and experienced, enacted instructional density in their teaching practice. In Chapter 1, I situated the inquiry within the Dimensions of Adaptive Expertise (see Figure 5.1). This model characterizes how teachers become adaptive experts, that is, how they learn to balance mastery of routines and procedures with innovation of content so that they can adeptly respond to the needs of learners by providing a richer learning experience and one that layers the many skills and standards within the content.

The optimal adaptability corridor, therefore, is a space in which instructional density can be realized. The process of adapting instruction, both in planning domains and in live interactions with students, hinged upon a number of variables along the horizontal dimension of efficiency. The novices, who were still learning to establish classroom environments that were conducive to layering, struggled with enacting instructional density. Part of their struggle was with issues of classroom management (broadly conceived) that are foundational to developing more sophisticated purposes and activities of instruction. The study revealed that growth in both domains occurs unevenly, and is characterized the complex interplay of a number of variables.

Limitations

This qualitative inquiry sought to understand how a group of novice and experienced middle-level language arts and reading teachers found ways to enact more instructional density in their practice. The study was limited by demographics, the location of the school district, and the pool of participants. Because the inquiry involved only a small group of teachers—5 that included myself, the principal investigator, the study could not be duplicated nor could the findings be generalized to other groups of teachers. I also limited my participants to 7th and 8th grade reading and language arts teachers, excluding the 6th grade teachers in the building in favor of creating a more manageable inquiry.

Another limitation, and one that I addressed in Chapter 3, was related to my role as a practitioner researcher and the relationships I had established with participants prior to the period of study. Because the novices considered me a

mentor, and because I shared a friendly and collegial relationship with all of them, it was possible and even likely their responses during the discussions and interviews were influenced in myriad ways by the level of familiarity with me as a colleague. I attended to possibilities for bias throughout the process of gathering and analyzing data, however. I ensured all results were accurately recorded and that participants' thoughts and experiences were verified through member checks and peer reviews.

Finally, the study was limited in that the observations were not conducted in a systematic fashion. Though each participant invested upwards of 12-15 hours over the course of the year in interviews, observations, and discussions, this was not enough time for a sustained examination of instructional density in practice. A longer period of study would provide a clearer picture of how the enactment of instructional density evolved over time. Given the limitations, however, the collection and synthesis of data was thorough and provided thick, rich descriptions of enactment and experiences with instructional density. In addition, I treated each participant as her own independent agent in developing an instructionally dense practice. Therefore, the data would be of value to language arts and reading teachers in a variety of school settings as well as literacy coaches and professional developers.

Study Significance

The study was designed to explore the different uses of instructional density in the practice of novice and experienced teachers. While there is an abundant body of research on the precise and varied habits of effective teaching, there is a limited amount that specifically names and discusses density. Further, the extant literature

cites instructional density as a practice of effective teachers, something that is certainly useful but not an in-depth analysis of how less effective teachers can learn to apply it to their own practice. My study was novel in that it applied instructional density to a problem of practice and acknowledged that teachers, especially those new to the profession, need opportunities to engage in ongoing, sustained collaboration with teachers in their same content area. They also benefit from opportunities to work jointly in matters of curriculum, which presents daily, tangible complexities in the professional life of a novice.

Each of the participants credited *intentionality* with their enactment of instructional density. At the outset of the study, they understood on an intuitive level the *what* of instructional density, but through their participation better understood the *how* of its enactment. Each of the participants found ways to execute it in their practice because as a construct, it was at the forefront of their thinking as they approached their lesson plans and interactions with students.

The study is also significant because it was designed to acknowledge what research has revealed about professional development most likely to engender change in practice. The inquiry was structured around live classroom observations, which gives rise to rich, contextual, and authentic conversations about teaching and learning. Darling-Hammond, Wei, and Andree (2009) cite a significant drop in the percentage of teachers who visit other classrooms. It was also designed to be collaborative in nature and with teachers of a similar subject matter content, which these researchers cite as a professional development practice most desired by practitioners. The study design was especially valuable for the novices in that it

allowed them access to experienced colleagues. Not only were they able to gather valuable, focused feedback that was immediately applicable to their practice, but it strengthened our working relationships. Finally, the intensive, ongoing nature of the inquiry allowed all of the participants, including myself, to experiment with new practices and strategies and then discuss them with knowledgeable others.

Implications for Further Research

In the body of research from which instructional density derived, Wharton-McDonald, Pressley, & Mistretta-Hampston (1998) outlined criteria for how building administrators characterized effective teaching. Through their observations of live classrooms, they were able to synthesize just what habits and practices make some teachers more effective than others. In fact, they identified more than 200 such traits (Pressley, Allington, & Morrow et al., 1998). It became clear in the present study that examining a specific facet of excellent teaching may not sufficiently acknowledge the complex mix of components that come to bear on practice. Instructional density is a worthwhile lens through which to view effective practice, but its complex relationship with other attributes would warrant further study.

The present study was also a teacher-centered one, that is, it was designed to explore how teachers enact a certain pedagogical construct. A logical “next move” in terms of exploring instructional density would be to extrapolate its effects on outcomes for students. The findings revealed a variety of insights and possibilities for conceiving of curriculum in terms of layering, and for dialogic considerations with content. However, another area for research would be to explore how students

fare in classrooms with high instructional density. This could be accomplished through any number of qualitative and quantitative means.

Throughout the process of observing participants and then conducting post-observation reflection sessions, it was clear that some of the participants had a greater demonstrable enthusiasm toward the nature of their work. Though it was not the purpose of the study to examine the elusive constructs of teacher beliefs and dispositions, sometimes referred to as *efficacy* and originally defined by Berman, McLaughlin, Bass, Pauly, & Zellman (1977) as “the extent to which the teacher believes he or she has the capacity to affect student performance (p. 137), I did note marked differences in some of the participants’ willingness, enthusiasm, and levels of creativity. Kathryn, who showed the most growth, also had the most enduringly positive attitude about her purpose as a teacher, her desire to grow, and her enthusiasm about garnering feedback from those more experienced than her. Likewise, Shelley exhibited high levels of personal agency in pushing her students into deeper realms of intellectual growth. She too was eager to learn about new ways she could help her students achieve mastery of the content. Her ceaseless energy in and out of the classroom was certainly a factor in her consistent enactment of instructional density. An area for further study would be the relationship between efficacy and instructional density.

It also became evident in exploring the planning aspects of instructional density that if the construct were to gain wider acceptance, new considerations of lesson plan design would have to be made. This would also present an area for research. Teachers in Moljner School District submit their daily plans according to

the policies of their building administrators, but all teachers choose from 5 similar templates that are designed around the Gradual Release of Instruction (Fisher & Frey, 2013) framework. This lesson plan model emphasizes the mastery of skills in a singular fashion. That is, the model does not invite teachers to consider how to layer many skills at once. This presents implications for future structural adaptations that would keep instructional density at the forefront of planning.

Another area for exploration, and one that was revealed through many hours of classroom observation is the possibility that instructional density is more difficult to enact in certain contexts. Each of the participants, including the more experienced ones, were challenged by classes in which the mix of students presented with wide ranges of ability. The novices cited that in especially in their reading and mixed special education classes, the students' lack of academic skills accompanied untenable and often overwhelming motivation and behavioral problems. This had bearing on how much and how often they were able to deviate from the lesson plan to attend to student inquiry. These problems also affected how much they were able to "cover," as well as the pace at which students acquired given skills. In fact, I had the sense that in some of the classes I observed, the novice participants were maintaining only tenuous control, and it often precluded the degree to which they were able to creatively improvise the direction of the lesson.

Finally, an area of research would be to explore instructional density in light of other content areas. The present study was limited to 7th and 8th grade reading and language arts teachers. There is much to be learned about how instructional density could be enacted across different disciplines in the middle grades.

Final Thoughts

The present study revealed that there is a need to attend directly and in a sustained fashion to how curriculum is negotiated and enacted in classroom practice. The findings demonstrate a new vision for the conceptualization of curriculum, that is, instructional density is a way to ease tensions that are inherent to managing a large body of content in a cohesive fashion. The study also revealed the varying ways in which teachers used instructional density in their practice. Each participant found ways to understand and enact it according to the particular contexts of her teaching, her levels of adaptive expertise, and her knowledge of the content and their students. My case study was exploratory in nature; much is yet to be learned. However, this type of practitioner inquiry holds promise for how professional development can be organized to remediate a problem of practice. In this case, the study provided needed support to teachers with varying degrees of expertise. It was individualized to support their needs and honored their ways of thinking and problem solving.

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Appendix A



Grade 7



LA 7.1 Reading: Students will learn and apply reading skills and strategies to comprehend text.

LA 7.1.1	Concepts of Print: Students will demonstrate knowledge of the concepts of print. <i>Mastered in Grade 1 and blended with other skills at this grade level.</i>
LA 7.1.2	Phonological Awareness: Students will demonstrate phonological awareness through oral activities. <i>Mastered in Grade 1 and blended with other skills at this grade level.</i>
LA 7.1.3	Word Analysis: Students will use knowledge of phonetic and structural analysis to read and write grade-level text across all disciplines.
LA 7.1.3.a	Know and apply phonetic and structural analysis (e.g., Greek and Latin roots and affixes, multi-syllable words) when reading, writing, and spelling grade-level text.
LA 7.1.4	Fluency: Students will read a variety of grade-level print/digital texts fluently with accuracy, appropriate pace, phrasing, and expression to support comprehension.
LA 7.1.4.a	Use reading strategies to persevere through text of increasing length and/or complexity.
LA 7.1.5	Vocabulary: Students will build and use conversational, academic, and content-specific grade-level vocabulary.
LA 7.1.5.a	Apply knowledge of Greek, Latin, and Anglo-Saxon roots, prefixes, and suffixes to understand complex words, including words across content areas.
LA 7.1.5.b	Select and apply knowledge of context clues (e.g., word, phrase, sentence, and paragraph clues) and text features to determine meaning of unknown words.
LA 7.1.5.c	Acquire new academic and content-specific grade-level vocabulary, relate to prior knowledge, and apply in new situations.
LA 7.1.5.d	Analyze and use semantic relationships (e.g., multiple meanings, synonyms, antonyms, figurative language, connotations, subtle distinctions) to determine the meaning of words, aid in comprehension, and improve writing.
LA 7.1.5.e	Verify meaning and pronunciation of words or phrases using reference materials.
LA 7.1.6	Comprehension: Students will construct meaning by applying prior knowledge, using text information, and monitoring comprehension while reading increasingly complex grade-level literary and informational text.
LA 7.1.6.a	Analyze the meaning, reliability, and validity of the text considering author's purpose and perspective.
LA 7.1.6.b	Analyze and explain the relationships between elements of literary text (e.g., character development, setting, plot, conflict, point of view, theme).
LA 7.1.6.c	Analyze the author's use of literary devices (e.g., simile, metaphor, personification, idiom, oxymoron, hyperbole, alliteration, onomatopoeia, analogy, tone, mood).
LA 7.1.6.d	Summarize, analyze, and synthesize a literary text and/or media, using key details to support interpretation of the theme.
LA 7.1.6.e	Summarize, analyze, and synthesize an informational text and/or media, using

- supporting details to formulate the main idea.
- LA 7.1.6.f Apply knowledge of text features to locate information and explain how the information contributes to an understanding of print and digital text.
 - LA 7.1.6.g Cite specific textual evidence to analyze and make inferences based on the characteristics of a variety of literary and informational texts.
 - LA 7.1.6.h Explain the relationships or interactions between two or more individuals, events, ideas, or concepts in literary and informational texts, citing textual evidence to develop a regional, national, and international multicultural perspective.
 - LA 7.1.6.i Construct and/or answer literal, inferential, critical, and interpretive questions and support answers with explicit evidence from the text or additional sources.
 - LA 7.1.6.j Apply knowledge of organizational patterns to comprehend informational text (e.g., sequence/chronological, description, spatial, cause and effect, compare/contrast, fact/opinion, proposition/support).
 - LA 7.1.6.k Select text for a particular purpose (e.g., answer a question, solve problems, enjoy, form an opinion, understand a specific viewpoint, predict outcomes, discover models for own writing, accomplish a task), citing evidence to support analysis, reflection, or research.
 - LA 7.1.6.l Build background knowledge and activate prior knowledge to clarify text, deepen understanding, and make text-to-self, text-to-text, and text-to-world connections while reading complex text.
 - LA 7.1.6.m Self-monitor comprehension and independently apply appropriate strategies to understand text.
 - LA 7.1.6.n Make and confirm/modify inferences with text evidence while previewing and reading literary, informational, digital text, and/or media.
 - LA 7.1.6.o Demonstrate an understanding of complex text using textual evidence via multiple mediums (e.g., writing, artistic representation, video, other media).
 - LA 7.1.6.p Analyze the extent to which a filmed or live production of a story, drama, or poem resembles or differs from the text or script.



LA 7.2 Writing: Students will learn and apply writing skills and strategies to communicate.

LA 7.2.1	Writing Process: Students will apply the writing process to plan, draft, revise, edit, and publish writing using correct spelling, grammar, punctuation, and other conventions of standard English appropriate for grade-level.
LA 7.2.1.a	Use prewriting activities and inquiry tools to recursively generate ideas, organize information, guide writing, and answer questions.
LA 7.2.1.b	Generate a draft that conveys complex ideas through analysis and use of organizational patterns that are suited to the purpose and intended audience, and includes a strong thesis, body, conclusion, and appropriate transitions linked to the purpose of the composition.
LA 7.2.1.c	Gather and use relevant information and evidence from multiple authoritative print and/or digital sources including primary and secondary sources to support claims or theses.
LA 7.2.1.d	Compose paragraphs with grammatically correct simple, compound, and complex sentences of varying length and complexity.
LA 7.2.1.e	Revise to improve and clarify writing through self-monitoring strategies and feedback from others.
LA 7.2.1.f	Provide oral, written, and/or digital descriptive feedback to other writers.
LA 7.2.1.g	Adjust writing processes to persevere in short and long-term writing tasks of increasing length and complexity.
LA 7.2.1.h	Proofread and edit writing recursively for format and conventions of standard English (e.g., spelling, capitalization, grammar, punctuation, syntax, semantics).
LA 7.2.1.i	Display academic honesty and integrity by avoiding plagiarism and/or overreliance on any one source and by following a standard format for citation.
LA 7.2.1.j	Publish a legible document using a variety of media, and apply formatting techniques to enhance the readability and impact of the document (e.g., fonts, spacing, design, images, citations).
LA 7.2.2	Writing Modes: Students will write in multiple modes for a variety of purposes and audiences across disciplines.
LA 7.2.2.a	Communicate information and ideas effectively in analytic, argumentative, descriptive, informative, narrative, poetic, persuasive, and reflective modes to multiple audiences using a variety of media and formats.
LA 7.2.2.b	Provide evidence from literary or informational text to support analysis, reflection, and research.
LA 7.2.2.c	Conduct and publish both short and sustained research projects to answer questions or solve problems using multiple primary and/or secondary sources to support theses.
LA 7.2.2.d	Use precise word choice and domain-specific vocabulary to write in a variety of modes.
LA 7.2.2.e	Analyze various mentor texts and/or exemplars in order to create a similar piece.



LA 7.3 Speaking and Listening: Students will develop and apply speaking and listening skills and strategies to communicate for a variety of purposes.

LA 7.3.1 Speaking: Students will develop, apply, and refine speaking skills and strategies to communicate key ideas in a variety of situations.

- LA 7.3.1.a Communicate ideas and information in a clear and concise manner suited to the purpose, setting, and audience (formal voice or informal voice), using appropriate word choice, grammar, and sentence structure.
- LA 7.3.1.b Demonstrate and adjust speaking techniques (e.g., appropriate eye contact, pacing, nonverbal cues, word choice) for a variety of purposes and situations, including interpreting text.
- LA 7.3.1.c Utilize appropriate visual and/or digital tools to enhance verbal communication and add interest.
- LA 7.3.1.d Convey a perspective with clear reasoning and valid evidence.
- LA 7.3.1.e Ask pertinent questions to acquire or confirm information.
- LA 7.3.1.f Address alternative or opposing perspectives when appropriate to the mode of speaking.

LA 7.3.2 Listening: Students will develop and demonstrate active listening skills across a variety of situations.

- LA 7.3.2.a Utilize active and attentive listening skills (e.g., eye contact, nonverbal cues, taking notes, summarizing, questioning) for multiple situations and modalities.
- LA 7.3.2.b Analyze and evaluate the purpose and credibility of information being presented in diverse media and formats.
- LA 7.3.2.c Complete a task following multi-step directions.

LA 7.3.3 Reciprocal Communication: Students will develop, apply, and adapt reciprocal communication skills.

- LA 7.3.3.a Apply appropriate social etiquette and practice social protocols when communicating.
- LA 7.3.3.b Demonstrate awareness of and sensitivity to the appropriate use of words (e.g., stereotypes, connotations, subtleties of language) in conversation.
- LA 7.3.3.c Apply conversation strategies to recognize, consider, and explain new information presented by others in relationship to one's own ideas.
- LA 7.3.3.d Listen, ask probing questions, and interpret information being communicated and consider its contribution to a topic, text, or issue under study.
- LA 7.3.3.e Collaboratively converse with peers and adults on grade-appropriate topics and texts, building on others' ideas to clearly and persuasively express one's own views while respecting diverse perspectives.



LA 7.4 Multiple Literacies: Students will apply information fluency and practice digital citizenship.

LA 7.4.1 Information Fluency: Students will evaluate, create, and communicate information in a variety of media and formats (textual, visual, and digital).

- LA 7.4.1.a Locate, organize, analyze, evaluate, and synthesize information from print and digital resources to generate and answer questions and create new understandings.
- LA 7.4.1.b Demonstrate ethical use of information and copyright guidelines by appropriately quoting or paraphrasing from a text and citing the source using available resources (e.g., online citation tools, publication guidelines).
- LA 7.4.1.c Use or decipher multiple formats of print and digital text (e.g., cursive, manuscript, font, graphics, symbols).

LA 7.4.2 Digital Citizenship: Students will practice the norms of appropriate and responsible technology use.

- LA 7.4.2.a Practice safe and ethical behaviors when communicating and interacting with others digitally (e.g., safe information to share, appropriate language use, utilize appropriate sites and materials, respect diverse perspectives).
- LA 7.4.2.b Use appropriate digital tools (e.g., social media, online collaborative tools, apps) to communicate with others for conveying information, gathering opinions, and solving problems.

Grade 8



LA 8.1 Reading: Students will learn and apply reading skills and strategies to comprehend text.

LA 8.1.1	Concepts of Print: Students will demonstrate knowledge of the concepts of print. <i>Mastered in Grade 1 and blended with other skills at this grade level.</i>
LA 8.1.2	Phonological Awareness: Students will demonstrate phonological awareness through oral activities. <i>Mastered in Grade 1 and blended with other skills at this grade level.</i>
LA 8.1.3	Word Analysis: Students will use knowledge of phonetic and structural analysis to read and write grade-level text across all disciplines.
LA 8.1.3.a	Know and apply phonetic and structural analysis (e.g., Greek and Latin roots and affixes, multi-syllable words) when reading, writing, and spelling grade-level text.
LA 8.1.4	Fluency: Students will read a variety of grade-level print/digital texts fluently with accuracy, appropriate pace, phrasing, and expression to support comprehension.
LA 8.1.4.a	Use reading strategies to persevere through text of increasing length and/or complexity.
LA 8.1.5	Vocabulary: Students will build and use conversational, academic, and content-specific grade-level vocabulary.
LA 8.1.5.a	Apply knowledge of Greek, Latin, and Anglo-Saxon roots, prefixes, and suffixes to understand complex words, including words across content areas.
LA 8.1.5.b	Select and apply knowledge of context clues (e.g., word, phrase, sentence, and paragraph clues) and text features to determine meaning of unknown words.
LA 8.1.5.c	Acquire new academic and content-specific grade-level vocabulary, relate to prior knowledge, and apply in new situations.
LA 8.1.5.d	Analyze and use semantic relationships (e.g., multiple meanings, synonyms, antonyms, figurative language, connotations, subtle distinctions) to determine the meaning of words, aid in comprehension, and improve writing.
LA 8.1.5.e	Verify meaning and pronunciation of words or phrases using reference materials.
LA 8.1.6	Comprehension: Students will construct meaning by applying prior knowledge, using text information, and monitoring comprehension while reading increasingly complex grade-level literary and informational text.
LA 8.1.6.a	Analyze the meaning, reliability, and validity of text considering author's purpose and perspective.
LA 8.1.6.b	Analyze and explain the relationships between elements of literary text (e.g., character development, setting, plot, conflict, point of view, inferred and recurring themes).
LA 8.1.6.c	Analyze the author's use of literary devices (e.g., simile, metaphor, personification, idiom, oxymoron, hyperbole, alliteration, onomatopoeia, analogy, tone, mood).
LA 8.1.6.d	Summarize, analyze and synthesize the development of a common theme between two literary text and/or media.

- LA 8.1.6.e Summarize, analyze, and synthesize the connection between the main ideas of two informational texts and/or media.
- LA 8.1.6.f Analyze and evaluate information from print and digital text features to support comprehension.
- LA 8.1.6.g Cite specific textual evidence to analyze and make inferences based on the characteristics of a variety of literary and informational texts.
- LA 8.1.6.h Analyze the social, historical, cultural, and biographical influences in a variety of texts, citing textual evidence from literary and informational text to develop a national and international multicultural perspective.
- LA 8.1.6.i Construct and/or answer literal, inferential, critical, and interpretive questions and support answers with explicit evidence from the text or additional sources.
- LA 8.1.6.j Apply knowledge of organizational patterns to comprehend informational text (e.g., sequence/chronological, description, spatial, cause and effect, compare/contrast, fact/opinion, proposition/support).
- LA 8.1.6.k Select text for a particular purpose (e.g., answer a question, solve problems, enjoy, form an opinion, understand a specific viewpoint, predict outcomes, discover models for own writing, accomplish a task), citing evidence to support analysis, reflection, or research.
- LA 8.1.6.l Build background knowledge and activate prior knowledge to clarify text, deepen understanding, and make connections while reading complex text.
- LA 8.1.6.m Self-monitor comprehension and independently apply appropriate strategies to understand text.
- LA 8.1.6.n Make and confirm/modify inferences with text evidence while previewing and reading literary, informational, digital text, and/or media.
- LA 8.1.6.o Demonstrate an understanding of complex text using textual evidence via multiple mediums (e.g., writing, artistic representation, video, other media).
- LA 8.1.6.p Analyze the extent to which a filmed or live production of a story, drama, or poem resembles or differs from the text or script.



LA 8.2 Writing: Students will learn and apply writing skills and strategies to communicate.

LA 8.2.1	Writing Process: Students will apply the writing process to plan, draft, revise, edit, and publish writing using correct spelling, grammar, punctuation, and other conventions of standard English appropriate for grade-level.
LA 8.2.1.a	Use prewriting activities and inquiry tools to recursively generate ideas, organize information, guide writing, answer questions, and synthesize information.
LA 8.2.1.b	Generate a draft that conveys complex ideas through analysis and use of organizational patterns that are suited to the purpose and intended audience and includes a strong thesis, body, conclusion, and appropriate transitions linked to the purpose of the composition.
LA 8.2.1.c	Gather and use relevant information and evidence from multiple authoritative print and/or digital sources including primary and secondary sources to support claims or theses.
LA 8.2.1.d	Compose paragraphs with grammatically correct simple, compound, and complex sentences of varying length and complexity.
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LA 8.2.1.f	Provide oral, written, and/or digital descriptive feedback to other writers.
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LA 8.2.1.i	Display academic honesty and integrity by avoiding plagiarism and/or overreliance on any one source and by following a standard format for citation.
LA 8.2.1.j	Publish a legible document using a variety of media, and apply formatting techniques to enhance the readability and impact of the document (e.g., fonts, spacing, design, images, citations).
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LA 8.2.2.c	Conduct and publish both short and sustained research projects to answer questions or solve problems using multiple primary and/or secondary sources to support theses

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LA 8.3.1.b Demonstrate and adjust speaking techniques (e.g., appropriate eye contact, pacing, nonverbal cues, word choice) for a variety of purposes and situations, including interpreting text.

LA 8.3.1.c Select and utilize appropriate visual and/or digital tools to enhance understanding for specific audiences.

LA 8.3.1.d Convey a perspective with clear reasoning and valid evidence.

LA 8.3.1.e Ask pertinent questions to acquire or confirm information.

LA 8.3.1.f Address alternative or opposing perspectives when appropriate to the mode of speaking.

LA 8.3.2 Listening: Students will develop and demonstrate active listening skills across a variety of situations.

LA 8.3.2.a Utilize active and attentive listening skills (e.g., eye contact, nonverbal cues, taking notes, summarizing, questioning) for multiple situations and modalities.

LA 8.3.2.b Analyze the purpose of information presented in diverse media and formats, evaluate its motives (e.g., social, commercial, political), and determine its credibility.

LA 8.3.2.c Complete a task following complex multi-step directions.

LA 8.3.3 Reciprocal Communication: Students will develop, apply, and adapt reciprocal communication skills.

LA 8.3.3.a Apply appropriate social etiquette and practice social protocols when communicating.

LA 8.3.3.b Demonstrate awareness of and sensitivity to the appropriate use of words (e.g., stereotypes, connotations, subtleties of language) in conversation.

LA 8.3.3.c Apply conversation strategies to recognize, consider, and explain new information presented by others in relationship to one's own ideas.

LA 8.3.3.d Listen, ask probing questions, and interpret information being communicated and consider its contribution to a topic, text, or issue under study.

LA 8.3.3.e Collaboratively converse with peers and adults on grade-appropriate topics and texts, building on others' ideas to clearly and persuasively express one's own views while respecting diverse perspectives.



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- LA 8.4.2.a Practice safe and ethical behaviors when communicating and interacting with others digitally (e.g., safe information to share, appropriate language use, utilize appropriate sites and materials, respect diverse perspectives).
- LA 8.4.2.b Use appropriate digital tools (e.g., social media, online collaborative tools, apps) to communicate with others for conveying information, gathering opinions, and solving problems.

Appendix B



Official Approval Letter for IRB project #15216

June 1, 2015

Marissa Jorgenson
Teaching, Learning and Teacher Education
3992 So. 153rd Cir. OMAHA, NE 68144

Stephanie Wessels
Teaching, Learning and Teacher Education
61C HENZ, UNL, 68588-0355

IRB Number: 20150615216 EX
Project ID: 15216
Project Title: Instructional Density in the Middle School Language Arts Classroom

Dear Marissa:

This letter is to officially notify you of the certification of exemption of your project by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) for the Protection of Human Subjects. Your proposal is in compliance with this institution's Federal Wide Assurance 00002258 and the DHHS Regulations for the Protection of Human Subjects (45 CFR 46) and has been classified as Exempt Category 2.

You are authorized to implement this study as of the Date of Exemption Determination: 06/01/2015.

1. Your stamped and approved informed consent document has been uploaded to NUgrant (files with Approved.pdf in the file name). Please use this document to distribute to participants. If you need to make changes to the informed consent document, please submit the revised document to the IRB for review and approval prior to using it.

We wish to remind you that the principal investigator is responsible for reporting to this Board any of the following events within 48 hours of the event:

- * Any serious event (including on-site and off-site adverse events, injuries, side effects, deaths, or other problems) which in the opinion of the local investigator was unanticipated, involved risk to subjects or others, and was possibly related to the research procedures;
- * Any serious accidental or unintentional change to the IRB-approved protocol that involves risk or has the potential to recur;
- * Any publication in the literature, safety monitoring report, interim result or other finding that indicates an unexpected change to the risk/benefit ratio of the research;
- * Any breach in confidentiality or compromise in data privacy related to the subject or others; or
- * Any complaint of a subject that indicates an unanticipated risk or that cannot be resolved by the research staff.

This project should be conducted in full accordance with all applicable sections of the IRB Guidelines and you should notify the IRB immediately of any proposed changes that may affect the exempt status of your research project. You should report any unanticipated problems involving risks to the participants or others to the Board.

If you have any questions, please contact the IRB office at 472-6965.

Sincerely,

Becky R. Freeman

Becky R. Freeman, CIP
for the IRB



Appendix C

Descriptive Feedback Peer Coaching Form 2015-2016

Teacher's Name: _____ Observer's Name: _____

Grade Level: _____ Content Area: _____ Date: _____

Number of students: _____ Number of Adults: _____ Arrival Time: _____ Depart Time: _____

TOP 5 PROCEDURES AND ROUTINES

#1 – 2x10 (ask before observation)

Who are some students your using 2x10 on during this quarter: _____

What is the goal of this 2x10: _____

#2 – Hand Raising

- Call Outs
- Talking over the teacher
- Non specific questions

#3 – Attention Getting Non-Verbal Techniques

- High Five and hand raised
- Chimes, clapping, tapping desks in rhythm
- Count backwards from 5
- All eyes on me eyes up front, heads up
- Visible Timer
- Student hand signals

#4 – Engagement Techniques – Record engagement techniques you observe below (white boards, games, thumbs up/down, response cards, smart board, and technology.

#5 – Give Directions Explicitly

- Verbal Directions
- Visual Directions
- Check for questions
- Student repeat back directions
- Begin Statement (when I say go)

List the procedures and routines you saw during the Coaching? List some examples:

Engagement and Interactions

- Teacher Modeled
- Student Response (Large Group)
- Pair Share
- Small Group
- Independent Work
- Agenda and Objectives displayed and clear

What are the students being asked to do?

Describe how the students are engaged in the lesson.

Describe the part of the gradual release process you are observing / focusing on.

Questioning

What type/level of questions are being asked in the lesson?

Do the students initiate the conversation, or are they responding to the teacher? Explain.

Final Thoughts

What will you take away from this observation?

DRAW A PICTURE OF THE ROOM

Appendix D



DIVISION OF RESEARCH

3215 CUMING STREET OMAHA, NEBRASKA 68131-2024 402-557-2080 FAX: 402-557-2049

May 22, 2015

Re: Instructional Density in the Middle School Language Arts Classroom (May 2015 to October 2015)

Dear Marissa Jorgenson:

The Research Review Committee has reviewed your research proposal that involves the collection of data from students, teachers, and administrators through processes such as the examination and/or collection of information from files or records, direct observation, focus groups, surveys, or individual interviews.

We believe your study has merit and permission is granted for you to proceed under the following conditions:

- The Principal of Davis Middle School agrees to your study.
- Teachers in affected buildings agree to your study.
- All interviews should be conducted outside of instructional time.
- In the reporting of the data/results, teachers, students, schools, and district will not be personally identifiable.
- You will share results of your study with OPS. The report should be sent to Lindsey Bandow (Lindsey.Bandow@ops.org) in the Research Division.
- The findings of the study must be shared with the Research Review Committee for review before being presented or released for publication or public access.
- The researcher(s) must obtain permission from the Superintendent's Office if Omaha Public Schools will in any way be identified in released oral or written findings (e.g., research paper, conference presentation, newspaper report).
- The collected data will be stored securely in a locked cabinet or under password protection.
- It is important to note that the Research Review Committee sees this as a limited study of this topic, and that results may not be generalizable.

Thank you for your interest and support in meeting the needs of our students.

Best wishes.

Sincerely,

Janet Zahm
Instructional Research Administrator
JZ/bf

pc: Principal

Appendix E



IRB # 20150615216 EX
Date Approved: 06/01/2015
Valid Until: 05/31/2020

COLLEGE OF EDUCATION AND HUMAN SCIENCES
Department of Teaching, Learning and Teacher Education

Participant Informed Consent Form

Title: *Instructional Density in the Middle School Language Arts Classroom* **Project ID:** 15216

COLLEGE OF EDUCATION AND HUMAN SCIENCES Department of Teaching, Learning and Teacher Education

Purpose: This research project will seek to understand how teachers use observation, collaboration, and reflection to implement facets of instructional density into their classroom practice.

Procedures: You will be asked to attend two informational sessions in which participants will be introduced to the topic and discuss a short reading concerning instructionally dense practice. You will also be interviewed by the investigator regarding thoughts about lesson planning and curriculum design. The initial information sessions and interviews will take place in May of 2015. At the beginning of the 2015-2016 school year, and lasting until the end of October 2015, participants will engage in a series of observations of Language Arts peers in the study group. Each participant will complete a total of 8 observations (observing each colleague 2x and lasting 30 minutes each) and carry out a brief post-observation reflection during which the Principal Investigator will be present. In addition, there will be two all-group sessions, one in early September and one in mid-October of 2015. The total time commitment of these activities for participants is approximately 9 hours.

Benefits: As a result of participation in this research, it is possible that your classroom practice will be enhanced or improved. The information obtained from this study may help us to better understand how teachers can layer their instruction so that they can more effectively teach the contents of their discipline.

Risks: There are no known risks as a result of participating in this study.

Confidentiality: This project involves group activities with other participants and the researcher(s) cannot guarantee your confidentiality due to the nature of group interaction and you should only share what you feel comfortable sharing in a group setting. Anything in the researcher's records will be maintained and stored in a locked cabinet and password-protected files. Any information obtained during this study from personal, one-on-one interviews which could identify you will be kept strictly confidential. The data will be stored in a locked cabinet in the investigator's office and will only be seen by the investigator during the study and for 4



years after the study is complete. The information obtained in this study will result in a published dissertation and may be published in scientific/educational journals, and/or presented at educational workshops and

conferences. All data will be reported in aggregate form.

Compensation: There will be no compensation for participation.

Opportunity to Ask Questions: Participants are welcome to ask any questions about any aspect of the study, at any time during the course of study or before agreeing to participate. Please contact the Principal Investigator at (402) 561-6130 to voice concerns about the research. If you have any questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant, you should contact the University of Nebraska-Lincoln Research Compliance Services Office at 402-472-6965.

Freedom to Withdraw: Participation in this study is voluntary. You can refuse to participate or withdraw at any time without harming your relationship with the researchers or the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, or in any other way receive a penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

Consent and Right to Receive a Copy: You are voluntarily making a decision whether or not to participate in

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this research study. Your signature certifies that you have decided to participate having read and understood the information presented. You will be given a copy of this consent form to keep.

Signature of Participant: _____

Signature of Research Participant Date

Name and Phone Number(s) of Investigators:

Marissa A. Jorgenson, Doctoral Candidate, Principal Investigator (402) 561-6130

Stephanie Wessels, Ph.D., Secondary Investigator (402) 472-2237

Appendix F

Marissa A. Jorgenson
CPED Cohort III
Teaching, Learning, and Teacher Education
Semi-Structured Interview Questions

Biographical Questions

- Describe your own educational background.
- How long have you been teaching?
- What attracted you to the profession?
- (*novices only*) How is teaching different than you had anticipated while in training?

Curriculum Questions

- What has been your experience with your assigned curriculum?
- How do you approach balancing the different components of the curriculum?

Lesson Planning Questions

- Tell me about your approach to lesson planning.
- What educational experiences informed the process you use to plan lessons?
- (*novices only*) What do you find most challenging about lesson planning?

Appendix G

EXIT INTERVIEW

Primary research question: In what ways do middle level reading and language arts teachers enact instructionally dense practice?

Subsidiary research questions: (1) How do differences in content knowledge inform the process of using instructional density?

(2) How do practitioners negotiate meaning of instructionally dense practice through collaborative discussion as they enact it in practice?

1. How has your understanding and knowledge of instructional density changed since you first learned about it? What do you attribute that to?
2. To what extent have you developed more instructional density in your teaching practice?
3. In terms of planning, what do you consider to be a strength in terms of instructional density? Areas for improvement?
4. In terms of being “in the moment” and helping students make connections, what do you feel are your strengths? Areas for improvement?
5. Please talk about the most meaningful experiences in terms of the observations you’ve participated in.
6. How helpful was it to be able to collaborate after an observation?
7. Do you feel you have sufficient content knowledge to be more instructionally dense in your practice?
8. How will you use instructional density moving forward?
9. To what extent would the opportunity to continue with peer observations be valuable to your professional life?

Appendix H

FIELD NOTES

Participants	
Date	
Description of Activities/ Observations	
Reflections	
Emerging Questions	

Appendix I



Synthesis

PAIRED TEXTS: "How Candy Conquered America" and
 "This Cupcake Is Trying to Hurt You," pages 22-28
 October 2015

Name: _____ Date: _____

Synthesis

Directions: Answer the questions below to synthesize information from "How Candy Conquered America" and "This Cupcake Is Trying to Hurt You." Then check the box that shows where the information comes from. (In some cases, you will check both boxes.) Use your answers to help you respond to the writing prompt on page 28.

Question	Answer	Source (check one or both)
How has the consumption of sugar and candy changed since the 1800s?		<input type="checkbox"/> "How Candy Conquered America" <input type="checkbox"/> "This Cupcake Is Trying to Hurt You"
What was known about nutrition in the time of Chase's lozenges?		<input type="checkbox"/> "How Candy Conquered America" <input type="checkbox"/> "This Cupcake Is Trying to Hurt You"
How has the price of sugar affected the consumption of sugar over time?		<input type="checkbox"/> "How Candy Conquered America" <input type="checkbox"/> "This Cupcake Is Trying to Hurt You"
What effect did Chase's lozenge-making machine have on candy-eating in America?		<input type="checkbox"/> "How Candy Conquered America" <input type="checkbox"/> "This Cupcake Is Trying to Hurt You"
What are the health risks associated with a high-sugar diet? How do we know about these risks?		<input type="checkbox"/> "How Candy Conquered America" <input type="checkbox"/> "This Cupcake Is Trying to Hurt You"
How did health experts' opinions about fatty diets in the 1980s affect sugar consumption?		<input type="checkbox"/> "How Candy Conquered America" <input type="checkbox"/> "This Cupcake Is Trying to Hurt You"

Appendix J



Vocabulary Acquisition

DRAMA: *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow*, pages 11-16
September 2015

Name: _____ Date: _____

Vocabulary:

The Legend of Sleepy Hollow and "You Live in Sleepy Hollow"

1. **absorb (AB-sawrb)** *verb*; To absorb something is to take it in or soak it up. A sponge can absorb water, a brain can absorb information, and an activity can absorb your time. If something absorbs your attention, it holds your attention completely. (The adjective *absorbed* means "deeply interested or involved.")
2. **brood (BREWD)** *noun or verb*; As a noun, *brood* refers to a family of young animals or children. It is most often used to refer to a group of young birds that all hatched at the same time.

As a verb, *brood* means to sit on your eggs and incubate them—if you are a bird. If you are not a bird, to brood is to think about something all the time in a worried, gloomy way.
3. **cacophony (kuh-KOF-uh-nee)** *noun*; A mix of harsh, loud, unpleasant sounds that makes you want to block your ears: that's cacophony.
4. **flax (FLAKS)** *noun*; Flax is a type of plant. It is made into the fabric called linen. People and certain animals eat the seeds of flax, which are called—you guessed it—*flaxseeds*.
5. **groggily (GRAW-gih-lee)** *adverb*; *Groggily* is the adverb form of the adjective *groggy*, which means confused or foggy-headed because of being sleepy or sick. You might be groggy when you first wake up, particularly if you didn't get enough sleep. If you groggily finished your homework, it might not be your best work: you were a little dazed and unfocused as you were doing it.
6. **mercenary (MUR-suh-neh-ree)** *noun*; A mercenary is a soldier who is paid by a foreign country to fight in its army. Soldiers who are not mercenaries often fight out of loyalty to their country or for a cause. A mercenary, on the other hand, fights only to get paid.
7. **musket (MUHS-kit)** *noun*; A musket is a type of long gun that soldiers used from the 16th to 18th centuries, before the invention of the rifle.

Appendix K

Language Arts 8: Responsibility
Quarter 1 Conceptual Lens: Roles

1 st 9 Weeks	2 nd 9 Weeks	3 rd 9 Weeks	4 th 9 Weeks
Theme: ROLES	Theme: RELATIONSHIPS	Theme: ADVERSITY	Theme: RISKS
Reading	Reading	Reading	Reading
Extended Text: Novel of Choice	Extended Text: Novel of Choice	Extended Text: Novel of Choice	Extended Text: <i>Diary of Anne Frank</i> or novel of choice
Shorter Texts: 3-5 texts from the literature book, incorporating a blend of literature, non-fiction, and poetry selected from Q1 resources	Shorter Texts: 3-5 texts from the literature book, incorporating a blend of literature, non-fiction, and poetry selected from Q2 resources	Shorter Texts: 3-5 texts from the literature book, incorporating a blend of literature, non-fiction, and poetry selected from Q3 resources	Shorter Texts: 3-5 texts from the literature book, incorporating a blend of literature, non-fiction, and poetry selected from Q4 resources
Writing	Writing	Writing	Writing
Focus: Descriptive	Focus: Argumentative/Persuasive	Focus: Descriptive/Narrative	Focus: Expository Essay
Skills: Pre-Writing, organizing, drafting, giving feedback	Skills: Analyzing models, writing based on models in different genres, editing & revising	Skills: Consider audience, purpose, and format when writing	Skills: Independently complete all steps in the writing process
Routine Writing Notes, summaries, process journals, and short responses across all genres	Routine Writing Notes, summaries, process journals, and short responses across all genres	Routine Writing Notes, summaries, process journals, and short responses across all genres	Routine Writing Notes, summaries, process journals, and short responses across all genres
2-3 descriptive paragraphs including figurative language	1-2 descriptive essays including figurative language	1-2 descriptive essays including figurative language	1-2 expository essays including figurative language
Multiple Literacy/GLE*	Multiple Literacy/GLE	Multiple Literacy/GLE	Multiple Literacy/GLE
Choose a research topic Begin evaluating websites	Complete website evaluations Annotated Bibliography (NoodleTools)		
Speaking/Listening	Speaking/Listening	Speaking/Listening	Speaking/Listening
Narrative Speech	Informational Speech	Narrative Speech	Persuasive Speech
ASSESSMENTS	ASSESSMENTS	ASSESSMENTS	ASSESSMENTS
Acuity District Writing	Guided Learning Experience	NeSA-W Acuity NeSA-R	Grammar CBA Final Project

Language Arts 8: Responsibility
Quarter 1 Conceptual Lens: Roles

VOCABULARY	NOVELS	STANDARD	SKILL
Short Story Elements: Round/Flat Characters, Static/Dynamic Characters, POV, Characterization, Theme, Conflict, Plot, Setting Figurative Language: Analogies, Alliteration, Onomatopoeia, Rhyme, Rhyme Scheme, Meter, Allusion Text Structure: C/E, C/C Genre: Expository vs. Narrative, Narrative Essay, Narrative Poem, Epic Poem, Free Verse, Sci-Fi Explicit/Implicit/Implied Overview/Summary, Reflect Author's Purpose/Style Mood <i>BOLD TEXT indicates words that should be taught using the 6-Step Vocabulary Method; other terms may be simply reviewed or may require re-teaching.</i>	<i>Shadow Club</i> <i>Things Not Seen</i> <i>Elsewhere</i> <i>Hope Was Here</i> <i>Toning the Sweep</i> <i>The Giver</i> <i>Monster (restricted)</i> <i>Touching Spirit Bear</i> <i>Nothing But the Truth</i> DL = Dual Language/Available in Spanish	READING: Literature 8.1.6.a 8.1.6.b 8.1.6.c 8.1.6.d READING: Informational 8.1.6.e 8.1.6.g 8.1.6.i 8.1.6.j WRITING 8.2.1.a 8.2.1.b 8.2.1.c 8.2.1.d 8.2.1.e 8.2.1.f	Analyze the meaning, reliability, and validity of text considering author's purpose and perspective. Analyze and explain the relationships between elements of literary text. Analyze the author's use of literary devices. Summarize, analyze, and synthesize the development of a common theme between two literary texts and/or media. Summarize, analyze, and synthesize the connection between the main ideas of two informational texts and/or media. Cite specific textual evidence to analyze and make inferences based on the characteristics of a variety of literary and informational texts. Construct and/or answer literal, inferential, critical, and interpretive questions and support answers with explicit evidence from the text or additional sources. Apply knowledge of organizational patterns to comprehend informational text. Use prewriting activities and inquiry tools recursively generate ideas, organize information, guide writing, answer questions, and synthesize information. Generate a draft that conveys complex ideas through analysis and use of organizational patterns that are suited to the purpose and intended audience and includes a strong thesis, body, conclusion, and appropriate transitions linked to the purpose of the composition. Gather and use relevant information and evidence from multiple authoritative print and/or digital sources to support claims or theses. Compose paragraphs with grammatically correct simple, compound, and complex sentences of varying length, complexity and type. Revise to improve and clarify writing through self-monitoring strategies and feedback from others. Provide oral, written, and/or digital descriptive feedback to other writers.
GRAMMAR	SHORT STORIES		
Action & Linking Verbs Principal Parts of Regular Verbs Simple Tenses of Verbs Adjectives & Articles	<i>from "The Baker Heater League" – pg. 9</i> <i>"The Drummer Boy of Shiloh" – pg. 200</i> <i>"Who Can Replace A Man" – pg. 248</i> <i>"Tears of Autumn"*** – pg. 264</i> <i>"The Tell-Tale Heart" – pg. 294</i> <i>"Charles" – pg. 336</i> <i>"Flowers for Algernon"*** – pg. 347</i>		
PREFIX/SUFFIX/ROOT WORD	NON-FICTION		
PREFIX: de, im SUFFIX: ity, ance ROOT: noun (or nunc), spec, sol <i>ITALICIZED TEXT indicates a prefix/suffix/root word that is not explicitly covered in the lit book.</i>	<i>from "Travels with Charlie" – pg. 164</i> <i>"Baseball" – pg. 478</i> <i>"Why Leaves..." – pg. 540</i> <i>"The Season's Curmudgeon..." – pg. 545</i> <i>from "My Own True Name" – pg. 1148</i> <i>"Words to Sit in, Like Chairs" – pg. 1152</i>		

Language Arts 8: Responsibility
Quarter 1 Conceptual Lens: Roles

		8.2.1.g	Adjust writing processes to persevere in short and long-term writing tasks of increasing length and complexity.
		8.2.1.h	Proofread and edit writing recursively for format and conventions of standard English.
	POETRY	SPEAKING/LISTENING	
		8.3.1.b	Demonstrate and adjust speaking techniques for a variety of purposes and situations, including interpreting text.
		8.3.1.c	Select and utilize appropriate visual and/or digital tools to enhance understanding for specific audiences.
		8.3.2.a	Utilize active and attentive listening skills for multiple situations and modalities.
DRAMA/ORAL TRADITION	<i>"Describe Somebody" – pg. 645</i> <i>"Almost a Summer Sky"*** – pg. 647</i> <i>"Catt!" – pg. 654</i> <i>"Silver" – pg. 657</i> <i>"Your World" – pg. 658</i> <i>"The Drum" ** – pg. 663</i> <i>"Ring Out, Wild Bells" – pg. 664</i> <i>"Thumbprints"*** – pg. 666</i>	MULTIPLE LITERACIES	
<i>"Invocation" – pg. 1078</i> <i>"Poetry (La Poesia) – pg. 1144</i>		8.4.1.a	Locate, organize, analyze, evaluate, and synthesize information from print and digital resources to generate and answer questions and create new understandings.
		8.4.1.b	Demonstrate ethical use of information and copyright guidelines by appropriately quoting or paraphrasing from a text and citing a source using available resources.

***Indicates higher-level reading selections

Language Arts 8: Responsibility
Quarter 1 Conceptual Lens: Roles

Thematic Concepts	
	<div> <div>Responsibility</div> <div>Relationships</div> <div>Perspective</div> <div>Beliefs</div> </div> <div> <div>Conflict</div> <div>Fear/Courage</div> <div>Culture</div> <div>Values</div> </div>
Enduring Understandings	Guiding Questions
Established relationships can mold identity and values through conflict and resolution.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How do our values shape our identity? (C) How can relationships change or mold identity? (C) Why is it important to have your own identity? (D) Can relationships survive if conflict remains unresolved? (D)
Personal identity changes the dynamics of relationships.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How and why do the roles we play change with different relationships? (C) Why is it important to assume different roles? (D) Can we assume more than one role at a time? (D) Is my identity defined by my role or is my role defined by my identity? (D)
Values and beliefs shape a person's sense of identity and grow from the interactions found among one's culture, society, and historical period.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How do the roles you assume in your life impact how you see yourself? (C) How much choice do you have in your own identity? (D) Does history impact your identity? (D)
Increase responsibility encourages maturity and can transform identity.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Does age correlate with maturity? (D) How does responsibility transform identity? (C) How do you know your actions are responsible? (C)
Individual responsibility may transform society and impact others.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Why do people assume responsibility while others do not? (C) Does an individual have an obligation to contribute to society? (D) What are the consequences of avoiding responsibility? (C)
Discover of one's identity facilitates personal growth and enriches the society and culture in which one lives.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Why is it important for a person to grow? (C) How is personal growth measured? (C) Does all personal growth enrich self identity? (D)
A writer uses literary devices to create individuality of voice in writing.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How does one develop a voice in their writing? (C) What creates a distinctive voice? (D) Can voice in writing change? (D)
A reader's background knowledge assists in the interpretation of author and character motivation within a literary piece.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How does one determine an author's motivation? (C) Is the motivation of the character the same as the author? (D) How does one's background knowledge affect an interpretation of literature? (C)

(D) = Debatable Question: often asks for a "yes" or "no" answer. Students are expected to support their responses with evidence and logic from their reading & personal experience.

Language Arts 8: Responsibility
Quarter 2 Conceptual Lens: Relationships

VOCABULARY	NOVELS	STANDARD	SKILL
<i>Short Story Elements:</i> Conflict/Resolution (Types), Characterization, Flashback, Foreshadowing, Theme <i>Text Structure:</i> Fact vs. Opinion, Narrative, Chronological <i>Figurative Language:</i> Irony, Hyperbole, Imagery, Assonance, Consonance, Symbol <i>Dramatic Monologue/Dialogue:</i> Adaptation vs. Original Explicit vs. Implicit Acronym <i>BOLD TEXT indicates words that should be taught using the 6-Step Vocabulary Method; other terms may be simply reviewed or may require re-teaching.</i>	<i>Petey</i> <i>Heat</i> <i>The Wednesday Wars</i> <i>Seedfolks</i> <i>Four Miles to Pinecone</i> <i>Surviving the Applewhites</i> <i>Parrot in the Oven (DL)</i> <i>A Light in the Forest</i> <i>Sarny: A Life Remembered</i> <i>NightJohn (restricted)</i> DL = Dual Language/Available in Spanish	READING: Literature 8.1.6.c 8.1.6.h READING: Informational 8.1.6.k 8.1.6.n WRITING 8.2.1.b 8.2.2.a 8.2.2.c 8.2.2.d 8.2.2.e SPEAKING/LISTENING 8.3.1.e 8.3.2.b 8.3.3.b 8.3.3.d	Analyze the author's use of literary devices. Analyze the social, historical, cultural, and biographical influence in a variety of texts, citing textual evidence from literary and information text to develop a national and international multicultural perspective. Select text for a particular purpose, citing evidence to support analysis, reflection, or research. Make and confirm/modify inference with text evidence while previewing and reading literary, informational, digital text, and/or media. Generate a draft that conveys complex ideas through analysis and use of organizational patterns that are suited to the purpose and intended audience and includes a strong thesis, body, conclusion, and appropriate transitions linked to the purpose of the composition. Communicate information and ideas effectively in analytic, argumentative, descriptive, informative, narrative, poetic, persuasive, and reflective modes to multiple audiences using a variety of media and formats. Conduct and publish both short and sustained research projects to answer questions or solve problems using multiple sources to support theses. Use precise word choice and domain-specific vocabulary to write in a variety of modes. Analyze various mentor texts and/or exemplars in order to create a similar piece. Ask pertinent questions to acquire or confirm information. Analyze the purpose of information presented in diverse media formats, evaluate its motives, and determine its credibility. Demonstrate awareness of and sensitivity to the appropriate use of words in conversation. Listen, ask probing questions, and interpret information being communicated and consider its contribution to a topic, text, or issue
GRAMMAR	SHORT STORIES "A Retrieved Reformation"**- pg. 42 "Gentleman of Rio..." - pg. 59 "Fox Hunt" - pg. 94 "An Hour with Abuelo" - pg. 237 "Hamadi" - pg. 281 "Thank You Ma'am" - pg. 388 "The Story Teller"**- pg. 396 "The White Umbrella" - pg. 416 "The Medicine Bag" - pg. 426 "The Governess" - pg. 818 "The Ninny" - pg. 838		
Common & Proper Nouns Plural Nouns Tense & Mood of Verbs Participial Phrases Plural Nouns Adverbs Sentence Structure			

Language Arts 8: Responsibility
Quarter 2 Conceptual Lens: Relationships

		8.3.3.e	under study. Collaboratively converse with peers and adults on grade-appropriate topics and texts, building on others ideas to clearly and persuasively express one's own views while respecting diverse perspectives.
PREFIX/SUFFIX/ROOTS	NON-FICTION	MULTIPLE LITERACIES	
PREFIX: mis, per SUFFIX: limin, ory, ous, ive, cede or ceed ROOT: trib, judex, val, vert, sacr <i>ITALICIZED TEXT indicates a prefix/suffix/root word that is not explicitly covered in the lit book.</i>	"Cub Pilot..." - pg. 66 "Old Ben" - pg. 88 from "I Know Why..." - pg. 514	8.4.2.b	Use appropriate digital tools to communicate with others for conveying information, gathering opinions, and solving problems.
DRAMA/ORAL TRADITION	POETRY		
"Coyote Steals..." - pg. 1026 "Why the Waves..." - pg. 1032	"Concrete Mixers" - pg. 675 "Harlem Night Song" - pg. 677 "The City is So Big" - pg. 678 "Little Exercise" - pg. 683 "Ode to Enchanted..." - pg. 685 "The Sky is Low..." - pg. 686 "January" - pg. 744 "New World" - pg. 746 from "My Sister Molly..." - pg. 749		

**Indicates higher-level reading selections

Language Arts 8: Responsibility
Quarter 2 Conceptual Lens: Relationships

Thematic Concepts	
Culture Power Conflict Beliefs	Cooperation Compromise Acceptance Values
Enduring Understandings	Guiding Questions
Relationships develop and change based on advances in technology.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How do technology and media affect relationships? (C) What types of relationships are healthy? (C) Does technology unite or divide relationships? (D) Can one have an unhealthy relationship with technology? (D)
A person's culture, morals, and ethical code shape relationships.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How do we build relationships? (C) How do people of different backgrounds sustain a relationship? (C) Do prejudices affect relationships? (D)
A balance of power and control is essential to a healthy relationship.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How do power structures vary based on types of relationships? (C) Does power corrupt a relationship? (D) What happens when too much power and control is held by one partner in a relationship? (C)
Relationships cultivate responsibility as they grow.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What is our responsibility in personal relationships? (C) How do relationships create responsibilities? (C) What makes some relationships more important than others? (D)
Relationships require acceptance and compromise in order to thrive.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How does acceptance make or break a relationship? (C) Is any relationship permanent? (D) How do we evaluate healthy and unhealthy relationships? (C) Do people have to condone other's beliefs and/or actions in order for relationships to be sustained? (D)
Conflict transforms relationships by encouraging participants to analyze their identities and motives.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Can positive relationships contain conflict? (D) Is conflict avoidable in relationships? (D) What are keys to a mutually satisfying relationship? (C) How does conflict transform a relationship? (C) How does conflict cause us to examine our identities and motives? (C)
Clear and concise writing enables people to communicate effectively with others.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Why is clear and concise writing important? (C) How does peer-editing help with effective communication? (C) Why is communication with others through writing valuable? (D)
Reading cultivates and understanding of relationships within literary works.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Why is it important to understand the relationships between characters? (C) How does reading cultivate understanding? (D) How does reading enhance relationships? (C)

Language Arts 8: Responsibility
Quarter 3 Conceptual Lens: Adversity

VOCABULARY	NOVELS	STANDARD	SKILL
Figurative Language: Hyperbole, Understatement, Rhyme Scheme Genre: Fable, Folktale, Tall Tale, Fiction/Non-Fiction Forms of Poetry: Lyric, Narrative, Sonnet, Ballad Author's Style/Purpose Main Idea/Supporting Details Paraphrase Connotation/Denotation Dialect <i>BOLD TEXT indicates words that should be taught using the 6-Step Vocabulary Method; other terms may be simply reviewed or may require re-teaching</i>	<i>Drums, Girls, and Dangerous Pie</i> <i>Notes of the Midnight Driver</i> <i>Mississippi Trial, 1955</i> <i>Chains</i> <i>Ask Me No Questions</i> <i>Chinese Cinderella</i> <i>Life As We Knew It</i> <i>There's a Girl in my Hammerlock</i> <i>The Call of the Wild</i> <i>Let the Circle Be Unbroken</i> <i>The Road to Memphis (restricted)</i> <i>Slave Dancer</i> <i>Lyddie</i> DL = Dual Language/Available in Spanish	READING: Literature 8.1.6.a 8.1.6.b 8.1.6.c 8.1.6.d READING: Informational 8.1.6.g 8.1.6.h 8.1.6.k WRITING 8.2.1.b 8.2.2.a 8.2.2.c 8.2.2.d	Analyze the meaning, reliability, and validity of text considering author's purpose and perspective. Analyze and explain the relationships between elements of literary text. Analyze the author's use of literary devices. Summarize, analyze and synthesize the development of a common theme between two literary text and/or media. Cite specific textual evidence to analyze and make inferences based on the characteristics of a variety of literary and informational texts. Analyze the social, historical, cultural, and biographical influences in a variety of texts, citing textual evidence from literary and informational text to develop a national and international multicultural perspective. Select a text for a particular purpose, citing evidence to support analysis, reflection, or research. Generate a draft that conveys complex ideas through analysis and use of organizational patterns that are suited to the purpose and intended audience and includes strong organization linked to the purpose. Communicate information and ideas effectively in analytic, argumentative, descriptive, informative, narrative, poetic, persuasive, and reflective modes to multiple audiences using a variety of media and formats. Conduct and publish both short and sustained research projects to answer questions or solve problems using multiple primary and/or secondary sources to support theses. Use precise word choice and domain-specific vocabulary to write in a variety of modes.
	SHORT STORIES		
	"Raymond's Run" – pg. 28 "The Adventure of ..." – pg. 122		
GRAMMAR	NON FICTION		
Personal Pronouns Reflexive Pronouns Prepositions Prepositional Phrases Semi-colons & Colons Commas	"The 11:59" – pg. 15 from "An American Childhood" – pg. 115 "The American Dream" – pg. 182 "Sun Suckers & Moon Cursors" – pg. 183 "Electric Circuits & Power" – pg. 188 "Up the Slide" – pg. 314 "A Glow in the Dark" – pg. 321 "Forest Fire" – pg. 536 from "Sharing the American Dream" – pg. 586 "Science & the Sense of Wonder" – pg. 582		

Language Arts 8: Responsibility
Quarter 3 Conceptual Lens: Adversity

PREFIX/SUFFIX/ROOT WORD	POETRY	STANDARD	SKILL
PREFIX: sub, super SUFFIX: in, ful, eer ROOT: scope, duc, lum, equi, pass, tract, trans, grat, nat <i>ITALICIZED TEXT indicates a prefix/suffix/root word that is not explicitly covered in the lit book.</i>	"Old Man" – pg. 718 "Runagate, Runagate" – pg. 720 "Blow... Though Winter Wind" – pg. 723 "The New Colossus" – pg. 728 "Paul Revere's Ride" – pg. 730 "Harriet Beecher Stowe" – pg. 735 from "Out of the Dust" – pg. 1094 "Ellis Island" – pg. 1103	SPEAKING/LISTENING 8.3.1.a 8.3.2.c MULTIPLE LITERACY 8.4.1.a 8.4.1.e	Communicate ideas and information in a clear and concise manner suited to the purpose, setting, and audience, using appropriate word choice, grammar, and sentence structure. Utilize active and attentive listening skills for multiple situations and modalities. Locate, organize, analyze, evaluate, and synthesize information from print and digital resources to generate and answer questions and create new understandings. Use appropriate digital tools to communicate with others for conveying information, gathering opinions, and solving problems.
DRAMA/ORAL TRADITION "Brer Possum's Dilemma" – pg. 1042 "John Henry" – pg. 1045 "Chicoria" – pg. 1052 from "The People..." – pg. 1055 "Davy Crockett's Dream" – pg. 1072 "Paul Bunyan" – pg. 1075			

***Indicates a kindred racial narrative collection

Language Arts 8: Responsibility
Quarter 3 Conceptual Lens: Adversity

Thematic Concepts	
Culture Values Prejudice Reform Choice	Beliefs Power Change Conflict Empathy
Enduring Understandings	Guiding Questions
Challenges in life provide opportunities for personal growth.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Why is it important to face challenges? (C) How can we grow from adversity? (C) Is change necessary for growth to occur? (D) What kinds of opportunities provide personal growth? (C)
Cultural background creates unique obstacles and opportunities that can enhance or diminish adversity.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How does one's culture create obstacles or opportunities? (C) Are some obstacles or opportunities universal? (D) How do prejudices cause adversity? (C) How do cultural obstacles or opportunities enhance or diminish adversity? (C)
Adversity can orchestrate personal or societal change to mold the social fabric of a group of people.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How can adversity shape individuals or society? (C) Is change inevitable? (D) Is adversity necessary for change? (D) Can society change without adversity? (D)
Technology changes the manner in which we face adversity, impacting problem-solving strategies and the relationships of those involved.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Does technology create or diminish challenges? (D) How does technology affect how we deal with adversity? (C) Why is it important to use technology responsibly? (C) Should the use of technology be regulated? (D)
Empathy to adversity fosters action to protect those who are marginalized.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In what ways are we responsible for protecting others? (D) What is the danger of remaining silent? (C) Is it ethical to sacrifice the rights of a group for the needs and benefit of another group? (D)
Adversity removes people from what is comfortable, forcing them to adapt.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Why does adversity make people uncomfortable? (C) Can adversities lead to apathy? (C) Can people thrive outside of their area of comfort? (D) Where do your comfort areas come from? (C) What is the danger of never being outside of your area of comfort? (C)
A well-developed point of view allows one to express unique perspectives and observations in writing.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What contributes to a person's point of view? (D) Is point of view always unique? (D) Why is it important to express one's point of view? (C)
A variety to reading experiences establishes deeper understanding of the adversities all cultures endure.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What adversities are universal to all cultures? (D) How does reading inspire empathy for other cultures? (C) Can someone read a serious subject matter for entertainment? (D) What are the different reasons to read? (D)

Language Arts 8: Responsibility
Quarter 4 Conceptual Lens: Risks

VOCABULARY	NOVELS	STANDARD	SKILL
<p><i>Short Story Elements:</i></p> <p>Static/Dynamic Characters</p> <p>Genre: Non-Fiction (Elements of and Types, Poetry vs. Prose</p> <p><i>Figurative Language: Imagery, Glittering Generalities, Propaganda, Bandwagon, Emotional Appeal, Subtleties of Language</i></p> <p>Primary vs. Secondary Sources</p> <p>Dramatic Monologue</p> <p>Tone</p> <p><i>BOLD TEXT indicates words that should be taught using the 6-Step Vocabulary Method; other terms may be simply reviewed or may require re-teaching.</i></p>	<p><i>Witness</i></p> <p><i>Parallel Journeys</i></p> <p><i>The Boy Who Dared</i></p> <p><i>Breaking Through (DL)</i></p> <p><i>The Diary of Anne Frank (and related readings)</i></p> <p><i>Anne Frank, Beyond the Diary: A Photographic Remembrance (restricted)</i></p> <p>DL = Dual Language/Available in Spanish</p> <p>SHORT STORIES</p> <p>"The Finish of Patsy Barnes" – pg. 192</p> <p>"An Episode of War" – pg. 1122</p> <p>NON-FICTION</p> <p>"Making Tracks on Mars" – pg. 467</p> <p>from "Harriet Tubman..."** – pg. 486</p> <p>from "Always to Remember..." – pg. 504</p> <p>"The Trouble with T.V." – pg. 558</p> <p>"On Women's Right..."** – pg. 565</p> <p>"Emancipation" – pg. 600</p> <p>"Brown vs. Board"*** – pg. 605</p> <p>"Vanishing Species"*** – pg. 702</p> <p>from "Anne Frank..." – pg. 970</p> <p>from "Anne Frank Remembered"**-pg. 975</p> <p>"Choice: A Tribute..." – pg. 1114</p> <p>POETRY</p> <p>"Snake on the Etowah" – pg. 700</p> <p>"The Road Not Taken" – pg. 774</p> <p>"Oh Captain! My Captain!"** – pg. 777</p> <p>DRAMA/ORAL TRADITION</p> <p>"Water Names" – pg. 1015</p>	<p>Using Acuity and Spring Writing data, determine standards and skills to focus on.</p>	
<p>GRAMMAR</p> <p>Capitalization</p> <p>Adjectives & Articles</p> <p>Adverbs</p> <p>Conjunctions.</p>			
<p>PREFIX/SUFFIX/ROOT WORD</p> <p>PREFIX: dis, non</p> <p>SUFFIX: ly, bellum</p> <p>ROOT: aud, nym, vad, her</p> <p><i>ITALICIZED TEXT indicates a prefix/suffix/root word that is not explicitly covered in the lit book</i></p>			

**Indicates higher-level reading selections

Language Arts 8: Responsibility
Quarter 4 Conceptual Lens: Risks

Thematic Concepts	
Culture Prejudice Conflict Change Choice	Perspective Oppression Freedom Power
Enduring Understandings	Guiding Questions
Taking risks empowers individuals or groups and may advance the cause for freedom.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How can freedoms be gained through taking risks? (C) For what freedoms are we willing to take a risk? (C) How does one's culture determine the definition of freedom? (C) What is freedom? (C) What price is too high to pay for freedom? (D)
The abuse of power can empower people to take risks to rescue the oppressed and disenfranchised.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Does oppression necessitate risk-taking? (D) How can power corrupt? (C) Can power be seen as both beneficial and detrimental? (D) Can change occur without risk? (D) Is it ever acceptable to be silent when one knows a wrong is being committed? (D)
Motivation for taking risk demonstrates maturity and experience.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Why do people take risks? (C) How do the risks we take reflect our maturity and experience? (C) Do we need to have a noble motivation to take a risk? (D) What types of selfish risks do people take? (C)
Culture, identity, and traditions guide decisions involved in taking risks.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How do culture, identity, and tradition guide the choice to take a risk? (C) What are some potential cultural repercussions for taking risks? (C) How is breaking away from your cultural traditions a risk? (C) Does living in a multi-cultural society mean you have to risk the integrity of your individual culture? (D) How does identity influence the risks you are willing to take? (C)
People who take risks have a responsibility to assess the situation, make decisions, and accept the consequences of their actions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Which risks are necessary and what are not? (D) Why do people knowingly take dangerous risks? (C) Are some risks worth taking no matter the consequences? (D)
Relationships require individual risk exposing inner emotions and feelings.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What risks do you need to take to be in a relationship? (C) When is it risky not to end a relationship? (C) What are the consequences of exposing your emotions and feelings? (C) Is it acceptable to keep a secret in a relationship? (D)
Communication of one's convictions in writing requires risk-taking depending of the audience.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Why is writing about one's convictions taking a risk? (C) Why does audience matter when writing about one's convictions? (C) Is the risk worth the controversy that could arise? (D)
Reading a variety of genres/viewpoints initiates one to gain a deeper understanding of the risks others take in relation to maintaining culture, identity, and traditions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Why is it important to explore different genres? (C) How does one portray aspects of culture through writing? (C) How much understanding of a culture is needed to appreciate the literature? (D)

Appendix L

QUARTER ONE: 1 st 9 Weeks	QUARTER TWO: 2 nd 9 Weeks	QUARTER THREE: 3 rd 9 Weeks	QUARTER FOUR: 4 th 9 Weeks
Theme: ROLES: Maintaining a Reading Life	Theme: RELATIONSHIPS: Reading Gains Understanding	Theme: RISKS: Drawing Meaning from Literature	Theme: ADVERSITY: Reading Helps Overcome Challenges
DISTRICT ASSESSMENTS	DISTRICT ASSESSMENTS	DISTRICT/STATE ASSESSMENTS	DISTRICT ASSESSMENTS
Fall Acuity: Predictive A	Diagnostic Acuity Test(s)	Winter Acuity: Predictive C NESA-Reading	Diagnostic Acuity Test(s)
Fluency (LA 8.1.4)	Fluency (LA 8.1.4)	Fluency (LA 8.1.4)	Fluency (LA 8.1.4)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Introduce quarterly and informal fluency check (8.1.4 a) Introduce quarterly and informal pacing check (8.1.4 b) Introduce assessments where students recognize and represent writer's tone and style (8.1.4 c) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use quarterly and informal fluency check (8.1.4 a) Use quarterly and informal pacing (rate) check (8.1.4 b) Use assessments where students recognize and represent writer's tone and style (8.1.4 c) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use quarterly and informal fluency check (8.1.4 a) Use quarterly and informal pacing (rate) check (8.1.4 b) Use assessments where students recognize and represent writer's tone and style (8.1.4 c) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use quarterly and informal fluency check (8.1.4 a) Use quarterly and informal pacing (rate) check (8.1.4 b) Use assessments where students recognize and represent writer's tone and style (8.1.4 c)
Vocabulary (LA 8.1.5)	Vocabulary (LA 8.1.5)	Vocabulary (LA 8.1.5)	Vocabulary (LA 8.1.5)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use vocabulary graphic organizers (before, during, and after reading) Introduce vocabulary strategies and the Marzano 6 Step Process Introduce structural analysis (8.1.5.a): prefixes, suffixes, word origin, and roots Relate new vocabulary to prior/background knowledge (8.1.5.b) Introduce context clues strategies (8.1.5.c) – tie to clarifying strategy Introduce using reference materials to determine meaning (8.1.5.e) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use vocabulary graphic organizers (before, during, and after reading) Teach with vocabulary strategies and the Marzano 6 Step Process Teach structural analysis (8.1.5.a) Relate new vocabulary to prior/background knowledge (8.1.5.b) Teach context clue strategies (8.1.5.c) - based on text selection Introduce Semantic Relationships (8.1.5.d): figurative language Teach: reference materials to determine meaning (8.1.5.e) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use vocabulary graphic organizers Teach with vocabulary strategies and the Marzano 6 Step Process Teach structural analysis (8.1.5.a) Relate new vocabulary to prior/background knowledge (8.1.5 b) Teach context clue strategies (8.1.5.c) – based on text selection Teach Semantic Relationships (8.1.5.d): figurative language and add connotations Review: reference materials to determine meaning (8.1.5.e) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use vocabulary graphic organizers (before, during, and after reading) Teach with vocabulary strategies and the Marzano 6 Step Process Teach structural analysis (8.1.5.a) Relate new vocabulary to prior/background knowledge (8.1.5.b) Review context clue strategies (8.1.5.c) - based on text selection Teach Semantic Relationships (8.1.5. d): figurative language, connotations, and add subtle distinctions
Comprehension (LA 8.1.6)	Comprehension (LA 8.1.6)	Comprehension (LA 8.1.6)	Comprehension (LA 8.1.6)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use graphic organizers (before, during, after reading) Introduce self-monitoring comprehension through use of reading strategies (8.1.6 m) Introduce and use Reciprocal 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use graphic organizers (before, during, after reading) Teach self-monitoring through use of reading strategies (8.1.6 m) Use reciprocal Teaching (specific) – based on text selections 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use graphic organizers (before, during, after reading) Teach self-monitoring and use of strategies to self-correct (8.1.6.m) Use reciprocal Teaching (specific) – based on text selections 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use graphic organizers (before, during, after reading) Teach self-monitoring and use of strategies to self-correct (8.1.6.m) Review reciprocal Teaching – based on text selections

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<p>Teaching (basic overview)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduce author's purpose: persuade, inform, entertain, explain, and describe (8.1.6.a) • Introduce story element/ narrative text (8.1.6.b) • Introduce main idea, supporting details, and summarizing (8.1.6.d) • Introduce informational text structure and organization (8.1.6.e) • Introduce nonfiction text features (8.1.6.f) • Introduce genres (8.1.6.h and 8.1.6.i) • Introduce levels and types of questions (8.1.6.j) • Build and activate prior knowledge (8.1.6.l) • Introduce independent reading (8.1.6.n) • Students respond to text verbally, in writing, or artistically (8.1.6.o) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teach author's purpose based on text selection (8.1.6.a) • Teach analyzing meaning of author's purpose/ perspective based on text selection (8.1.6.a) • Teach narrative elements (8.1.6.b) • Introduce figurative language (8.1.6.c) • Introduce literary devices (8.1.6.c) • Teach summarizing main idea and supporting details (8.1.6.d) • Teach informational text structure and organization – based on text selections (8.1.6.e) • Teach how to analyze nonfiction text features (8.1.6.f) • Introduce making inferences and inferring (8.1.6.g and 8.1.6.n) • Teach genres (8.1.6.h and 8.1.6.i) • Teach levels and types of questions with supporting text evidence (8.1.6.j) • Build and activate prior knowledge <i>and</i> making connections (8.1.6.l) • Use independent reading with a variety of purposes (8.1.6.n) • Students respond to text verbally, in writing, or artistically (8.1.6.o) • Introduce test taking tips 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review author's purpose based on text selection (8.1.6.a) • Teach analyzing meaning, <i>reliability</i>, and <i>validity</i> of author's purpose, perspective (8.1.6.a) • Teach narrative elements (8.1.6.b) • Teach figurative language (8.1.6.c) • Teach literary devices, <i>and</i> how to analyze (8.1.6.c) • Teach <i>analyzing</i> main idea, details, and summarizing (8.1.6.d) • Teach <i>how to apply knowledge</i> text structure and organization based on text selections (8.1.6.e) • Teach how to analyze <i>and</i> evaluate nonfiction text features (8.1.6.f) • Teach inferring (8.1.6.g and 8.1.6.n); more complex/abstract • Teach genres (8.1.6.h and 8.1.6.i) • Use levels and types of questions with supporting text evidence from several sources (8.1.6.j) • Build and activate prior knowledge, <i>and</i> making connections (8.1.6.l) • Use independent reading with a variety of purposes (8.1.6.n) • Students respond to text verbally, in writing, or artistically (8.1.6.o) • Teach test taking tips 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review author's purpose based on text selection (8.1.6.a) • Review analyzing meaning, <i>reliability</i>, and <i>validity</i> of author's purpose, perspective (8.1.6.a) • Review all story elements – narrative text (8.1.6.b) • Review figurative language (8.1.6.c) depending on text selection • Review literary devices <i>and</i> how to analyze (8.1.6.c) • Teach summarizing, analyzing, <i>and add synthesizing</i> main idea and supporting details (8.1.6.d) • Review <i>applying knowledge</i> of informational text structures and organizations – based on text selections (8.1.6.e) • Review nonfiction text features, how to analyze/evaluate (8.1.6.f) • Review inferring (8.1.6.g and 8.1.6.n); complex and abstract • Teach genres (8.1.6.h and 8.1.6.i) • Use independent reading with a variety of purposes (8.1.6.n) • Use levels and types of questions with supporting text evidence from several sources (8.1.6.j) • Build and activate prior knowledge, <i>and</i> making connections (8.1.6.l) • Review test taking tips
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YEAR ROUND SKILLS: Reciprocal Teaching and the Language Arts' concepts of: academic vocabulary, prefixes, suffixes, and root words
 ** NOTE: Reading strategies should not be taught independently, but lessons should blend together per text and per quarter

Appendix M

QUARTER ONE: 1 st 9 Weeks	QUARTER TWO: 2 nd 9 Weeks	QUARTER THREE: 3 rd 9 Weeks	QUARTER FOUR: 4 th 9 Weeks
Theme: IDENTITY: What Good Readers Do	Theme: CHOICES: Making Sense of Our World	Theme: PERSPECTIVES: Literature Reflects Life	Theme: CONVICTION: Gaining Insight Through Reading
DISTRICT ASSESSMENTS	DISTRICT ASSESSMENTS	DISTRICT/STATE ASSESSMENTS	DISTRICT ASSESSMENTS
Fall Acuity: Predictive A	Diagnostic Acuity Test(s)	Winter Acuity: Predictive C CAT testing NESA-Reading	Diagnostic Acuity Test(s)
Fluency (LA 7.1.4)	Fluency (LA 7.1.4)	Fluency (LA 7.1.4)	Fluency (LA 7.1.4)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Introduce quarterly and informal fluency check (7.1.4 a) Introduce quarterly and informal pacing check (7.1.4 b) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use quarterly and informal fluency check (7.1.4 a) Use quarterly and informal pacing (rate) check (7.1.4 b) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use quarterly and informal fluency check (7.1.4 a) Use quarterly and informal pacing (rate) check (7.1.4 b) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use quarterly and informal fluency check (7.1.4 a) Use quarterly and informal pacing (rate) check (7.1.4 b)
Vocabulary (LA 7.1.5)	Vocabulary (LA 7.1.5)	Vocabulary (LA 7.1.5)	Vocabulary (LA 7.1.5)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use vocabulary graphic organizers (before, during, and after reading) Introduce vocabulary strategies and the Marzano 6 Step Process Introduce structural analysis (7.1.5 a) - Prefixes, suffixes, word origin, base words, and roots Vocabulary preview before reading (7.1.5 b) Introduce context Clues (7.1.5 c) – tie to clarifying Introduce nonfiction text features (7.1.5 c and 7.1.6 f) Introduce using reference materials to help with vocabulary and context clues (7.1.5 e) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use vocabulary graphic organizers (before, during, and after reading) Teach with vocabulary Strategies and the Marzano 6 Step Process Teach structural analysis (7.1.5 a) - Prefixes, suffixes, word origin, base words, and roots Vocabulary preview before reading (7.1.5 b) Teach Context Clues (7.1.5 c) – tie to clarifying strategy Teach nonfiction text features based on text selections (7.1.5 c and 7.1.6 f) Teach using reference materials (7.1.5 e) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use vocabulary graphic organizers Teach with vocabulary Strategies and the Marzano 6 Step Process Teach structural analysis (7.1.5 a) - Prefixes, suffixes, word origin, and roots Teach Context Clues (7.1.5 c) – tie to clarifying strategy Teach nonfiction text features based on text selections (7.1.5 c and 7.1.6 f) Introduce Semantic Relationships (7.1.5. d) - figurative language and connotations Review using reference materials (7.1.5e) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use vocabulary graphic organizers Teach with vocabulary Strategies and the Marzano 6 Step Process Teach structural analysis (7.1.5 a) - Prefixes, suffixes, word origin, and roots Review Context Clues (7.1.5 c) and the clarifying strategy Review nonfiction text features (7.1.5c and 7.1.6 f) Teach and review Semantic Relationships (7.1.5. d)- figurative language, connotations, and <i>subtle distinctions</i> Review using reference materials (7.1.5e)
Comprehension (LA 7.1.6)	Comprehension (LA 7.1.6)	Comprehension (LA 7.1.6)	Comprehension (LA 7.1.6)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use graphic organizers (before, during, after reading) Introduce and use Reciprocal Teaching (basic overview) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use graphic organizers (before, during, after reading) Use reciprocal Teaching (specific) – based on text selections 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use graphic organizers (before, during, after reading) Use reciprocal Teaching (specific) – based on text selections 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use graphic organizers (before, during, after reading) Review reciprocal Teaching – based on text selections

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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduce and/or review narrative text/story elements (7.1.6 b) • Introduce main idea + details – tie to summarizing (7.1.6 d) • Introduce text structure and organization (7.1.6 e) • Introduce genres and genre study with independent reading (7.1.6 g and 7.1.6 h) • Build and activate prior knowledge (7.1.6 l) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduce author's purpose(7.1.6.a) • Review narrative text and story elements (7.1.6 b) • Teach main idea, details, and summarizing (7.1.6 d) • Teach text structure and organization – based on text selections (7.1.6 e) • Continue genre study with or without independent reading (7.1.6.g, 7.1.6 h, and 7.1.6 k) • Introduce inferences and inferring (7.1.6 g and 7.1.6 n) • Introduce levels and types of questions with supporting text evidence (7.1.6 j) • Build and activate prior knowledge <i>and</i> making connections (7.1.6 l) • Introduce test taking tips 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teach author's purpose based on text selections (7.1.6 a) • Introduce and teach figurative language (7.1.6 c) • Introduce literary devices (7.1.6 c) • Teach <i>analyzing</i> main idea, details, and summarizing (7.1.6 d) and <i>add paraphrasing</i> • Teach text structure/organization - based on text selections (7.1.6 e) • Continue genre study with or without independent reading (7.1.6 g, 7.1.6 h, and 7.1.6 k) • Review inferring (7.1.6 g, 7.1.6 n), <i>add drawing conclusions</i> • Teach levels and types of questions with supporting text evidence (7.1.6.j) • Build and activate prior knowledge, <i>and</i> making connections (7.1.6 l) • Teach test taking tips 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teach and review author's purpose based on text selections (7.1.6 a) • Teach and review figurative language based on text selections (7.1.6 c) • Review Literary Devices based on text selections (7.1.6 c) • Teach using, analyzing, and <i>synthesizing</i> main idea and details – summarizing (7.1.6 d) • Review text structure and organization based on text selections (7.1.6 e) • Review genres with or without independent reading (7.1.6 g, 7.1.6 h, and 7.1.6 k) • Review making inferences and drawing conclusions with text evidence (7.1.6 g and 7.1.6 n) • Review levels and types of questions with supporting text evidence based on text selections (7.1.6.j) • Continue building/activating prior knowledge with making connections (7.1.6 l) • Review test taking tips
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YEAR ROUND SKILLS: Reciprocal Teaching, and the Language Arts' concepts of: academic vocabulary, prefixes, suffixes, and root words

** NOTE: Reading Strategies should not be taught independently, but lessons should blend together per text and per quarter

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Appendix N

Language Arts 7: Discovery Quarter 1 Conceptual Lens: Identity

Q1: 1 st 9 Weeks	Q2: 2 nd 9 Weeks	Q3: 3 rd 9 Weeks	Q4: 4 th 9 Weeks
Theme: IDENTITY	Theme: CHOICES	Theme: PERSPECTIVES	Theme: CONVICTION
Reading	Reading	Reading	Reading
Extended Text: Novel of Choice	Extended Text: <i>A Christmas Carol</i> – C. Dickens	Extended Text: Novel of Choice	Extended Text: Novel of Choice or <i>Iqbal</i> – F. D’Adamo
Shorter Texts: 3-5 texts from the literature book, incorporating a blend of literature, non-fiction, and poetry selected from Q1 resources	Shorter Texts: 3-5 texts from the literature book, incorporating a blend of literature, non-fiction, and poetry selected from Q2 resources	Shorter Texts: 3-5 texts from the literature book, incorporating a blend of literature, non-fiction, and poetry selected from Q3 resources	Shorter Texts: 3-5 texts from the literature book, incorporating a blend of literature, non-fiction, and poetry selected from Q4 resources
Writing	Writing	Writing	Writing
Focus: Informational (paragraph summaries)	Focus: Argumentative/Persuasive	Focus: Descriptive/Narrative	Focus: Expository Essay
Skills: Pre-Writing, organizing, drafting, giving feedback	Skills: Analyzing models, writing based on models in different genres, editing & revising	Skills: Consider audience, purpose, and format when writing	Skills: Independently complete all steps in the writing process
Routine Writing Notes, summaries, process journals, and short responses across all genres	Routine Writing Notes, summaries, process journals, and short responses across all genres	Routine Writing Notes, summaries, process journals, and short responses across all genres	Routine Writing Notes, summaries, process journals, and short responses across all genres
1-2 descriptive paragraphs including figurative language	1-2 descriptive paragraphs including figurative language	1-2 descriptive essays including figurative language	1-2 descriptive essays including figurative language
Multiple Literacy/GLE*	Multiple Literacy/GLE	Multiple Literacy/GLE	Multiple Literacy/GLE
Pick a topic for GLE Begin evaluating websites	Complete website evaluations Cite Source (NoodleTools) Write persuasive letter	Continue practice of establishing validity of websites and summarizing important info	Research a person of conviction.
Speaking/Listening	Speaking/Listening	Speaking/Listening	Speaking/Listening
How to Speech	Persuasive Speech	Narrative Speech	Informational Speech
ASSESSMENTS	ASSESSMENTS	ASSESSMENTS	ASSESSMENTS
Acuity	Guided Learning Experience	District Writing Acuity NeSA-R	Grammar CBA Final Project

Language Arts 7: Discovery
Quarter 1 Conceptual Lens: Identity

PREFIXES/SUFFIXES/ROOT WORDS	POETRY	STANDARD	SKILL
PREFIX: ac, trans, <i>anti</i> , <i>fore</i> , <i>pre</i> SUFFIX: ious, able, <i>en</i> ROOT: spet/spes, rupt, just <i>ITALICIZED TEXT indicates a prefix/suffix/root word that is not explicitly covered in the lit book.</i>	“Maestro”** – pg. 577 “Loo-Wit” – pg. 606 “One” – pg. 652	WRITING 7.2.1.a 7.2.1.b 7.2.1.c 7.2.1.d 7.2.1.g	Use prewriting activities and inquiry tools to recursively generate ideas, organize information, guide writing, and answer questions. Generate a draft that conveys complex ideas through analysis and use of organizational patterns that are suited to the purpose and intended audience and includes a strong thesis, body, conclusion, and appropriate transitions linked to the purpose of the composition. Gather and use relevant information and evidence from multiple authoritative sources to support claims or theses. Compose paragraphs with grammatically correct simple, compound, and complex sentences of varying length, complexity, and type. Adjust writing processes to persevere in short and long-term writing tasks of increasing length and complexity.
SUPPLEMENTAL RESOURCES	DRAMA/ ORAL TRADITION “My Head is Full of Starshine” – pg. 874 “Duckbilled Platypus...” – pg. 910	SPEAKING/LISTENING 7.3.1.b 7.3.2.d 7.3.2.e 7.3.3.b	Demonstrate and adjust speaking techniques (e.g., appropriate eye contact, pacing, nonverbal cues, word choice) for a variety of purposes and situations, including interpreting text. Listen, ask probing questions, and interpret information being communicated and consider its contribution to a topic, text, or issue under study. Ask pertinent questions to acquire or confirm information. Apply conversational strategies to recognize, consider, and explain new information presented by other in relationship to one’s own ideas.
		MULTIPLE LITERACIES 7.4.1.b 7.4.1.c	Demonstrate ethical use of info and copyright guidelines by appropriately quoting or paraphrasing from a text and citing the source. Practice safe and ethical behaviors when communicating and interacting with others digitally.

**Indicates higher-level reading selections

Language Arts 7: Discovery
Quarter 1 Conceptual Lens: Identity

Thematic Concepts	
Conflict Perspective Relationships Influence	Identity Culture Power
Enduring Understandings	Guiding Questions
Opportunities through discovery refine identity & shape perspective.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What factors influence identity and perspective? (C) • How do opportunities (positive or negative) help us discover our identity? (C) • Are we always on a quest to refine our identity? (D)
Beliefs and values built from family relationships shape attitudes and perspectives.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do relationships effect who we are? (C) • Does our identity influence our relationships? (D) • What influence does identity have on the friends you choose? (C) • What role does family play in developing your identity? (D)
Personal identity develops as values and beliefs shift due to societal and cultural influences.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the differences and similarities between personal, cultural, and societal values and beliefs? (C) • What factors shape a culture or society? (C) • Can beliefs and values change? What might cause them to change? (D) • Are one's values and beliefs "better" than others? (D) • Are there consequences if your views differ from the majority? What are they? (D)
Overcoming fear by facing challenges produces growth and opens the path to maturity.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What does it mean to be mature? (C) • When do you reach maturity? (D) • How do people overcome fear? (C) • What impact does facing challenges have on our identity? (C)
By discovering identity, writers use a standard set of elements to create their works of literature.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How does a writer's identity influence his/her writing? (C) • Does your identity determine the types of literature you will select/produce? (D) • How do personal discoveries impact an author's voice? (C) • What is the author's angle or perspective? (C) • Does literature reflect culture or shape it? (D)
A reader's background knowledge assists in the interpretation of a piece of literature and provides a unique experience for each reader.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How does a reader's background knowledge assist in the interpretation of a piece of literature? (C) • What is background knowledge? How can one attain it? (C) • How does literature help mold your identity? (C) • What criterion determines if something is a "good" piece of literature? (D) • What makes a great book or story "great"? (D) • How do I know I am getting the point and not merely imposing my views and experiences? (C)

(D) = Debatable Question: often asks for a "yes" or "no" answer. Students are expected to support their responses with evidence and logic from their reading & personal experience.

Language Arts 7: Discovery
Quarter 2 Conceptual Lens: Choices

VOCABULARY	NOVELS	STANDARD	SKILL
PLOT: Multiple Viewpoints, Suspense/Tension FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE: Alliteration, Rhyme, Repetition TEXT STRUCTURE: Fact/Opinion, Persuasion/Argument, Conflict/Resolution AUTHOR'S PURPOSE: Persuade, Inform, Entertain GENRE: Myth, Fable, Drama Stereotype Elaboration Dialect Mnemonic Device Aside <i>BOLD TEXT indicates words that should be taught using the 6-Step Vocabulary Method; other terms may be simply reviewed or may require re-teaching.</i>	<i>Flush</i> <i>Green Boy</i> <i>Begging for Change</i> <i>Crossing the Wire</i> <i>Esperanza Rising (DL)</i> <i>The Circuit (DL)</i> <i>What the Moon Saw</i> <i>Letters from Rifka</i> <i>The Road to Paris</i> <i>Joey Pigza Loses Control</i> <i>Walk Two Moons</i> <i>Gold Dust</i> DL = Dual Language/Available in Spanish	READING: Literature 7.1.6.a 7.1.6.b 7.1.6.c 7.1.6.d READING: Informational 7.1.6.d 7.1.6.g READING: Vocabulary 7.1.5.c 7.1.5.d WRITING 7.2.1.e 7.2.1.h 7.2.1.f 7.2.2.a	Analyze and explain the relationships between elements of literary text. Analyze and explain the relationships between elements of literary text. Analyze the author's use of literary devices. Summarize, analyze, and synthesize a literary text and/or media, using key details to support interpretation of the theme. Summarize, analyze, and synthesize an informational text and/or media, using supporting details to formulate the main idea. Cite specific textual evidence to analyze and make inferences based on the characteristics of a variety of literary and informational texts. Acquire new academic and content-specific grade-level vocabulary, relate to prior knowledge, and apply in new situations. Analyze and use semantic relationships to determine the meaning of words, aid in comprehension, and improve writing. Revise to improve and clarify writing through self-monitoring strategies and feedback from others. Proofread and edit writing recursively for format and conventions of standard English. Publish a legible document using a variety of media, and apply formatting techniques to enhance the readability and impact of the document. Communicate information and ideas effectively in analytic, argumentative, descriptive, informative, narrative, poetic, persuasive, and reflective modes to multiple audiences using a variety of media and formats.
	SHORT STORIES		
	"The Third Wish" – pg. 312 "Amigo Brothers" – pg. 322 "H-ey, Come on O-ut" – pg. 378		
GRAMMAR	NON-FICTION		
Sentence Types Punctuation Marks Adjectives Subjects/Predicates Interjections	"All Together Now" – pg. 494 "The Eternal Frontier" – pg. 500		

Language Arts 7: Discovery
Quarter 2 Conceptual Lens: Choices

			7.2.2.b	Generate a draft that conveys complex ideas through analysis and use of organizational patterns that are suited to the purpose and intended audience and includes a strong thesis, body, conclusion, and appropriate transitions linked to the purpose of the composition.
			7.2.2.c	Conduct and publish both short and sustained research projects to answer questions or solve problems using multiple sources to support theses.
			7.2.2.d	Use precise word choice and domain-specific vocabulary to write in a variety of modes.
		POEMS		
		"Sarah, Cynthia, Sylvia, Stout..." – pg. 650 "Jim" – pg. 680		
	PREFIX/SUFFIX/ROOT WORD		SPEAKING/LISTENING	
	PREFIX: un, per, mal SUFFIX: ancy/ency, ive, ative, itive ROOT: vac, sist, grat, leg	DRAMA/ORAL TRADITION	7.3.1.c	Utilize appropriate visual and/or digital tools to enhance verbal communication and add interest.
	<i>ITALICIZED TEXT indicates a prefix/suffix/root word that is not explicitly covered in the lit book.</i>	"Christmas Carol" – pg. 740 "The Monsters are Due..." – pg. 834 "Grasshopper Logic" – pg. 907 "Icarus & Daedalus" – pg. 916 "The Fox and the Crow" – pg. 1038	7.3.3.b	Demonstrate awareness of and sensitivity to the appropriate use of words in conversation.
			7.3.3.e	Collaboratively converse with peers and adults on grade-appropriate topics and texts, building on others' ideas to clearly and persuasively express one's own views while respecting diverse perspectives.
			MULTIPLE LITERACIES	
			7.4.1.b	Demonstrate ethical use of info and copyright guidelines by appropriately quoting or paraphrasing from a text and citing the source.
			7.4.1.c	Practice safe and ethical behaviors when communicating and interacting with others digitally.

**Indicates higher-level reading selections

Language Arts 7: Discovery
Quarter 2 Conceptual Lens: Choices

Thematic Concepts	
Friendship Perspective Tolerance	Conflict Sacrifice Compromise
Enduring Understandings	Guiding Questions
Learning from mistakes may promote personal growth.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are all mistakes negative? (D) • How does making mistakes affect personal growth? (C) • Are there irreversible mistakes? (D) • Are we able to forgive all mistakes? (D)
New information invites questioning of traditional practices and beliefs, encouraging change.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are traditions and why do they exist? (C) • How does new information, or a new situation, affect our tradition? (C) • How do traditions affect our choices? (C) • Is it appropriate to question traditional practices and beliefs? (D) • How does our tradition affect our identity? (C)
Motivation to take responsibility may come from understanding and accepting consequences.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What responsibilities do we have when making choices? (C) • Why is it difficult to accept responsibility? (C) • When do you need to start accepting responsibility for your actions? (D) • Are all consequences negative? (D) • How are motivation and responsibility related to consequences? (C) • How does social structure depend on individual responsibility? (C)
Cultural and moral norms and influences may spark inner conflict when making choices.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How does culture affect choice? (C) • What are morals? (C) • How do choices affect cultural and moral beliefs? (C) • How much control do we have in our choices? (D)
A writer selects traits of writing to formulate organized communication.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is organized communication and why is it important? (C) • Why types of writing constitute organized communication? (C) • Why are some types of writing or communication preferred more than others? (C) • Are all types of writing valuable? (D)
Reading provides opportunities to gain new information and activate discovery of new possibilities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Where do we get our information? (C) • Does all information hold value? How do we determine what information is valuable? (D) • How does new information impact our lives? (C)

(D) = Debatable Question: often asks for a “yes” or “no” answer. Students are expected to support their responses with evidence and logic from their reading & personal experience.

Language Arts 7: Discovery
Quarter 3 Conceptual Lens: Perspectives

VOCABULARY	NOVELS	STANDARD	SKILL
<p><i>PLOT</i>: Exposition, rising action, climax, falling action, resolution, flash forward, flash back, foreshadowing, characterization, theme, setting</p> <p><i>TEXT STRUCTURE</i>: compare and contrast, cause and effect</p> <p><i>GENRE</i>: Folktale vs. Folklore, Narrative Poem, Autobiographical Narrative, Lyric Poem</p> <p>Text Features</p> <p>Dialog/Dramatic Speeches</p> <p>Paraphrase, draw conclusions</p> <p>BOLD TEXT indicates words that should be taught using the 6-Step Vocabulary Method; other terms may be simply reviewed or may require re-teaching.</p>	<p><i>Crash</i></p> <p><i>Color of My Words (DL)</i></p> <p><i>Flipped</i></p> <p><i>The Outsiders</i></p> <p><i>Under the Blood-Red Sun</i></p> <p><i>A Step From Heaven</i></p> <p><i>Boy From Over There</i></p> <p><i>Forbidden City**</i></p> <p><i>Gentlehands (restricted)</i></p> <p><i>The Land I Lost: Adventures of a Boy in Vietnam</i></p> <p align="center">DL = Dual Language/Available in Spanish</p>	<p>READING: Literature</p> <p>7.1.6.a Analyze the meaning, reliability, and validity of the text considering author's purpose and perspective.</p> <p>7.1.6.b Analyze and explain the relationships between elements of literary text.</p> <p>7.1.6.c Analyze the author's use of literary devices.</p> <p>7.1.6.d Summarize, analyze, and synthesize a literary text and/or media, using key details to support interpretation of the theme.</p> <p>READING: Informational</p> <p>7.1.6.d Summarize, analyze, and synthesize an informational text and/or media, using supporting details to formulate the main idea.</p> <p>7.1.6.g Cite specific textual evidence to analyze and make inferences based on the characteristics of a variety of literary and informational texts.</p> <p>7.1.6.h Explain the social, historical, cultural, biographical influences in a variety of texts, citing textual evidence from literary and informational text to develop a regional, national, and international multicultural perspective.</p> <p>7.1.6.k Select a text for a particular purpose citing evidence to support analysis, reflection, or research.</p> <p>WRITING</p> <p>7.2.2.a Communicate information and ideas effectively in analytic, argumentative, descriptive, informative, narrative, poetic, persuasive, and reflective modes to multiple audiences using a variety of media and formats.</p> <p>7.2.2.b Generate a draft that conveys complex ideas through analysis and use of organizational patterns that are suited to the purpose and intended audience and includes a strong thesis, body, conclusion, and appropriate transitions linked to the purpose of the composition.</p> <p>7.2.2.c Conduct and publish both short and sustained research projects to answer questions or solve problems using multiple sources to support theses.</p> <p>7.2.2.d Use precise word choice and domain-specific vocabulary to write in a variety of modes.</p>	
	SHORT STORIES		
	<p>"The Night the Bed Fell" – pg. 162</p> <p>"Stolen Day"*** – pg. 168</p> <p>"The Treasure of Lemon Brown" – pg. 205</p> <p>"The Bear Boy" – pg. 220</p> <p>"Rikki-Tikki-Tavi"*** – pg. 228</p> <p>"Zoo" – pg. 340</p> <p>"After Twenty Years" – pg. 372</p>		
GRAMMAR			
<p>Verb Tenses</p> <p>Subject/Verb Agreement</p>			

**Indicates higher-level reading selections

Language Arts 7: Discovery
Quarter 3 Conceptual Lens: Perspectives

Thematic Concepts	
Identity Relationships Conflict Compromise	Jealousy Courage Humanity Empathy
Enduring Understandings	Guiding Questions
Perspectives shift as an understanding of humanity develops through life experiences.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What events can change the face of humanity? (C) • How do viewpoints change? (C) • Does understanding others change our point of view? (D)
Change exposes vulnerability which may prompt action.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can change be uncomfortable? (D) • How does discomfort bring about action? (C) • Does action lead to change? (D)
Understanding inequity may foster empathy.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What can hinder empathy? (C) • Does equality hold the same meaning for everyone? (D) • What does it mean to experience empathy? (C) • How does being empathetic take courage? (C)
Revision provides an opportunity to change initial ideas and refine viewpoints.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the purpose of revision? (C) • How do our ideas change through revision? (C) • Does revision refine our viewpoints? (D) • Is a piece of writing ever finished? (D)
A variety of reading experiences establishes deeper understanding and facilitates changes in perspective.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Why is it important to explore different genres? (C) • How do different genres help us gain deeper understandings? (C) • Do different genres facilitate a change in viewpoints? (D)
Interactions with society can create internal changes?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do social interactions bring about internal change? (C) • Can internal changes affect external interactions? (D) • How can we maintain a sense of self in the face of external forces? (C) • Should honoring one's self come before external influences? (D)

(D) = Debatable Question: often asks for a "yes" or "no" answer. Students are expected to support their responses with evidence and logic from their reading & personal experience.

Language Arts 7: Discovery
Quarter 4 Conceptual Lens: Conviction

VOCABULARY	NOVELS	STANDARD	SKILL
FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE: Rhyme, rhythm, symbol, simile, metaphor, hyperbole, personification TEXT STRUCTURE: Argument/Persuasion, Expository, Fact/Opinion, Compare/Contrast GENRE: Myth, Fairy Tale, Folk Tale, Legend , Narrative Poem Character Traits/Motivation Tone/Word Choice Inference/Interpretation Formal/Informal Language <i>BOLD TEXT indicates words that should be taught using the 6-Step Vocabulary Method; other terms may be simply reviewed or may require re-teaching.</i>	<i>Tangerine</i> <i>Iqbal</i> <i>The Young Man & The Sea (DL)</i> <i>Listening for Lions</i> <i>Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry</i> <i>Call it Courage</i> <i>Endless Steppe</i> <i>Zlata's Diary</i> DL = Dual Language/Available in Spanish SHORT STORIES <i>from "Letters from Rifka" – pg. 252</i> <i>from "The Joy Luck Club" – pg. 260</i> NON-FICTION "Keeping it Quiet" – pg. 463 "On the Boardwalk" – pg. 465 "The Real Story..." – pg. 510 "Rattlesnake Hunt" – pg. 612	Using Acuity and Spring Writing data, determine standards and skills to focus on.	
GRAMMAR	POEMS		
Principal Parts of Verbs Compound Subjects & Predicates Punctuation Marks Abbreviations	"The Courage That..." – pg. 608 "Mother to Son" – pg. 612 "The Highway Man" – pg. 630 "How I Learned English" – pg. 636 "Annabel Lee" – pg. 668 "Martin Luther King" – pg. 670		
PREFIX/SUFFIX/ROOT WORD	DRAMA/ORAL TRADITION		
PREFIX: im, uni SUFFIX: ly ROOT: tract, spir, vers, sol, dom, myst <i>ITALICIZED TEXT indicates a prefix/suffix/root word that is not explicitly covered in the lit book</i>	"The Other Frog Prince" – pg. 908 "Demeter & Persephone" – pg. 924 "Popocatepetl & Ixtlaccihuatl" – pg. 946 "The People Could Fly" – pg. 1010		

**Indicates higher-level reading selections

Language Arts 7: Discovery
Quarter 4 Conceptual Lens: Conviction

Thematic Concepts	
Control Survival Power Fear Respect	Justice Risk Courage Morals
Enduring Understandings	Guiding Questions
Taking a stand on an issue empowers an individual to make a difference.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What are the different ways to take a stand? (C) What are the differences and similarities between fear and respect? (C) What responsibilities do you have when taking a stand? (D) What are the consequences of standing alone? (C)
The path to self-discovery often requires taking a stand that may be unpopular or unacceptable by the opposing side.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How does taking a stand shape identity and values? (C) Do you have to be comfortable with yourself to take a stand? (D) How do you choose when to take a stand? (C) What can you learn about others when taking a stand? (C)
Culture, identity, and traditions guide the decisions involved in standing up for one's convictions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How do a culture, identity, and tradition affect the choice to take a stand? (C) What are the different ways to take a stand? (C) Can doing nothing be considered taking a stand? (D) Is there ever a time when it is better to not take a stand? (D) What are the consequences of inaction? (D)
Communication of one's convictions in writing requires reasoning and logic to support point of view.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What is the significance of supporting details in writing? (C) How does a solid point of view enhance your writing? (C) Does every piece of writing involve taking a stand? (D)
Reading a variety of genres/viewpoints stimulates the process of synthesis and guides one to take a stand.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What steps are involved in the process of synthesis? (C) How does synthesis prepare you to take a stand? (C) How can reading a variety of genre and viewpoints influence the stand you take? (C) Does everything you read help you take a stand? (D)
The consequences of taking a stand requires acceptance of responsibility.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> When you initiate a stand, what responsibility do you have to those who stand with you? (C) What roles are involved in taking a stand? (C) If you are in a leadership role, do you have to maintain that role? (D)