A TEACHER'S STORY OF ENGLISH CURRICULUM:
REFLECTIONS AND PERCEPTIONS OF DEVELOPMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of the study is to inform English curricular studies with a teacher and her students' perceptions of the curricula she has developed and implemented in her high school tenth grade English classes. The teacher's reflections of her earliest teaching experiences and influences for change illuminate her reasons for creating the curricula she now uses. A description of the teacher's "regular" tenth grade curriculum organized around Arthur N. Applebee's notion of a culturally significant conversation and four case study students' perceptions of the curriculum serve to show what elements of quality, quantity, relatedness, and manner exist within the curricular structure. Additionally, a description of the teacher's "challenge" or college preparatory curriculum organized within Applebee's notion of a collection is compared using the same elements of quality, quantity, relatedness, and manner to show students' perceptions. The study shows that students personally relate to the curriculum designed as a culturally significant conversation and as a result develop critical thinking skills about issues discussed which leads to deeper levels of learning. Also, the
study shows that students who experience the text-based collection of works in the challenge curriculum were not personally connected to the works studied, and their experiences were limited to learning only content and form. The teacher concludes that she will restructure her challenge curriculum to resemble a culturally significant conversation in the same way her regular curriculum does, therefore, enabling a deeper level of learning will take place.
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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT .................................................................................................................. ii

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS ................................................................................................. iv

VITA ............................................................................................................................... v

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION ......................................................................................... 1

Background of the Problem ......................................................................................... 2

Statement of the Problem ............................................................................................ 4

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF RELATED WORKS ................................................................. 12

Cultural Literacy ........................................................................................................ 12

Uncommon Sense ...................................................................................................... 15

Language and Reflection ............................................................................................ 20

Curriculum as Conversation ....................................................................................... 25

Instructional Scaffolding .............................................................................................. 31

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY ....................................................................................... 36

Purpose of the Study ................................................................................................... 36

Site and Respondents ................................................................................................. 37

Location ....................................................................................................................... 37

My Tenth Grade Classes:
"Regular" and "Challenge" ....................................................................................... 39

vi
The Case Study Students ............................................ 40

Researcher Role .......................................................... 43

Data Collection Methods .................................................. 44

Classroom Observations .............................................. 45

Interviews ................................................................. 46

Collection of Documents ............................................... 47

Data Analysis Methods ................................................... 47

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS ......................................................... 49

Reflections of the Past .................................................... 49

My Old Philosophy for Teaching and Learning ............ 50

My Educational Background: The High School and College Years ........................................ 51

My Early Teaching Experiences ................................... 57

The Design of My Old Regular Tenth Grade Curriculum ........................................ 59

The Design of My Old Challenge Tenth Grade Curriculum ........................................ 64

A Picture of the Present ................................................... 69

My New Philosophy for Teaching and Learning ............ 70

Sources of Change: School Reform and My Master's Program ........................................ 71

My Present Teaching Experiences ................................... 75
Future Plans for My Tenth Grade Curricula ....................... 127

REFERENCES .............................................................................. 134

APPENDICES ................................................................................ 136
   A. Content Outline of Tenth Grade Regular Class .............. 136
   B. Initial Interview about "Choices" ................................. 137
   C. Instructions for "Uno" Game ........................................ 138
   D. Content Outline for Tenth Grade Challenge Class ...... 140
   E. Reader Response Journals for The Pearl ..................... 141
   F. Writing Poetry ............................................................. 142
   G. Recommended Book Report ....................................... 143
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Curriculum is the heart and soul of what happens in a classroom. An effective teacher knows that curriculum means much more than just content; how students learn and experience new ideas is just as important as what is being taught within her four walls. Yet, with all of the different aspects of school dividing our attention, it is at times difficult to get a handle on the big picture: the shape of the curriculum and all of its components. For a teacher who has not yet established what the design of her classroom will be or for the educator who has lost sight of her goals because she has become bogged down in the day-to-day routines, teaching can become quite tedious and frustrating. It is time then to re-evaluate the direction of the her curriculum and re-establish what is most important for her students. If not, she may become as discontented as I did not too many years ago. Yet, designing a custom-made curriculum is not a simple task. However, with patience and research, a teacher can begin to create a curriculum which meets the individual needs of her students.
Background to the Problem

It was in my third year of teaching that I became quite disillusioned as an educator and English teacher. My students were increasingly less motivated to learn and I was increasingly bored with my subject. I began to question myself and in doing so, I became even more unsettled. My questions ranged from more local concerns such as why do my students not enjoy learning to more global issues such as how should the subject of English really be defined? These questions reflected my growing feeling that I was not accomplishing anything as a teacher and that perhaps my chosen profession was devoid of useful ideas for doing so. Up until this point, I had believed that I was a pretty good teacher. But my questioning began the process of opening my eyes to the reality around me. My students were learning something, but what they were learning was not important to them or to me. I was not prepared for this crisis or how to handle it. I considered changing professions but a few changes which took place in our school over the next couple of years served to help me find answers to my questions and ultimately change me as a teacher.

The evidence of these changes has surfaced most profoundly in the curriculum I have developed for each of my two tenth grade English classes. I have begun to construct a curriculum which reflects not only English subject matter, such as writing, literature, and language study, but one that allows me to discover who my individual students are and how they learn best. Developing my own views on
curriculum and how it is best implemented has involved a long, tedious process. My own educational background as a student and teacher provided little guidance since my early education was based on a traditional philosophy with which I was no longer comfortable, and which at best, prepared me for the daily routine tasks of being a teacher but not for the larger scope of curriculum planning that I now believe is more central to my practice. Additionally, I had the familiar constraints which are typical of urban school districts: few resources, little support from the top, mandated tests, etc. However, through trial and error, reflection, and persistence, I have developed a framework for a curriculum which best reflects who I am as a teacher and what I feel my students need most. With a central focus on the theme of "choices," my students and I enter into a conversation of choices and implications using world literature and informal and formal writing to support this ongoing conversation. Because of this new interactive curriculum, my interest in teaching has been revitalized. I now feel that what my students and I encounter in the classroom is significant in developing ways to think about the world in which we live and therefore, provides a practical and interesting approach to the study of literature and writing.

The following study is my story: how I have come to develop my current tenth grade classes' curricula, one college preparatory and the other regular, as well as the literature and writing the curricula includes, and how my students respond to it. Most importantly, this study examines what my students' and my perceptions are about the curricula to inform myself as well as fellow educators about what
works and what does not. Perhaps my story may serve to help new and experienced teachers develop curriculum of their own which best fits their individual classrooms. In any case, I know that personally it has allowed me an opportunity to reflect on who I am as a teacher, what it is I teach, and who it is I am teaching. In doing so, I have begun to evaluate if the curriculum I teach is truly student-centered and applicable to my individual students. If it is, I can rest assured that learning is indeed taking place in my classroom, and at the same time, I will be encouraged to find even more new and innovative ways to enable my students in being actively involved in exploring new ideas and experiences.

Statement of the Problem

The struggle to develop and implement English curriculum is not an easy task, even for the teacher who is implementing district-wide mandated curriculum. In general, teachers are isolated creatures by nature. We walk into our classrooms and shut the doors. So often we end up teaching the textbook or what we were taught when we were students, without regard for what we are trying to accomplish. We have little time to reflect on what we are doing or what the students are learning. More importantly, we don't reach at the heart of what and how our students learn best. And what happens to our students? We see few who achieve any significant amount of learning. As a result of this ongoing process, many
teachers, like myself, become frustrated with education altogether. It is at this point that we must get at the root of our problems or perhaps abandon teaching as a profession.

The bandages for fixing these problems have often come in the form of an aphorism about instruction: "Teach reader's response theory so that students will be involved with the literature" or "Be sure to take students through the writing process in order that they may see that revision brings improvement." Please understand, I am not making light of these suggestions, but a focus on planning lessons can only take a teacher and students so far. Instruction is an important part of our day-to-day lives in the classroom, but a series of well-planned lessons will not necessarily answer the larger question of what we are trying to accomplish. This is a question curricular issues bring us to ask. For the enacted curriculum represents the teacher, the students, the content being studied, the daily lesson plans, and the manner in which all of these elements function together to create a learning environment. It is an analysis of the curriculum which will enable a teacher to find her way through the frustration.

I envision many teachers facing the same dilemma as me: 1) becoming disillusioned with my profession because my teaching philosophy had not yet been clearly defined, 2) rummaging through the past to see what, if anything, I was doing was of any value, and 3) facing the task of building a curriculum of my own which is best for my students. Unfortunately, there has been little help for teachers who are trying to rethink and reshape their own curriculum. In fact,
curricular issues are typically the purview of administrators which leaves teachers to follow mandates that often miss the mark in particular classrooms.

Some districts have tried to side-skirt the issue entirely by implementing a formal (written) mandated curriculum which all teachers in the district are expected and required to follow. The belief is that the uniformity of a district curriculum will ensure that all students are receiving the content the district wants students to cover at specific grade levels in certain academic tracks. Many districts go so far as to outline daily lesson plans as well as what content is to be studied. The fact is that this type of "teacher-proof" curriculum may reduce many teachers to not much more than human robots who are going through the motions. Of course, as effective teachers know, the teacher must re-conceptualize curriculum in a manner most fitting for her students. Rather than "covering the material," she must rethink her own classroom curriculum to make sense to her students.

Fortunately or unfortunately, depending on one's perspective, various groups both within and outside of the English teaching profession have over the years tried to offer some assistance to the teacher. On the national level, attempts have been made to create curriculum which can be implemented in schools across the country. One of the earliest was "An Experience Curriculum in English" (Hatfield, 1935) by the National Council of Teachers of English. "An Experience Curriculum in English" was an attempt to make language arts study student-centered and experience-oriented and to provide teachers with patterns that could be modeled in their individual
classrooms. But this approach was weak in defining the curriculum as just communication "experiences." As a result, any experience students may have encountered in real life seemed grist for the mill, causing the unique nature of literacy experience or substantive issues to be lost.

Also attempting to influence language arts curriculum nationwide, E.D. Hirsch's (1987) book *Cultural Literacy* focuses on the argument that students' background knowledge is important in building literacy. Hirsch asserts that students must be taught cultural background in schools if they are to be "culturally" literate, which in turn promotes functioning adequately in modern society. Therefore, Hirsch has develop a body of knowledge which all students should know if they want to enter into the realm of cultural literacy. However, Hirsch fails to focus on the manner in which this curriculum should be implemented, therefore, reducing it to a list of knowledge that students should know. Classrooms thus become places in which students are merely "filled up" with knowledge that is regurgitated on objective tests.

In response to Hirsch's (1987) list of content for language arts study, the English Coalition (Lloyd-Jones and Lundford, 1989), sponsored in large part by the National Council of Teachers of English, set out to establish a national model for curriculum based solely on pedagogy. In emphasizing "practicing" in English, the Coalition attempted to give examples or cases from which all English teachers could develop approaches to writing and reading. But the Coalition shied away from any discussion of content and offered very
little guidance for implementing lessons. Instead, the Coalition advocated theories of "active" learning with practical advice for ways in which teachers could execute such theories in their classrooms. Issues of curricular content and organization were overlooked, leaving a void in discussions of reform in English teaching.

Perhaps the best attempt to date for devising a curriculum with a structure and a concern for rich content for all students is Pacesetter English (Applebee, 1996) developed by the College Board and the National Council of Teachers of English. Pacesetter, modeled somewhat on the Advanced Placement curriculum but for all students, focuses on "Voices of Modern Cultures." It is a holistic, student-centered, constructivist approach to teaching twelfth grade English. Unlike the NCTE's "An Experience Curriculum in English" and E.D. Hirsch's *Cultural Literacy*, Pacesetter does not focus on a particular body of knowledge that students should know. Instead it creates experiences in English which are explorations of significant issues, and in the manner of The English Coalition, uses methods which are more process-oriented and example-driven so that teachers may decide for themselves what is most appropriate for their individual classrooms. Pacesetter serves as a model which every teacher could use to devise a meaningful, coherent curriculum. However, Pacesetter, as with other curricula, has been created by someone on the outside--other teachers, professors, and the "aloof" College Board--leaving it open to scrutiny and debate as with all other curriculum attempts. Harvey A. Daniels (1994) has criticized Pacesetter as "unremarkable" (p. 134) because it resembles the
Advanced Placement curriculum and is nothing more than what he terms a traditional content framed in a slightly different way. In looking at preliminary documents, Daniels could see very little room for a student-centered, progressive approach to teaching English even though this is a primary goal of the Pacesetter developers.

Kristina M. Elias, (1994) one of the developers, argues that Pacesetter works to "marry the best in up-to-date innovative thinking with high standards of literacy" (p. 139). But these conflicting views articulated by Daniels and Elias serve to show the complexities in creating a curriculum for individual teachers. Daniels has missed the entire intent of Pacesetter simply because he was not in on its development. Being cynical of much of its content, Daniels has referred to Pacesetter as "unremarkable." It is obvious then that only the individual teacher can decide what can be used and what is to be discarded from any particular curriculum, no matter how well-grounded it may be in theory. Additionally, every individual's implementation will look different from another's. It will take an open-minded educator who views Pacesetter as a resource rather than a directive to decide upon its true contribution to her curriculum development.

One of the guiding forces behind Pacesetter English is Arthur N. Applebee's (1996) notion of a "culturally significant conversation." It is Applebee's framework for conceptualizing curriculum within a constructivist pedagogy that has guided me in designing a curriculum for my tenth grade classes. Applebee's domain for a culturally significant conversation invites teachers to focus not only on content,
its quality and quantity, but on the coherence between concepts taught as well as the manner in which all lessons are framed. All of the necessary ingredients of a curriculum are addressed, unlike the earlier approaches which focussed on either content or context. Additionally, a domain for a culturally significant conversation has given me the flexibility to design a curriculum which I feel best represents the needs of my students.

Since so few successful attempts have been made in developing an English curriculum, it seems that some important questions should be asked which get at the heart of why these curriculum attempts have been less than successful. Instead of calling upon committees to try and solve the problems teachers face, what would be the result of getting into the minds of teachers to discover how they think about curriculum? How would analyzing teachers' perceptions influence what and how teachers teach? What would be gained from knowing how students perceive the curriculum they encounter in the classroom? Answers to these questions would give me, as well as other teachers, more concrete, practical ways in which to build a meaningful curriculum. Perhaps a good hard look at teachers and their practices would reshape the make-up and design of curriculum committees or the attitudes of those advocating National Standards. Additionally, perhaps colleges of education would rethink teacher preparation programs so that courses are designed to enable young teachers to walk into a classroom with a sense of who they are and how they need to teach.
These may be lofty dreams, but maybe they're not so unrealistic. Getting into the minds of teachers and their students might just shed new light on what actually must be done in order for learning to take place inside the classroom. For me, an in-depth look at my teaching philosophy and practices has meant a personal transformation in who I am as a teacher and how I construct and conduct the curriculum in each of my classes. Drawing from various sources, sometimes even those from opposing theoretical stances, has given me the ammunition I need to teach an important and experiential curriculum in my tenth grade English classes.
CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF RELATED WORKS

During the course of my master's degree program, I read several works that have enabled me to rethink my work as an English teacher. In this chapter I review several key books that I have found especially helpful in my reformulation of my tenth grade English curriculum as a conversation about choices.

Cultural Literacy

In Cultural Literacy E.D. Hirsch (1987) focuses on the idea that students must have some background knowledge when approaching a reading task in order to truly comprehend it. For understanding to be possible, a body of cultural knowledge must be readily available in a reader's mind. For example, when an individual picks up a newspaper intending to comprehend what the articles are about, she must bring certain facts and information to bear. Hirsch claims that recent attempts to teach students to read ignores the content students must know and focuses on just the skills involved in reading, leaving the student "culturally illiterate." He argues that this has
particularly negative consequences for poor and working class students, the kinds of students that attend my school and my classroom.

For the sake of his argument, Hirsch and his colleagues have generated a list of words, terms, or facts which they feel are the basis of cultural content for American children. Hirsch asserts that the United States needs to abandon its approach to such philosophies as what he terms the "shopping mall high school" (p. 47) and apply a systematic, national approach to teaching the cultural knowledge that students must have. Hirsch is in favor of innovative ways of teaching this traditional material for "it opens up the possibility of a compromise--a curriculum that is traditional in content but diverse in its emphasis, that is pluralistic in its material and modes of teaching but nonetheless provides our children with a common core of cultural information" (p. 127). But no solution for creating a curriculum which steers away from memorization and recitation techniques is offered by Hirsch.

Although I agree with Hirsch's basic argument that all readers need background knowledge in order to comprehend a text, I disagree that anyone could and would generate a list of "things to know" which can be passed on in schools. As many critics have pointed out, Hirsch's list is limited and narrow in scope, and sometimes laughable, when one truly defines "American culture." For example, must one know the belief of the tooth fairy in order to enter into cultural knowledge? Additionally, individual teachers must assess the background information their students already
possess and build from there. Not all children beginning kindergarten at the same time possess the same background information on which teachers can build, and only the individual classroom teacher can get a sense of where she needs to begin with her students.

Likewise, because Hirsch offers no plan to implement teaching cultural literacy, education may be reduced to teaching students the list in a manner in which students memorize and regurgitate content. There is no proof that students retain such knowledge when it is merely memorized. Just as Hirsch argues that "critical thinking and basic skills, two areas of current focus in education do not enable children to create out of their own imaginations the essential names and concepts that have arisen by historical accident" (p. 28), neither does memorization ensure that students will become culturally literate. It seems much more logical that a teacher would not only build on the background knowledge her students already possess, but would do it in such a manner as provides contexts enabling internalization of the new concepts. My curriculum, for example, attempts to thematize the reading of literature and writing assignments around the notion of choices and decision-making. Accordingly, content would seem to have more meaning as my students organize information, ideas, and experiences with such a framework.

Hirsch reminds us that content is an important element of a teacher's curriculum, but as I have learned as a teacher, curriculum
is so much more as well. Who I teach and the manner in which I teach are components of curriculum which cannot be ignored if true learning is to take place in a classroom.

Uncommon Sense

In Uncommon Sense, Mayher, (1990) like Hirsch, (1987) asks teachers to become reflective practitioners who initially ask themselves the essential question: how do students learn? If we break out of our teaching habits long enough to truly ponder this question, the answers will lead us to what Mayher coins "uncommonsense" teaching and learning. His purpose is to get teachers to reflect on how students learn so that they can make a fundamental paradigm shift in the way they think about teaching. Unlike Hirsch, Mayher does not have a prescribed list of information students should know. Instead, if we realize that students learn best through experience, we can no longer be teachers who primarily teach transmission of knowledge or who only incorporate new approaches in an old system. "This uncommon sense theory is offered, therefore, not as a theory to be applied mechanically to pedagogical problems but as one that tries to help frame those problems in new ways" (p. 9).

One aspect of Mayher's work encourages teachers to analyze existing commonsense methods of teaching English. For example, in teaching literature we may believe that only the canon is "important" and that close reading of a text will allow us to know what the literary
work is about. But does this method encourage students to read in school or even on their own? Does this method allow students any personal interaction with what they read? The answer is "no" if we realize that many students do not read outside the context of school, and if they do, it is often books that veer far away from the "acceptable" canonical list. Likewise, in teaching composition, the commonsense position holds to students acquiring writing skills within acceptable modes: narration, description, persuasion, etc., and presenting what they have learned in polished final products. But what do students learn if they never revisit the "polished product" as a means of learning from their mistakes? How have we given students real-life writing situations in which they pose their own problems with writing? Finally, in teaching language and grammar, the commonsense approach emphasizes knowing all the different aspects of grammatical form. But how does knowing these aspects improve writing? Studies show that is doesn’t.

Mayher is not asserting that we need to throw out the subject matter of the commonsense approach to school. Instead, we need to teach literature, composition, and language in ways that will be meaningful to students, building on their existing background knowledge. "But the way will not be through lists, or out-of-context memory exercises; the way will be to find a path which brings them meaningfully alive in the contemporary reality of children and adolescents. And if we can’t? Then maybe their importance has been overstated" (p. 44).
In light of the problems associated with commonsense teaching, Mayher asserts an uncommonsense approach which fits with the known ways in which students learn. First, Mayher points out that the context in which learning takes place is of primary concern. Accomplishing a task is dependent upon "the way the problems are posed and by the learner's interpretation of what the task entails" (p. 76). Also, personal knowledge plays a role in what and how students learn. Learning occurs when "the student’s personal connections to the material being learned, and his individual reasons for learning it" (p. 79) are the focus of instruction. The more personally connected one is to the information being taught, the deeper a learner will be able to internalize the information.

On this point, Mayher and Hirsch seem to agree: background knowledge is a key; learning can only be built on the existing knowledge a student has. However, Mayher also reminds us that most of what we learn is learned tacitly. This means that experience itself teaches us more than just the primary focus of that experience. What we pick up is often not said, but observed. At this point, Mayher's and Hirsch's arguments begin to diverge. The uncommonsense approach to learning requires a top down, holistic approach rather than a bottom-up, part-to-whole approach. It is the entire experience which must be analyzed if we realize that "the whole is greater than the sum of its parts because it involves the simultaneous interaction of all these aspects of meaning" (p. 87). Instead of randomly learning about information, Mayher reminds educators that students learn best by experience which explores the
entire concept in a realistic fashion. Within this uncommonsense theory, the teacher and students take on the roles of collaborators, where an emphasis is placed on building upon "spontaneous concepts where they are available, and to provide experiences which will help develop them when they are not" (p. 92) since these are the "teachable moments." Teachers who view themselves as collaborators will provide scaffolding support for students so that students may take their learning to new levels. Mayher also states that another important aspect of uncommonsense learning is teaching students how to learn. This requires the teacher to provide opportunities for conscious reflection on what students have learned and how they have learned it. Students may then be able to transfer these skills to new learning situations. One last important aspect of the uncommonsense theory is an emphasis on the use of narrative. Narrative outlets allow students opportunities to reflect, interpret, and analyze all types of learning experiences.

My curriculum of "choices" reflects Mayher's thinking in many ways. Not only does it invite students to bring their personal knowledge of choices to the new concepts discussed in class, but the concepts are posed in such a fashion that students can easily enter into the conversational domain. Since the discussions involve not only the choices characters in literary texts make but those of my students as well, the students can feel personally connected to the information presented and will be able to make personal meaning of new concepts which are explored. The holistic approach of the conversational domain also offers students an experience which
examines the idea of choices from a myriad of aspects. In other words, not only do we study the nature of making choices, but we explore the implications involved, as well as the effects those implications have on others and society. This approach has also changed my role as a teacher. I am now the manager of the conversation; I have created the framework for the experience which enables students to become critical thinkers.

Mayher ends his argument for a call for reform in schools. If teachers are to change their commonsense approaches to teaching, they must be allowed to break out of the commonsense confinements which our schools promote. In other words, if teachers are to manipulate learning environments to create learning experiences, they may need more time than the traditional American high school affords in a 50 minute block of time. Likewise, perhaps traditional modes of assessment must be rethought if we want students to demonstrate what they have learned in context. Schools must be willing to become uncommonsense also, if teachers are to make the difference in teaching and learning that is needed.

Mayher's arguments for an uncommonsense approach to teaching are well-grounded in today's theory of how students learn best. In revisiting the commonsense approaches to teaching, I was reminded of my own educational experiences and the types of learning environments which disconnected me to how I felt about what I learned. For decades, teachers have blindly taught in the commonsense style because it was all they knew or it was what they perceived was acceptable. But the commonsense approach is no
longer acceptable if we get to the core of how students learn. We must be willing to break out of our existing paradigms and adopt a new approach to teaching if we want our students to have experiences in school which will mirror the experiences they will encounter in life. Mayher’s book has timely information which every teacher should read in order to renew or relearn what will work best in her classroom.

Language and Reflection

In *Language and Reflection* (1992), Gere, Fairbanks, Howes, Roop, and Schaafsma, (1992) provide an overview of differing philosophies in teaching English for students or teachers who are interested in "research and reflection that is an essential part of good teaching" (p. v). In particular, *Language and Reflection* reviews four different approaches to teaching: language-as-artifact, language-as-development, language-as-expression, and language-as-social construct. For teachers who are particularly interested in philosophies based on student-centered classrooms, language-as-expression and language-as-social construct may be of particular interest. For the purposes of this thesis, and to describe my teaching philosophy in particular, I will briefly examine just two of these four approaches: language-as-artifact and language-as-expression.

Language-as-artifact (p. 112) reflects a traditional philosophy in which the focus of the curriculum centers on the text. In this tradition, a literary text holds "right" answers which students must
decode. Writing takes on specific forms, such as narration and exposition, that students must know and employ in order to be effective writers. Language study may "range all the way from the formal grammar unit prescribed in some school curricula, to a selective study of key grammatical concepts, to a functional treatment of whatever usage problems students may be having" (p. 91). The goal of this type of teaching is to provide students with an acceptable way of thinking about literature, writing discourses, and language study as a whole so that students know or are at the least informed in the tradition of English. Hirsch's (1987) idea of cultural literacy is easily promoted by a teacher who views language as an artifact.

A teacher who is part of the language-as-artifact philosophy will also be center stage in the classroom. Her aim is to direct students to what they should learn. In reading literature, she uses a close reading of the text so that students can answer the question, what is this text about? In writing instruction, emphasis in the language-as-artifact approach focuses on language's qualities and characteristics, usually through grammatical analysis.

Often the different elements of the language-as-artifact classroom are separated into different subjects within the subject of English. For instance, vocabulary, grammar, writing, and literature may be isolated to studies in and of themselves. This is not always the case, however. Effective teachers will find ways to integrate the various components.
The strengths of this philosophy may be obvious. For one, it promotes the concept of cultural literacy. In doing so, students are taught an intellectual discipline, such as close reading of a text, which may prepare students for college work. Additionally, this approach "permits measurement against a standard" (p. 97) in which students are evaluated objectively against what has been set as "right." Finally, this philosophy incorporates various concepts from different approaches "making possible the kind of eclecticism that is crucial in developing an individual teaching style" (p. 98).

Yet, there are also various limitations to the language-as-artifact approach. Perhaps the most glaring is that "the product is privileged over the process" (p. 98). This means that all students are expected to learn the "right" answer--making language like a science. To say that only one way is right is to deny that individuals approach texts from various backgrounds or with various ways of thinking. For this reason, students may become very disillusioned with language, reserving it as a subject for study rather than a daily activity in their lives.

On the opposite side of the curricular spectrum is what Gere et al. terms language-as-expression (p. 140), based on the philosophy that students learn language through their own meaning-making rather than prescribed facts and interpretations handed down from the teacher. "The goal in this way of teaching is...to enable students to trust their own responses; to understand why they respond as they do; to respect the responses of others; to move beyond initial engagement to more sophisticated responses such as interpretation, evaluation,
and construct-perception" (p. 146). At the heart of this approach to teaching are student feelings and the belief that these feelings foster more sophisticated responses to language, learning, and life. Because of this goal, the teacher's role becomes more of a "facilitator than a performer in the classroom" (p. 149) who encourages and creates ways for students to have an authentic voice in the classroom as well as who learns to evaluate students' processes and not just products of their work. In many ways, this philosophy fits Mayher's (1990) definition of uncommonsense schooling. Like Mayher, language-as-expression focuses on students' personal interactions with a text in order to develop critical thinking skills. The role of the teacher changes to enable students to experience language, not to inform them of what they need to know about a text or a method of writing.

The design of a language-as-expression classroom will vary according to the needs of the students. Student activity is the central focus of the classroom where reading, writing, vocabulary, and language study are integrated, often within thematic units which are designed to invite students "to use language to express their feelings, ideas, and beliefs" (p. 162). Most choices about writing are often left to the student. Additionally, "narrative is especially important in the language-as-expression classroom, as an object of study, as a mode of learning, and as an indispensable activity in class discussions" (p. 150) as Mayher has argued.

There are limitations to this approach to teaching but for the most part, these limitations can be modified by a thoughtful teacher.
For example, if teachers are not careful, they can focus so much on students' feelings that they never move on to fostering student thought. It is important to remember that feelings are the open door to more sophisticated ways of knowing which must be learned. Additionally, this approach is more individualistic than social in nature. Teachers must not forget that much of our learning is formed in social constructs, so activities must be designed to move students into these types of situations. Furthermore, this approach tends to privilege student texts and responses over professional texts and responses. Teachers not only need to be comfortable with this approach, but they must also foster interactions with professional texts and responses as well.

For all of the limitations to the language-as-expression approach, there are several potentials it has offered me as I have reformulated my curriculum. This approach helps to create a classroom which is student-centered and which celebrates individuality. Students are enabled to think and respond for themselves in educated and creative ways. The hope is that this type of learning allows students to engender their confidence in language in differing contexts so that they become sophisticated readers and responders in the world in which they know (pp. 158 - 161).

The categories in Language and Reflection help beginning and experienced teachers clearly define differing approaches to the teaching of English. At the risk of becoming stereotypical, Language and Reflection works out the distinctions between opposing philosophies as to how students learn and therefore, how teachers
teach. For me, I have been able to identify my own practices in such a way as to enable me to understand why I may teach a particular lesson the way I do. Language-as-artifact reflects the traditional teacher I used to be. Language-as-expression reflects the constructive teacher I am working to become. However, in this shifting of approaches, I see that even though my focus has changed—valuing student's responses over the perceived "rightness" of the text—many of my methods have not entirely reflected this change. Most teachers will undoubtedly see a strong resemblance of themselves in one approach, but more than likely they will also be able to identify elements in other approaches as well. For a reflective educator, this will allow her to identify what she values most in her classroom without narrowing the possibility of change.

Curriculum As Conversation

In Curriculum As Conversation, Arthur N. Applebee (1996) provides a framework for teachers in thinking about and developing their curriculum. Applebee asserts that curriculum, by its very nature, provides a domain for the conversation of the classroom. It is up to the teacher to "establish not only the roles of the teacher and learner, but also what will count as knowing in their classrooms" (p. 35).

Applebee asserts that in thinking about curriculum, educators have limited their focus to what students should know and because of this, classroom domains have focused on what Applebee calls
"knowledge-out-of-context" (pp. 1-2) in which students learn about a subject rather than participate in a subject (p. 28). However, in light of recent studies focusing on how students learn, Applebee states that we must think of curriculum in terms of how students learn best, not only what students should know. In doing so, the conversational domain will emphasize "knowledge-in-action" (pp. 1-2) in which students are invited to participate in significant meaning-making. Additionally, the framework for establishing participation in the domain of the classroom must focus on conversations which matter. Applebee defines this as what is "culturally significant" (p. 42) to a particular community. Therefore, Applebee is not denying Hirsch's (1987) claim for cultural literacy, but Applebee sees the need for the individual teacher to define what is culturally significant for her classroom. Content is valuable as it fuels the ongoing conversation that shapes what gets read, discussed, and written about.

According to Applebee, the work of the teacher is "establishing a conversational domain and fostering relevant conversations within it" (p. 44). The first problem for the teacher is in "finding an initial topic or direction for conversation" (p. 83) which will lay the groundwork for the effectiveness of the conversation in the classroom. If the topic is too difficult or too unrelated to the students, the conversation may be stifled at onset. However, if the direction of the conversation is substantive and connected to students, teachers may see the conversation explode as students take it farther and deeper than the teacher envisioned.
Applebee outlines four principles of effective conversation by H.P. Grice, a philosopher of language, which will aid teachers in creating and evaluating significant conversations. It is these four terms which guide the analysis of the study of my tenth grade curricular conversations about choices: quality, quantity, relatedness, and manner.

"Quality," according to Applebee, represents the worthiness of the materials studied. In other words, the works and concepts studied in the classroom should "support meaningful conversation" (p. 54). In this light, "quality is not an absolute; it is always defined with respect to a particular topic of conversation" (p. 65). For example, a work of quality in my particular curriculum is a selection from *Kaffir Boy* by Mark Mathabane. It supports the initial conversation of "choices for maturity" and lends a South African voice to this world literature course.

Applebee also argues that teachers must balance the "quantity" of works covered in instruction. The materials included in a curriculum must allow interaction among all the participants. If too much information is covered, students will not be able to participate in the curricular conversation and learning will become "knowledge-out-of-context." If the conversation develops and moves too quickly, the curriculum is reduced to coverage of material rather than students' experience with the material. For example, my class may become one of listing what choices characters make instead of taking the time to examine the thoughts and actions behind those choices. On the other hand, if not enough information is engaged, students will
drop out of the conversation entirely because they become bored and frustrated with a conversation that drags. This was true in the district mandated curriculum I taught early in my teaching. One unit centered on the play *A Raisin In The Sun* and was designed to discuss family relationships. But this unit lagged on over a nine week period exploring only a collection of works about families. There was no integration between the different works represented and no elaboration upon the nature of family relationships. My students became extremely bored with the unit and verbalized this to me daily.

"Relatedness" refers to the coherence a curriculum must have in order to give a sense of direction to what has been covered and what is to come (p. 59). If the parts of the conversation are fragmented, the conversation will lose its significance and students will be reduced to learning the parts out of context with the whole picture, losing sight of Mayher's (1990) argument for a holistic, top-down approach to concepts. An example would be the second unit of my current curriculum of "choices" which is an examination of the implications of choices. I did not decide on this unit; rather, it developed as a natural part of an exploration of the nature of choices with my students. Therefore, it was built from existing elements of the curriculum, allowing an ebb and flow between ideas discussed.

Finally, Applebee asserts that a successful conversation is dependent upon the "manner" in which the curriculum is presented. "What we learn is in large part a function of how we learn it" (p. 62). The teacher's work then focuses on enabling students to participate in the curricular conversation. This requires activities built around
discussions which enable knowing and learning. It also requires "activities that invite diverse interpretation and multiple points of view" (p. 49). One example would include having my students role playing miscommunications within families. This invites students to share their perceptions of the choices and actions each family member makes. In turn, this allows students an opportunity to internalize how one may feel in a certain situation, therefore, adding a new scope to an existing concept. A teacher must remember that her manner of teaching, as in creating experiential contexts, is what fosters helping students into the conversation.

Applebee also offers examples of six different structures of curricular conversations which get to the very heart of what the classroom conversation emphasizes as important. For example, in what Applebee refers to as a "collection," subject matter is explored in relationship to its "set-ness" (p. 72). In other words, in studying writing, a course may divide the curricular conversation into units of different types of discourses and these units are studied independent of one another. Or in what Applebee terms an "episodic" (p. 76) structure, the curricular conversation is more interrelated around an overall topic and the curricular manner focuses on sequence. An example would include a chronological study of American literature. This structure "leads students to return at regular intervals to the organizing topic" but often the different episodes are not related to one another (p. 76). Applebee refers to the "integrated" (p. 76) structure as one in which "students discover interrelationships across all the elements in the curriculum, so that the parallel but
independent discussions of an episodic curriculum begin to echo back on one another" (pp. 76 - 77). It is this type of structure which lays the framework for a rich curricular conversation, and one which I have tried to create for my own classroom.

Applebee's work pushes teachers to look beyond covering content when creating a curriculum and to consider how students learn to use information. In light of today's educational shift from teaching students about a subject matter to having students fully experience subject matter in ways that are meaningful to them, Applebee's work is a welcome change in approaches to curriculum development. Furthermore, Applebee's four qualities of an effective conversation give teachers a way in which to conceptualize all of the different elements of a culturally significant conversation. If one element is missing or not fully developed, the conversation will stall and students will be denied the richness of a life-like conversation. Since our aim is to have experiences which enable significant learning, the entire context in which that is fostered must be fully explored.

In particular, Applebee's notion of a culturally significant conversation has helped me analyze the uniqueness of the curriculum developed for my classroom. In choosing a topic for the curriculum, I have had to analyze the different participants and aspects that contribute to the conversation. In doing so, I have chosen a guiding topic of "choices" which I feel my students need. At the same time, I have had to consider the culture and climate of the school, community, and nation in order to know what is important when
guiding my students in what they should learn. In this way I am building what Hirsch (1987) terms cultural literacy, but within an experiential approach with the goal of thoughtfulness such as Applebee offers. The structure of the conversation must then be integrated so that each element may work together to present the whole. If I want my English classroom to be a context in which students learn, I must manipulate an environment which will model true life experiences.

Instructional Scaffolding

Judith Langer and Arthur N. Applebee's (1987) notion of "instructional scaffolding" in How Writing Shapes Thinking not only fits with Applebee's idea of a culturally significant conversation but takes this concept to a deeper level. As Applebee sets up guidelines for a curricular framework, Langer concentrates more intensely on one aspect of that framework: manner. Instructional scaffolding, based on Bruner's idea of "tutorial assistance" (p. 139) focuses on the methods a teacher uses to not only enable students to enter the curricular conversation, but to aid them in internalizing what they have learned as well. "In this model of instruction, the teacher retains the role of planner and initiator of classroom activities. However, the activities planned need to provide scope for the students to develop their own purposes rather than simply providing responses to fit into the teacher's predetermined framework" (p. 145).
This represents a constructivist view of learning and thinking where the classroom is student-centered rather than teacher-centered, and the teacher's role is to foster the students' meaning-making.

According to Langer and Applebee, there are five important aspects of successful instructional scaffolding: ownership, appropriateness, support, collaboration, and internalization. In order for "ownership" to be involved in instruction, "tasks must allow room for students to have something of their own to say...Students must see the point of the task, beyond simple obedience to the teacher's demands" (p. 141). If ownership is not present, the task becomes merely an exercise to be completed for the teacher causing original thought and learning to be scarce and regurgitation to be the norm. But if a teacher orchestrates instruction in such a manner as the student sees what may be gained from the task, the atmosphere is conducive to authentic learning. In many ways this parallels Mayher's (1990) emphasis on context. The context of learning and understanding is the focus of the curriculum.

Langer and Applebee also state that the "appropriateness" of the tasks will determine the effectiveness of the instruction. In this case, "tasks (must) build on literacy and thinking skills the students already have, helping them to accomplish tasks that they could not otherwise complete on their own" (p. 142). Therefore, teachers must be able to assess where their students are and what they will need to be drawn into deeper thinking and knowing. Again, Langer and Applebee's ideas echo Mayher's. Personal knowledge of the students determines the beginning point for the teacher. With this in mind, the
teacher provides "support" for students which aids "a natural sequence of thought and language, providing effective routines for the students to internalize" (pp. 142 - 143). Because of this, the teacher's role is one of "collaboration" which helps "students toward new learning rather than of testing the adequacy of new learning" (p. 143). "Internalization" is the goal of effective instruction. In this sense, the scaffolding "self-destructs as the child internalizes its features, allowing the student to complete similar tasks without further help" (p. 144). This moves the new information out of the classroom to the "inner world of knowing and remembering" (p. 144). This is where Gere et al.'s (1992) language-as-expression approach must be directed if students are to move beyond their own responses and truly learn.

Langer and Applebee's work widens Applebee's (1996) notion of a culturally significant conversation. For teachers who have assessed what their students need, in terms of the guiding topic and materials, the next step is in orchestrating everything to work in a learning atmosphere. This manner is not clearly defined for many teachers. But the aspects of ownership, appropriateness, support, collaboration, and internalization give teachers guidelines to focus on while making day-to-day lesson plans within the realm of the curricular conversation. Teachers can ask themselves the questions: Does this lesson draw the students in? Do my students have the necessary background information on which to build the new concept? Have I designed the lesson in a manner which allows students to think for themselves? And ultimately, have I enacted the lesson in a manner
which enables students to apply the new information in different contexts? For me, instructional scaffolding is the essential next step after deciding the overarching framework for my curriculum. I continually have to scrutinize every aspect of my daily lesson plans, old and new ideas alike, in order that each activity not only contributes to the ongoing conversation but makes the conversation as rich as possible for my students.

Teachers will have to revisit the culturally significant conversation from time to time to ensure that it is appropriate for her students. However, a teacher must revisit her scaffolding techniques on a daily basis so as to continuously maintain a context in which students are invited into the conversation. These elements of scaffolding are what ensure that students have experiences with the content.

Hirsch, Mayher, Gere et al., Applebee, and Langer add many voices to the development of curriculum. A teacher who is truly interested in developing a curriculum which meets the needs of her students must always search for ways to create a meaningful content as well as find ways to invite students into the curricular structure. An effective teacher will build on information her students already possess. An effective teacher will also be willing to shift or redefine her paradigm if it means implementing methods which enable students to learn. Applebee’s notion of a culturally significant conversation embodies a mixing of the old, traditional information with new progressive experienced-based approaches to teaching and
learning which allow students to find meaning in ways that are relevant and timely for today's teachers. For this reason, I have used the framework of a culturally significant conversation to build my tenth grade English curricula.
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Purpose of the Study

This study is an attempt to respond to the questions I have about the curricula I have developed for my tenth grade regular and tenth grade challenge English classrooms and how I came to make certain choices about that curricula. The study is threefold: 1) it is a reflection on my old teaching philosophy and curricula and why they did not work for me and my students, 2) it is an analysis of my current philosophy and curricular practices to find out what is working, and 3) it explores what changes still need to be made. The following questions will guide the study:

1) How did my own high school and college experiences shape my earlier beliefs about the teaching of English?

2) Why and how has my teaching philosophy and curricula changed?

3) What is the current shape of my classroom curricula based on my existing teaching philosophy?
4) What are my instructional practices today based on my classroom curricula?

5) What are my students' perceptions of my classroom curriculum?

Site and Respondents

Location

I teach tenth grade English in an urban school district in Columbus, Ohio. In fact, I too, am a product of the Columbus Public Schools, graduating from Mifflin High School in 1981. I began my teaching career as a substitute teacher in the Columbus school district in 1985 after I graduated from Mount Vernon Nazarene College in Mount Vernon, Ohio. I became a contracted teacher in 1987 at Independence High School and throughout my nine years of experience, I have taught all grade levels of high school (9 - 12) and a variety of courses such as Writer's Workshop, Mass Media, British Literature, and World Literature.

The city of Columbus has a population of approximately 500,000 with more than 60,000 students enrolled in its elementary, middle, and high schools. With the enforcement of mandatory desegregation in the late 1970s, Columbus' school population steadily shifted from a majority of white students to mostly African American students by the early 1990s. My school, Independence High School, more than reflects this shift in demographics with a student population of 81
percent African American, 17 percent Euro-American, and less than 2 percent Asian. Our school has a population of just over 1200 students, making it one of the largest high schools in the district.

Although the school itself is reform-minded, it faces many challenges. For example, the majority of Independence's students would be classified as coming from middle to low income working-class households. Over 30 percent are eligible for free or reduced lunches. Approximately 20 percent of our students will drop out before they reach their senior year and less than 30 percent of the senior class will go on to a two or four year college. Clearly, Independence High School is a school that needs to consider change at many levels, including a rethinking of classroom curriculum and instruction.

Beginning in 1989, under the guidance of our administration, Independence became active in reform in education. We underwent many changes which included implementing a block schedule as well as becoming actively involved in nation-wide reform efforts such as the Coalition of Essential Schools (Sizer, 1984). Additionally, we became partners with The Ohio State University as a professional development school in which the university and the school collaborate in the professional development of student teachers and teachers alike for the purpose of improving the practice of teaching as a whole. In the past year, several colleagues and myself have been actively involved in a movement entitled "Critical Friends," initiated by the Annenburg Institute at Brown University, a group committed to helping one another in our own personal development as educators.
All of these influences have created an atmosphere of change in our school where as teachers, we have been encouraged to better ourselves and the curriculum we teach.

My Tenth Grade Classes: "Regular" and "Challenge"

The tenth grade students I teach are divided into two tracks: "regular" and "challenge." The course I teach is designated as a comprehensive study of "world" literature and composition. Early on in their schooling, the best and brightest students are classified as college-bound while all others fall under a general track umbrella. Students who maintain good grades, at least a B average or better, continue in the college-bound track and are placed in the "challenge" track in high school. The "regular" track students continue in a general education track completing the minimum requirements of history, math, science, English, and various electives for a total of 20 hours of credit needed for graduation. Attendance for these regular students vary from excellent to extremely poor. The same is true for their grade averages. It is assumed by most teachers and administrators that these students are not going on to college but will enter the work force directly after high school. The course of study is less rigorous than the challenge track, with an emphasis on developing basic reading and writing skills. For example, English students in a "regular" class will read less canonical works than their "challenge" counterparts, and they will focus mainly on five-paragraph essay style throughout their high school experience.
Additionally, many of these students are encouraged to enter a career center their junior year where they will learn a trade which they can continue in after high school.

On the other hand, the "challenge" students are classified as "college-bound" and are attempting to receive an "honors" or college-preparatory diploma. They will meet the same requirements as the regular students but with additional classes in math, science, and foreign language. Additionally, "challenge" students must complete 22 hours of credit for graduation. Most of these students have somewhat consistent attendance records and maintain "A" or "B" averages in most of their classes. This track is considered to be a more academically rigorous course of study, with a focus on a curriculum intended to enable students to complete college-level work. While no particular content is specified, it is tacitly understood that students in the challenge track will have exposure to canonical literature and various genres of writing discourses such as they will also study at the college level. Of course, the chosen textbooks fully support this content.

The Case Study Students

Two of my classes, one regular and one challenge tenth grade, served as the basis for this study. A maximum variation sampling of four students from each of the researched classes were selected for interviewing and for collection of documents. The students were chosen for variations in gender, race, and academic achievement.

40
Danielle, Natasha, John, and Dylan were interviewed and studied from the "regular" tenth grade English class. Danielle is an excellent student in all subject areas, maintaining an overall 4.0 grade point average. She was actually scheduled to be in the challenge class, but due to scheduling conflicts, she took the regular class with the understanding that she would complete additional work in order to receive challenge credit. I included Danielle as part of the study because I was curious to see her reaction to the curriculum of the "regular" class. I felt her perspective was extremely valuable since I hope to one day implement the notion of a culturally significant conversation in my challenge curriculum as well. Not only does Danielle maintain a 4.0 grade point average, she is involved in numerous extra-curricular activities such as drill team and student government. Outside of school, Danielle maintains a part-time job and regularly takes dance classes. Danielle is very concerned at this stage in her life about her schooling. She went to a private school in grades six through eight, but because of financial concerns, Danielle has returned to public school for her high school years. Danielle is already checking out colleges and has determined that she wants to be an attorney one day. Danielle enjoys writing but is hesitant about her skills as a reader.

Natasha, also a student in the regular class, is a good student maintaining a 3.4 grade point average. Natasha could do the work of the challenge class, but due to lower grades in previous years, Natasha was never placed in the challenge track. She is active in the choir at school and church and spends much of her spare time taking
care of her eight year old sister. Natasha plans to go to college and major in business. She enjoys both reading and writing and does a lot of both in her leisure time. Natasha is an excellent communicator. She was a lively, talkative student in class who never hesitated to state her opinions.

John is an average student who obtained a 3.5 grade point average the trimester before the study was conducted. John readily admits that this was the first time he had ever made honor roll. John is a serious student who thinks a lot about his future. He plans to go to a vocational school during his junior and senior years of high school to learn an electrical trade. John has already planned to join the army upon graduation from high school. John likes to read and write when the topics are interesting, and he particularly likes to write poetry.

Dylan is a struggling student. He wants to play football in high school, but he knows he must raise his 1.5 grade point average in order to do so. Dylan’s interests outside of school include sports and video games. He prefers writing over reading, and he delights in giving comical answers during a group discussion. Unfortunately, Dylan was removed from school for disciplinary reasons halfway through the study and therefore only participated in one interview. I felt that a less-successful student’s perspective, like Dylan’s, was extremely important to this study since I want to get a wide range of opinions of what seems to work and what does not in my curriculum.

Angela, Shawn, Jeff, and Rebecca were the four students selected from the challenge class for the study. Angela is a talkative,
energetic student who enjoys doing well in school. Her 3.5 grade point average reflects her hard work and determination. Angela's favorite subjects include math and typing, and she hopes to attend The Ohio State University to study business.

Shawn, also a challenge student, works steadily to receive his 3.0 grade point average. His favorite high school subject is math, but one day, he would like to become an attorney. Shawn is also active in extra-curricular activities as a member of various athletic teams such as football.

Jeff, often a quiet student, maintains an overall 3.6 grade point average. Jeff's favorite subject is also math. Outside of school, Jeff volunteers full-time in church work. Jeff has doubled up on many of his subjects hoping to free up his senior year to take several college-credit courses through a program called "College-Options." This program allows seniors at Independence to take courses at local colleges free of charge.

Rebecca, an extremely shy student, maintains an overall 4.0 grade point average. Like the other three challenge students, Rebecca's favorite subject is math. She knows she wants to attend college after high school, but she has not made any definite plans yet. Rebecca enjoys reading and proves to be an excellent writer.

Researcher Role

Since the first part of the study involves a reflection of my past educational and teaching experiences, this part of the study unfolds
as a narrative. I have attempted to recount my experiences as accurately as possible with an analysis of why I became such a disillusioned teacher after only a few years into my teaching career.

For the second part of the study, I have attempted to explain my current teaching philosophy and curricula. Again this unfolds in narrative form. However, the analysis of my current teaching practices is based on my role as an action researcher in my classroom in collaboration with Dr. George E. Newell, from The Ohio State University, who observed my regular and challenge track classes during the 1995-96 school year. Dr. Newell interviewed me about my curriculum for each class, and he also interviewed the case study students chosen for the study. Dr. Newell's presence in my classroom and bi-weekly interviews kept me in a reflective mode throughout each trimester he observed. I was forced to examine daily what I was doing in my classroom and to reflect upon what I felt worked and what did not.

Data Collection Methods

For part two of the study, observation, interviewing, and collection of documents were the data collection methods used. This triangulation method was employed to enhance the trustworthiness of the data collected.
Classroom Observations

I observed my own classes on an informal daily basis in order to observe student behaviors. At least twice a week throughout the trimester, I made log entries of my observations and impressions of the class sessions. To further the depth of my observations, I videotaped class sessions on an average of once every two weeks. This allowed me the opportunity to study my behavior as well as the behaviors of my students.

Dr. Newell observed each class on an average of two days a week throughout each trimester in order to observe both my behavior and my students' behaviors. Dr. Newell made field notes/log entries for each visit. Dr. Newell also wrote several conceptual memos to record key events, to note significant patterns in the data, and to synthesize our conversations about my growing understanding of my teaching and my students' experiences. In the beginning of each trimester, Dr. Newell observed the classes with only broad interests in mind (i.e. noting the structure of the classroom, interaction between students and teacher, and material being covered in class). After Dr. Newell discovered recurring patterns of behavior and relationships, his observations became more focused checking for analytical themes. All of Dr. Newell's documents were available to me at any time during the study. He occasionally would send me a copy of his memos, and these served to direct my thinking toward particular areas of my curriculum or teaching. After the study was
completed, Dr. Newell gave me complete access to all documents in order that I might begin my own analysis of my curriculum and my students' perceptions of each class.

**Interviews**

Before beginning observations of the class, Dr. Newell interviewed me about the development of my curriculum. We discussed my perceptions of the curricula of my two classes. Dr. Newell also conducted debriefing interviews with me bi-weekly throughout each trimester. Again, this was to gain insight into my perceptions of the curricula by capturing my perceptions of the development of my daily lesson plans as well as my perceptions of how the lessons unfolded. In turn, my perceptions of my students' engagement with the curricula were discussed.

These discussions provided an opportunity for me to gain insight into my own perceptions as well as those of my students. Being able to articulate what my intentions were for the curriculum I have created, helped me solidify my own thoughts. Additionally, the interviews provided an opportunity to reflect on how I felt my students were responding to the curriculum presented. Therefore, I was able to make adjustments in the curriculum on a daily basis as I felt was needed.

At the beginning and end of each trimester, Dr. Newell conducted interviews with the sample group of students from each class. These interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed for later analysis. In each interview, Dr. Newell gathered the students'
perceptions of the curricular conversation I developed in each class, focusing on the students' notions of the content (choices in literature and life), quantity (pace of coverage), relatedness (coherence between concepts taught), and manner (instructional methods used). I have used these interviews to form my own analysis of how my students perceive the classroom curriculum. What they have said or not said has informed me of the quality, quantity, relatedness, and manner of the classroom conversation for both the regular and challenge classes.

Collection of Documents

Dr. Newell and I gathered documents such as writing samples from the case study students as well as from their peers in order to analyze their content for topics and themes. Documents also served as an instrument to follow-up or check ongoing themes or issues that were identified in observations and interviews. These documents include student journals, essays in rough and final draft form, and essay tests.

Data Analysis Methods

Data analysis began with a reflection on my past educational experiences both in high school and college, examining specifically the methods my teachers employed for instruction and the content they covered. Next I analyzed the beginning of my own teaching career reflecting on the curriculum I taught as well as the underlying
reasons for my method of teaching. My analysis continued as I examined the changes which have occurred in my teaching as a result of reform in my school and the professional development I have sought on my own. This analysis leads to an examination of my current teaching practices which are a result of the many changes I have undergone as a teacher. Based on the interviews conducted by Dr. Newell and the journals I kept during the 1995 - 96 school year, I was able to reflect on my present practices, analyzing how and why I teach my classes as I do. The next step in data analysis includes an examination of my students' perceptions of the current curricula I employ. Using Applebee's (1996) four qualities of a culturally significant conversation--quality, quantity, relatedness, and manner--I organized students' comments from interviews as well as passages from students' writings to inform the analysis of the existence or non-existence of these qualities in my curricula. Finally, I have outlined my future plans for the development of my curricula based on my own perceptions as well as my students'.
CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

Reflections of the Past

In order to understand the changes I have undergone to become the teacher I am today, I have had to reflect on the different experiences which contributed to the kind of teacher I was at the beginning of my career. Many elements combined to make me resemble a teacher who Mayher (1990) would dub a "commonsense" type of teacher. My strongest influences began with my own educational experiences, primarily in high school and college, and for this reason, I specifically reflect on two teachers, who I will call Mrs. Whitley and Dr. Benson, who made a huge impact on me as a student. Additionally, I examine my earliest years of training and teaching to show what type of teacher I had become based on how my education had influenced me.

The purpose of this reflection into my past is vital in understanding the changes I have undergone as a tenth grade teacher in an urban school. When I started to rethink the curriculum I was teaching, I began to realize my educational background had not
provided me with an adequate scope of curricular and instructional preparation that could help me find answers to my problems. As a high school and then as a college student, I had been taught in a traditional manner, in much the same way as Gere et al. defines a "language-as-artifact" classroom. Frankly, I didn't know that other philosophies or methods even existed. In analyzing how these methods affected me, I began to find the source of disillusionment I was to face in my early teaching career.

My Old Philosophy for Teaching and Learning

My old teaching philosophy and style, based solely on my own traditional educational experiences, centered on the belief that there is a specific body of knowledge, including types of literature, writing discourses, and language conventions, which all students should know. This put the content of the English curriculum at the core of everything I did in the classroom. Included in this philosophy was the belief that the traditional literary canon is "quality" and the basis of study for literature. Likewise, I believed there are certain conventions and structures for reading and writing that are "correct" and therefore, must be studied by all students. As a result, my English curriculum was divided into separate units. Literature, writing, grammar, and vocabulary were studied as separate bodies of knowledge to be imparted to my students so that they would become prepared for the rigors of life after high school.
My Educational Background: The High School and College Years

My early beliefs were heavily influenced by the education I received as a student, both in high school and in college. Two teachers from my past, Mrs. Whitley and Dr. Benson, stand out as teachers I admired and who influenced my concept of education. It was the example of these two teachers that originally encouraged me to become an English teacher.

Mrs. Whitley had the reputation of being a difficult teacher. As most tenth grade honors students would, I came to her class prepared: large notebook, text, pen, and paper in hand. I sat front and center, poised and ready to begin furiously writing notes. In particular I recall the Shakespeare unit and Mrs. Whitley loved Shakespeare. This conclusion was based on all the information she had given us on his life, the Elizabethan age, all of the plays he wrote...she was preparing us for *Julius Caesar*, I think. She chose her favorite plays and recited them to us in story form. Gory details of the psychological acts of Shakespeare's characters mesmerized me. I loved this stuff! I couldn't write fast enough.

Then test time came: match the character's names with the correct plays, tell which character is responsible for the immortal lines, "To be or not to be...," list evidence of Queen Elizabeth's reign being termed "The Golden Age." Final grade = B. I hadn't memorized enough. But I'd do better on the next test because now I knew what was expected of me.

Sounds like a story based on Hirsch's (1987) *Cultural Literacy*, yet this was a real experience for me. As sophomore high school
students, we were expected to be familiar with certain aspects of Shakespeare. That made us "educated." And I really did love Mrs. Whitley's class. I felt as if I was being filled up with information. I was in a new age of awakening as a fifteen year old. This was the important learning! The tests were difficult, but at least I was learning how to really take tests. I knew this would be helpful when I went off to college.

But in my later life, I never returned to reading Shakespeare. Even in college as we watched videotaped versions of his plays and were asked to read on our own as homework, I don't believe I ever cracked the book. Why? Part was due to laziness, no doubt. But perhaps a greater part was due to how difficult I thought the text would be. For me it was the same as reading poetry: there was a strong chance I would not be able to come up with what it "really" was about. So instead, I waited for Dr. Benson's lectures about the works. Then, as in my professor's tradition, I read criticisms of the plays (instead of the plays themselves--which was not my professor's tradition) and I formed "my own opinions" based on picking and choosing from what the critics said. I did well; I received straight "A's."

If the sole purpose of my educational experience was to expose me to canonical works of literature or to find the "right" answer to what a piece of work was about, my teachers were very effective. If their goals included making me think critically about what I was encountering, then I side-skirted that goal quite well. Additionally, if my teachers' goals included helping me appreciate literature so that I
would become a life-long reader, then my education was woefully deficient. I never picked up a book for pleasure during college or for several years after. I seldom found the canonical works to be the great pieces of quality that all educated people seemed to rave about. In fact, in my circle of family and friends, few raved about any classics at all. And I found myself feeling guilty—as someone who had majored in English—for not reading anything beyond what was in my student’s textbook and for not appreciating the great works as much as my colleagues and peers seemed to. I appreciated knowing about them, but I dreaded my encounters with them. Perhaps this all happened because I was trained that there were "good" books and "bad" books. Perhaps it was because I felt that the so-called "good" books required too much effort to read.

As I look back on my high school and college experiences, I have no doubt that I learned. Mrs. Whitley opened doors to a world I had never known. Dr. Benson taught me how to expand that world even farther by reading what others’ perspectives were. But neither taught me to read and critique for myself. Neither taught me that my own encounters with reading were of any value. And for that reason, I isolated reading as an activity reserved for school. I left it there and never incorporated it into my personal life until years after I had finished school. Content had been the focus, not the student. Perhaps a different manner of teaching would have allowed me to not only be educated in "great" works but would have made me desire to read any and all books as well.
This is a sad commentary for a someone who loved to read as a child. What had made me initially love reading, and what had made me abandon pleasure reading later in my life? When I look back on my childhood, my only memory of reading experiences are positive ones in which I really "connected" with the books I was reading. My mother, an avid reader, took me to the library often to find the "Betsy" books I loved so much as a third grader. I believe now that I must have been living my life vicariously through Betsy. In the eighth grade, I know we read The Pigman by Paul Zindel, but I have absolutely no memory of the contents of the book. However, I do remember reading Farewell to Manzanar by Jeannie Watkutski Houston that same year and feeling as if it opened a world to me I had never known. Jeannie's teenage voice spoke of the Japanese-American internment camps in ways that made her story come alive for me.

Sometime during my college years, I internalized the universality of Shakespeare's characters. I don't know how or when, but I fell in love with characters who could transcend time and represent "everyman." A conversation about Lady Macbeth's guilt was much more interesting when put into a context of the guilt we all experience at sometime in our lives. "Out, out damned spot" was not something I would have understood on my own if it had not related to me personally. Nor would "The lady doth protest too much" take on any significance except that we all tend to give our secrets away unwillingly. I was never asked to memorize these lines, yet I know them well. Yet ironically, I did not even recognize a quote from Julius
Caesar, which I have taught for nine years, that Hirsch (1987) refers to in Cultural Literacy. Why? Because the quote which Hirsch tries to show as being culturally significant has never related to me or my life. Neither do I remember any of the quotes I learned in Mrs. Whitley's class.

My educational training in college only served to reinforce the traditional, commonsense methods of teaching I had encountered most of my life. Perhaps the fact that I remember very little of my teacher preparation speaks volumes. The child psychology courses seemed beneficial in understanding the development of children, but I never fully understood these concepts since we were never given actual contexts in which to watch children at certain age levels interact. Maybe if I had seen a six-year old working through certain reading tasks, I could have internalized the processes many six-year olds work through, as I am observing today, watching my six-year old nephew learn how to read.

Curriculum instruction in my education program was reduced to lesson planning. Attending a small college meant that my curriculum class was generalized across all high school subjects; there were no specialty areas in English, science, math, or social studies. Fifteen students in my lone curriculum course were majors from all areas from physical education to comprehensive science. We were required to develop individual lesson plans and present them to the class. Additionally, we were required to develop unit plans, in the form of daily lesson plans, as a final project. We taught from the basic skills approach: Write an objective for what we wanted our students
to learn and create a specific lesson to meet that objective. The emphasis on planning was never holistic or top-down across a semester or a whole year. Instead there was an emphasis to cover the material.

This concept of covering the material or dispensing knowledge was again reinforced during my student teaching experience. My cooperating teacher designed her class around individual works or novels to study, rather than units per se. For example, during my fourteen-week teaching experience, my students read The Odyssey, Julius Caesar, Huckleberry Finn, and Great Expectations. Students were assigned twenty or more pages a night to read, and the next class period was spent asking specific questions of the students about the text. These questions were to lead students to the symbolism and thematic structures of the works. In turn, students answered similar questions on objective tests at the close of each unit. Since students were never given an opportunity to explore their own thoughts and feelings about the books they were reading, I'm sure that many students simply forgot about the books altogether after taking the tests.

Even though I did not understand why many of my school practices and my personal practices didn't coincide, I never questioned my educational experience. I knew I had learned. What I did not realize was that learning could be much more open to me. Shakespeare or other canonical pieces didn't have to have just one interpretation. What I thought, not just what I had memorized, was important too. But early in my education and teacher training, I did
not need to face the incongruence between what I felt and what I believed, and I became the same type of teacher my teachers had been.

Right out of college, I could not have articulated my philosophy of teaching and learning. In fact, in my limited world view, I didn't realize that there were differing philosophies floating around. I believed the teacher walked in with her body of knowledge and imparted it to her students in the best way she could. As a result, the burden of her role would focus on evaluation and discipline.

**My Early Teaching Experiences**

It is obvious to me through reflection upon my educational experience, I was not prepared to teach in any way other than what had been modeled for me in my commonsense classrooms. But again, this foreshadows the discontentment I was to face after teaching only a few years. Because my teaching philosophy and curriculum was limited to a focus on content, and because I was to encounter students who were very different than those who had sat beside me in my high school and college classrooms, I would eventually realize a focus on just this one aspect of curriculum was not enough.

Since a system-wide curriculum was already established in my district when I began teaching in 1987, I concentrated not on curriculum development but solely on how to enact the existing curriculum. The adopted curriculum for my school district at this time focused on thematic units. It integrated composition and literature around universal themes using the tenth grade anthology.
as the source of information. In Applebee's (1996) terms, this would have strongly resembled an "episodic" curricular structure. Quite honestly, I do not recall the various thematic units with the exception of one: the family. I remember this unit in particular because my students complained while reading *A Raisin in the Sun* that they were "tired" of talking about the family. I personally did not like the theme chosen because I hadn't come here to teach about families and how they interact. I had come to teach literature and to expose students to great pieces of literary art. But this was part of my job and I worked to impart this curriculum to my students. However, having a set curriculum in place delayed my growth as a teacher and hastened my growing disillusionment with my profession. I realize now that I never owned this curriculum because it was not something which appealed to me. Additionally, because I was a young teacher, I didn't know how to make a thematic curriculum my own; I only knew to keep plodding through the information. Perhaps if I had been forced to reflect on my philosophy of teaching and compare it to the curriculum, I would have realized that the two did not fit. Perhaps too, if I had begun to develop my own curriculum, I would have scrutinized more deeply my belief of how students learn.

Change came again in 1990 when the school district adopted a new curriculum for tenth grade English. This was mainly because the district had purchased new textbooks which incorporated an entirely new set of readings. A committee selected by the district spent a summer devising the new curriculum. When we came to school the following fall, we received our new texts and our new curriculum.
This curriculum focused on just one main theme: the hero. Problems plagued us from the beginning of the school year. In particular, the new curriculum relied heavily on a supplemental book, not the new text, and we never received the supplemental book. We scrambled as tenth grade teachers to try to work with the new theme. We had students do library reports on heroes of various cultures. Students wrote legends of their own during the King Arthur unit. Again, I did not like this topic or theme because I didn't understand teaching "hero" just for the sake of identifying heroes. It leant itself to being world literature, which was the title of our course, but it was very removed from our students. My disillusionment was growing. The curriculum included "fluff" I didn't want to teach, and the problems which surrounded this new curriculum forced me to design a curriculum for a topic I was not connected to and for which I had received no guidance. Eventually, it seemed that the tenth grade English teachers at my school abandoned this new curriculum and set out to build one that would work in our classrooms. In creating my own curriculum I began to learn what my true philosophy of teaching and learning was. However, at that point, the problems were not over. In a sense, they were only just beginning. For now I had to face the reality that what I was doing as a teacher was not effective for the students I teach.

The Design of My Old Tenth Grade Regular Curriculum

After the district-mandated curriculum faded away with failure and frustration, I struggled to develop what I taught with my tenth
grade students. Since I had never liked the themes of the earlier district curricula, I steered clear of any thematic approach. Instead, I took what seemed to be a more logical and simple approach: a genre study of literature, an experience of different discourses in writing, simple drill and practice exercises with grammar, and enrichment lessons for vocabulary. In Applebee's (1996) terms this structure would be classified as a "collection" since the different units of reading, writing, grammar, and vocabulary were disconnected and isolated from one another. Each unit served as a "sample" of various genres, modes, or lessons.

The genre approach to literature was formatted with the textbook we used in tenth grade language arts. The book was already divided into sections for short story, drama, poetry, non-fiction, and novel. Additionally, the textbook supplemental materials provided all the worksheets I needed for vocabulary, study guides, and objective and essay tests. Therefore, I concentrated on what the teacher's manual identified as important and taught rising action, climax, falling action, irony, symbolism, theme, etc. There is no doubt that the central focus of the curriculum was the text, and that I was teaching about literature rather than focusing on the students' experiences of reading it.

Writing in my class concentrated mainly on various discourses I felt students needed to experience: narrative, expository, comparison/contrast, and argumentation. Again, I relied heavily on our grammar textbook and its materials. The essays students wrote had to conform to the five-paragraph style. Students chose their own
topics based on a list from the supplemental materials. For example, in writing a comparison/contrast paper, students could choose from a prescribed list of fifteen topics which included something like, "Compare and contrast your two favorite musical artists." And I liked giving students this freedom.

After a year or so of developing this curriculum, I included journal writing with my students. I would term the topics as "feel-good" topics designed to allow students an opportunity to do some short, impromptu writing about themselves. For example, one journal asked students to identify someone they admired and to explain why. With the use of the journals, I was trying in some way to link student's writing to something they were more connected with: themselves. I felt they needed to do more personal writing to help them work out ideas and thoughts they may have, but I never considered that personal writing could or should be connected with any of the existing writing assignments in the class. For this reason, the journals were added to the existing curriculum, but as with all of the other writing, these journals were not connected to the literature or any other aspect of the curriculum.

Language study in my old curriculum for tenth grade also came directly from our grammar text. I didn't work through the textbook, but I did choose lessons I felt my students needed: subject/verb agreement, run-on sentences and fragments, prefixes, suffixes, and roots. The manner I used was typical: drill and practice.

At first, vocabulary was tied to the literature since I was using the worksheets which came with the textbook materials. Later this
changed when I found a vocabulary workbook which I felt aided students more in actually learning new vocabulary because it took students through a set of experiences with the new words. This book was set up alphabetically, so students no longer studied "new words" associated with their readings but rather new words to "enrich" their existing repertoires. The change didn't bother me as long as they were learning new words.

Yet, there were many problems with this new curriculum I had created. I began to see the growing gap between the material I was teaching and the students who entered my classroom every day. What does learning about the structure of a short story have to do with my students? In what ways are they benefiting from reading W.W. Jacob's "The Monkey's Paw?" And not only was the content so far removed from my students, but we all found it boring as well. This curriculum lacked what Applebee (1996) would deem as "quality." There seemed to be no worthiness or substance to anything we studied. As a remedy, I tried to create lessons which were "fun." In particular, during the King Arthur unit I had my students create children's books based on a legend they had read. Except being fun, this project had absolutely no relationship to anything else I was doing in class. Even though it was creative, there still was no personal connection with my students and this assignment. My eyes were being opened to the realities around me. My urban students needed an education that would benefit them after high school
regardless of their plans of going to college or directly into the work force. More importantly, my urban students needed an education that would motivate them to stay in high school!

I believe this reality really sunk in after going through a year and a half in which our school faced several tragedies. This was definitely a turning point in my career. In November of 1993, I found myself counting the number of students who had been violently killed over the past two years. I also found myself making trips to an intensive care unit to see "Andrew," one of my students who had been shot and was paralyzed from the neck down--for the rest of his life. It was a wake-up call for me. I certainly knew this was not the fate for all of my students, but I began to realize that many did not come from backgrounds that assured them support, success, or a future. So what was I doing as a teacher to help them deal with the world in which they would live? What might my classroom and my time with them contribute to their lives?

I do not recall where the idea came from, but during that same school year, I included a mini-unit in my course which I felt came close to the changes for which I was looking. Building on a short story, "The Secret Room" by Corrie ten Boom, already incorporated in the existing curriculum, I created a short unit on stereotypes and prejudice. Somewhere I had read of a lesson plan that helped students identify their perceptions of stereotypes. After this activity, I had students read the short story "By Any Other Name" by Santha Rama Rau which expanded their idea of stereotypes to a character who is a victim of prejudice. Many intense conversations developed.
in class based on this topic and our exploration of it. Eventually I decided to extend the unit by adding choices of young adult novels in which the main characters were victims of the Holocaust or apartheid, instances of extreme prejudice and hatred. I liked this unit for several reasons. For one, my students could and did identify with it. Most could relate their own stories of times they had been victims of prejudice. Additionally, the unit extended my students' existing knowledge of stereotypes and prejudice. By looking at world characters who had been victims of social injustice, my students were forced to step outside of themselves and walk in the shoes of others who had faced much worse fates. I also liked this unit because it was what Mayher (1990) refers to as "top-down / holistic." Within the realm of the classroom curriculum, we were attempting to get the big picture. We were analyzing the broad concept of stereotype and how its many components work together. It was because of the success of this unit that I had the courage to rethink my curriculum for my regular tenth grade class altogether. In the next school year, I came back to school with an entirely new design for my classroom curriculum.

The Design of My Old Tenth Grade Challenge Curriculum

My old challenge curriculum was different from my regular curriculum in that I tried to make it more academically rigorous since these students were our brightest and likely headed for college.
This class was designed specifically after the experiences I had had in my high school college-bound classes and the college-bound classes I had taught as a student teacher.

For literature, we studied individual canonized pieces such as *Julius Caesar* and *A Tale of Two Cities*. These made up two full units out of four. In addition, one unit concentrated fully on poetry, learning form and analyzing content. Again, the poems chosen came from lists of canonized authors: Emily Dickinson, Robert Frost, Shakespeare, etc. Students completed poetry notebooks in which they regurgitated literary terms and examples. Finally, another unit was devoted to the study of the short story. In this unit, we concentrated on form: rising action, climax, falling action.

As with the regular class, writing was isolated to process papers that were not connected to the literature. During each unit, students completed a required essay which was either a narrative, expository, comparison/contrast, or argumentative paper. The writing which was connected with literature was always in essay test form.

Again, vocabulary study was used to increase students' repertoires for college. Words were studied because they were unfamiliar words, not because they were connected with anything being taught in the class. Words were to be memorized; students were to be tested.

With the challenge class, I devoted much time to sentence diagramming. This was not in the typical traditional method of diagramming, but a more creative, seemingly more logical way to help students identify parts of speech and parts of a sentence. I
wasn't necessarily trying to improve students' writing abilities but rather to increase their knowledge of parts of speech and the different conventions of grammar.

In keeping with the traditions I knew, I had created a challenge curriculum which I felt was preparing students for college. I believed this approach was academically rigorous because it included difficult pieces of "canonized" literature and rigorous modes of writing that were similar to the studies I had encountered in high school and college. Hopefully, students were also learning through the different evaluation methods I employed.

Eventually, I began to question my tenth grade challenge curriculum as I had my regular. However, the dissonance was not as striking as it had been with my regular tenth grade classes and it did not occur for the same reasons. For one, these students were supposed to be "college-bound." They received better grades in school than my regular students. Because their futures seemed brighter, change did not seem so necessary. For another, I didn't want to create a curriculum for these students which was not rigorous. If they were going to college, they needed exposure to college-level work. I didn't want to compromise them in that area. Finally, because I was concentrating so intensely on the changes in my regular tenth grade curriculum, I didn't have time to rethink what was happening in my challenge class. What I had been doing for years seemed to work for the most part, so I would have to go with the status quo until I was comfortable with the regular curriculum.
Change did begin to occur with my challenge class when our school went through a major reform in 1992. Our school adopted a new time schedule in which I now saw my students for two hours a day for twelve weeks. Change had to occur if I was to teach effectively in a two-hour time block. In getting ready for the new schedule, I remember watching a report on a school in Pittsburgh which had adopted a similar type of block schedule for a certain portion of their school. These students were receiving an integrated, outcome-based education which focused on one question throughout their entire four years of high school: "How do people, events, and conditions influence change?" Every aspect of their schooling focused on this essential question. This made sense to me. These Pittsburgh students were being challenged to think critically by connecting what they were learning in school to their own lives. I could see a connection with some of the works we were studying in the challenge curriculum so I decided to experiment with it. While reading *Julius Caesar*, my students pondered the same question as the Pittsburgh students. In the next unit, while reading *A Tale of Two Cities*, my students once again made lists of how changes were influenced to occur. Since this happened to be an election year in our country, it was natural to bring all of these ideas around to present day and what was happening around us. The purpose in reading *Julius Caesar* and *A Tale of Two Cities* began to make more sense to me. They were no longer only texts to be studied, but they were texts which could
inform our own lives as well. Additionally, I had moved closer to an integrated curricular structure since we would revisit previous works that we had studied under the unifying question.

But the change in my tenth grade curriculum did not last for long. The next year I found that it was much easier to revert back to the old ways of teaching Julius Caesar and A Tale of Two Cities. It wasn’t that I hadn’t liked the changes, but I found them difficult at times to implement. They were almost an afterthought; the Pittsburgh question was secondary to having my students read and understand the various texts.

Yet, on a day-to-day basis, I was becoming increasingly dissatisfied with the challenge curriculum. More and more of my students were cheating. More and more of my students were not finishing the class novel. Too many were doing only mediocre work. I found myself constantly trying to stay one step ahead of them with quizzes, tests, homework, or anything that would ensure that students were doing their work. But I also found this cycle to be exhausting for myself. My students were not doing the rigorous work, and they were receiving poor grades. I was giving them tests over the work which only compounded their poor grades. Perhaps the problem lie somewhere else. But it took several years to face these problems with my tenth grade challenge curriculum.
Within the past four years (1992 - 1996), I have evolved tremendously as a teacher of English. This is due in large part to the external influences around me, such as the school reform our school has undergone and my enrollment in a master's program. Because I was ready for change, these two factors have catapulted me into a new concept of education. To develop a new philosophy of my own for teaching and learning, I have had to begin at the bottom and work up. This has meant evaluating who and what I was working with, as well as what methods I was using. I could no longer be a teacher who simply implemented curriculum or worked with a curriculum that was vague and disconnected to my students and me; I had to develop curriculum that I felt was compelling yet also fit the needs of my students. The reality is that most of my fifteen-year old students are African Americans from middle to low income working-class families. Most will go directly into the work world instead of on to college after high school, regardless of what track in school they are following. How was introducing them to "great" works of literature and its structure helping to prepare them for living in a diverse, multicultural society? In what ways did different discourses of writing connect them with how to function in situations outside of high school? Was exposure to grammar and vocabulary going to be useful for their futures? It was increasingly obvious to me that my students were very uninvolved in the current curriculum. I was feeding them information which I wasn't sure would benefit them
outside the classroom. They were bored; I was bored. As a result, I have made significant changes in the way I teach. In particular, my philosophy of teaching and learning has changed in that the student is now the central focus of my classroom, not the text. Growing out of this philosophy is a new curriculum I have developed for my regular tenth grade English class.

My New Philosophy for Teaching and Learning

The philosophy I hold now, albeit a developing philosophy, is based on several personal beliefs developed from critical questions I had to ask myself. In attempting to answer these questions, I realize now there are specific goals which drive my instruction today: 1) Students must have a personal investment in what they study if they are to internalize and appreciate what they learn. If they can relate to a literary work, they will take ideas from the experience and apply it to their own lives. My role as a teacher, then, is to find ways for the subject matter to be personal to the students and to aid them in taking it to deeper levels. 2) Students need to read and respond to quality world literature and to real-life writing opportunities which help to expand their worlds of knowing and doing. The "traditional" literary canon is limited to traditional voices that often exclude ethnic minorities and women, and "traditional" writing discourses limit students to unnatural ways of learning to write. 3) Students need to develop critical thinking skills which enable them to elicit their own understandings as they read a work or write an essay. In other words, "knowing" can no longer be defined as repeating the "right"
answer. Students must be able to apply these thinking skills to all aspects of their lives, and they do so by exploring literary texts, not learning about them. 4) Language instruction and curriculum needs to be coherent and unified so that school learning becomes an experience with which students can begin to map their own experiences and ideas. The subject matter can no longer be divided into sterilized compartments of bodies of knowledge such as dividing the study of literature and vocabulary. Instead, students need to develop their skills in a holistic environment that provides both support and then independence. In this sense, I have shifted to a "language-as-expression" (Gere et al., 1992) teacher with Mayher's (1990) notion of an "uncommonsense" view of education.

But this philosophy did not develop over night. Many factors, including the disillusionment I have already described and the changes I will next recount, contributed to an environment in which I could and did test everything that I knew as a teacher. My instructional practices began to change first, but they did not change permanently until I became aware of my new concept for teaching and learning.

Sources of Change: School Reform and My Master's Thesis

The beginning of teaching reform for me began with school reform in our district. My school began to undergo major changes in 1989. We applied and were accepted as one of five high schools in our district to become a "Scout School." The district gave each of these five schools the freedom to experiment with reform in any method
that we could justify. With the guidance of our principal, our school decided to make two very important changes. The first was to establish site-based management. This meant that a Shared Decision-Making Cabinet, consisting of administrators, teachers, staff, students, parents, and community leaders, would guide the decision-making process in our school. We still had to answer to the district in terms of policy and finance, but we were given the freedom to make many new decisions about instruction and operations. Taking this autonomy seriously, our Cabinet and staff began to truly consider reform for our school.

Perhaps we did not know it at the time, but we had tacitly adopted a constructivist theory of knowing. We agreed on terms such as "teacher as coach" and "student as worker" without a full understanding of the implications of doing so. We began to experiment with various teaching methods such as cooperative learning and authentic assessment. Anything at this point was better than our old way of doing things because we felt in general that our school was not motivating our students to learn.

This led to our second major change. Our school decided to reconfigure the time structure of the school year and the school day to create an atmosphere more conducive to learning. As a result, we established a new time schedule on a trimester plan in which students attend three, two-hour block classes during a twelve week period. With a two-hour time block, perhaps teachers could create more experiential contexts in which students could have hands on learning in the classroom.
It was almost impossible for me not to change as a teacher with all of the transitions that were taking place around me. The actual progress began with the introduction to the term "paradigm shift." As a teaching staff, we sat through workshops about rethinking our established paradigms. We laughingly referred to the evil "p" word, almost without realizing that we were now sanctioned to break out of our traditional teaching methods. I felt that my whole philosophy of education and teaching was now up for scrutiny. Other terms were also introduced to us such as "cooperative learning," "multicultural education," "grading in pencil," and "outcome based education" which gave me ways to experiment with my shifting paradigm for teaching and learning.

The road to change was, however, not straight and nicely paved; new ideas and new practices came and went. I experimented with cooperative learning groups trying to teach students to teach each other. I added multicultural young adult books as outside reading to try to expand my students' worlds. But then I suddenly dropped these strategies the following year. Cooperative learning groups required a lot of planning and reflection, and sometimes I found it easier to just transmit the knowledge myself. I was disappointed when my students were not as excited with the young adult books as I was. But the heart of the problem was more fundamental than adding new titles and new activities. My traditional philosophy was still dominant in my teaching practices so there was little room for more student-centered approaches to take a stronghold. My paradigm was beginning to shift, but until I grasped how I believe students learn best, any
student-centered strategies would be incongruent with the existing classroom conversation. Even with reform happening at my school, I found myself reverting back to the way I taught before our school had undergone any change. Many of my colleagues were doing the same. We were given the time to incorporate change and some new strategies, but we were not given enough training on a whole-scale approach to how students learn best. It was not until I enrolled in a master's program in education that I began to get at the root of who I was as an educator.

This may have been a different experience if my school had taken reform to the next level. After changing to a block schedule, I felt that as a whole, our school failed to move forward with change except for some involvement with the Coalition of Essential Schools, and this change was limited to a handful of teachers. Many teachers, like myself, were not challenged to reflect on what and who we were teaching. The old style of imparting content would not be broken if we were never given better ways to teach students. I realize that there is a fine line between what a school can motivate a teacher to do and what a school must avoid dictating a teacher to do, but with a staff who was willing to take such a drastic change with manipulating the time schedule, certainly more direction could have been given to help us find new ways to teach our students. Perhaps the administration could have initiated more concrete ways of implementing reform just as they had done to implement the initial change. Instead of sending us to outside professional development classes in cooperative learning or multicultural education, we might
have profited more from "in-school" workshops which explored the nature of teaching and learning.

As part of my school's reform efforts, we became a professional development partner with The Ohio State University. It was at this point that the changes which had begun for me in the last few years found a place to manifest. I enrolled in a master's program of education at The Ohio State University and began to rework my teaching philosophy and consequently, my tenth grade curricula. In particular, my master's program in English education has helped me the most to make the transition from a positivist approach to a constructivist approach to teaching and learning. In other words, instead of being a teacher who gives students a body of knowledge they should know, I have attempted to become a teacher who creates an environment in which students come to know and learn for themselves.

There is no way to recount all of the specific experiences in my master's program which led to the shift in my teaching philosophy. However, the works of Mayher, Gere, Applebee, and Langer were sources I have drawn upon to make changes in how I teach. Not only have I found ways to help students read and write better, I have been given a much broader overview of what it means to teach effectively. This has equated to my development of an entirely new curriculum for my regular tenth grade class.

**My Present Teaching Experience**

To any observer, my classroom still takes on many appearances of a traditional classroom. I have not shoved desks into small clusters
nor have I abandoned being the central visual focus of my classroom entirely. I borrow many ideas from student-centered educators such as Nancie Atwell (1987), but I have not, and may not, evolve to that point as a teacher. This is for two reasons. For one, it is a slow process for a teacher to change. It truly is an evolution. One cannot expect her thoughts and practices to change in a short span of time. In fact, I'm convinced that I will continue to evolve for the rest of my teaching career. Secondly, traditional approaches to teaching and learning should not be abandoned entirely. There are times when students need and should receive direct instruction. This is especially true for my students and others like them who come to school with less of an idea of what it means to be successful in "the culture of power" (Delpit, 1988, p. 282), which is the culture of the school, work, or community in which we live. Delpit argues that students must be told explicitly what the rules of the culture of power are in order to be successful. For instance, in the American work culture, individuals are expected to speak American standard English if they are to be hired and promoted. Conformity to the standard, then, assu
that the largest portion of students who do not pass the writing portion of the state's proficiency test fail because they do not understand how to organize their own essays. When students are taught the five-paragraph style method, most are successful in passing the test. Even if we were to dismiss the idea of teaching for the proficiency test, my students will be much better at expressing their own ideas when they are given some type of organizational tree on which to hang those ideas.

Although some elements of a traditional approach to teaching and learning remain, close observers will note the fundamental shift in how my classroom operates. Subject matter is no longer center stage, but rather students' experiences with subject matter is what is emphasized. One of the major influences in creating this change was Mayher's (1990) concept of an uncommonsense approach to education. My paradigms had previously been shaken with school reform, but Mayher gave me a perspective of how those paradigms could be reshaped. I did not make whole-scale changes in my curricula overnight, but in analyzing my curricula from the uncommonsense perspective, I began to ask myself many "what if" questions and the process of change began in increments. What if I were to do away with objective tests that were too difficult and promoted guessing on my students' part? The alternative was implementing essay tests in which students had to prove their understanding of a text or a topic. What if I threw out the class novel and found other methods of reading which piqued my students' interests? In incorporating a book report assignment in which
students had complete control over what books they chose, my goal was accomplished. Ninety percent of my students successfully completed the assignment; in the past, I felt fortunate if fifty percent of the students completed the assignment. What if I experimented with lively discussions on topics such as prejudice to help students enter into what we were studying in class? Sometimes the discussions became too "lively" for me, but now students were interacting and expressing their views. Class became much more interesting! So I not only incorporated new lessons in my existing curricula, I also began to analyze my so-called "tried and true" lessons. If I couldn't figure out a good reason for the lesson, I dropped it altogether. For this reason, the children's book project of the King Arthur unit was put on hold until I could find a reason for its existence other than just because it was creative and fun.

Slowly, I began to scrutinize every aspect of my tenth grade curricula. I was no longer comfortable with doing activities or reading works which did not relate directly to my students or to the conversation of the classroom. I was finding new and better ways to teach the subject English, and I was also discovering that my curriculum had a center and a direction--it was about something I believed in.

The Design of My Present Regular Tenth Grade Curriculum

After my initial successes with small changes in the curriculum, over the summer of 1994, I developed an entirely new curriculum for my tenth grade regular class. My experimentation with the mini-unit
on stereotypes and prejudices had been so successful that I decided to devise an entire curriculum based on this model. My first problem was in choosing a theme or themes. Since I only have my students for a twelve-week period, I decided to limit my focus to just one theme that would guide my conversation with my students. I came to the theme of "choices" based on where I believe my students are at this stage in their lives. My students are fifteen and sixteen-year olds who worry about relationships more than anything else in their lives right now. Peer pressure is increasing and will become a way of life for the next several years. Making choices for after high school, either going to college or directly into a career, is now within reaching distance for my students. Additionally, the "almighty" driver's license, which is foremost among my students' goals, will open doors to a world they have never known outside of television and the movies. So in wanting to have them think critically and to have a way in which to connect with their lives, the theme of choices seemed most appropriate as a concept for my students to explore. As Louise Rosenblatt (1983) states, "Anything that his (an adolescent's) reading may contribute must take its place in the complex web of influences acting upon him" (p. 92).

Another reason for deciding upon the theme of choices is because choices is a key principle behind the way many literary texts work. As readers, we are invited into the life of a book and given the opportunity to make a judgment upon not only the circumstances a character faces, but what the character's choices are in facing different situations. In this manner, a literary text contributes one of
many voices to all that we encounter. "For literature by its very nature invokes participation in the experiences of others and comprehension of their goals and aspirations" (Rosenblatt, 1983, p. 93).

**What is Included in the Conversation.**

After choosing the theme, I decided upon the content of the course. (APPENDIX A) The differing units seemed to build naturally from the literature I was choosing. I first looked at the existing content, mainly from our current textbook, and decided on which stories and poems to keep. In particular, I was looking for those which fit nicely with the theme of choices. I did not choose whole new texts for one very obvious reason: my school does not have the funds to purchase textbooks or paperback novels. We are limited to using only the texts that the district has purchased or whatever we have been able to collect on our own. However, if the funds were available, I would purchase new multicultural texts and a myriad of young adult literature.

Unit one was first anchored on the short story "Through the Tunnel" by Doris Lessing, which is about an eleven-year old boy who chooses to swim through an underwater tunnel. It is a daring feat but one which Jerry accomplishes successfully because he trains himself fully to do so. This story was a part of the previous content in the short story unit, and I thought that an exploration of Jerry's choices seemed a good starting point for the entire course conversation about choices. Jerry's series of decisions lead to his maturity. As a result,
the first unit was entitled "Choices for Maturity." After hunting through various old textbooks, I found a selection from the novel *Kaffir Boy* by Mark Mathabane. *Kaffir Boy* is based on the true life story of Mark Mathabane growing up in South Africa under the system of apartheid. In this particular selection, Mark, a seven-year-old, is being forced by his mother to go to school, but Mark would rather run the streets with his friends. Through a series of domestic problems, Mark finally chooses to do what his mother asks and gets an education. Again, this seemed a good story for dealing with a child's choices leading to maturity. Likewise, the author of this story is South African who relates aspects of apartheid, so I felt it fit nicely with my search for world literature. Added to this unit were various poems I had used in the past. I felt a definite need to integrate poetry rather than isolate it into a unit of its own since the course was now being built to be coherent. Therefore, "Mother to Son," "Ex-Basketball Player," "The Choice," "Fifteen," and "Mattie Stevens" were poems chosen mainly because of what they added to the conversation of choices being established in the unit.

The second unit was initially entitled "Bad Choices" and was anchored on several short stories and one drama I liked from the old curriculum: "Lamb to the Slaughter" by Roald Dahl, "The Necklace" by Guy de Maupassant, "The Monkey's Paw" by W.W. Jacobs, and *Twelve Angry Men* by Reginald Rose. Each story seems to deal with a choice the main character makes which leads to some difficult outcomes. Yet, I was never completely comfortable with the idea of bad choices since it seemed to be prescriptive in having the students
take a moral stand about the characters' choices. Later I realized that each story deals with miscommunications of some sort and I attempted to build the theme of choices from that angle. I added another story, "A Visit to Grandmother" by William Melvin Kelley since I remembered it dealing specifically with miscommunications when I taught it in my old short story unit. I felt it added one more voice to the topic being discussed. Still, "miscommunications" as a unit never quite fit. It was through the students' involvement with the stories and discussion of what they felt the characters could or should have done that I finally realized that the conversation of the unit lead naturally to an exploration of "implications." This fit much more succinctly with the overall theme of choices for the class because it provided an opportunity to explore not just the outcomes for the characters but the students' own choices and the implications for their own lives. It was a much more natural transition from unit one.

Unit 3, "Stereotypes and Prejudice," grew out of the original mini-unit I had incorporated in my previous curriculum. This was actually the heart of my new curriculum of choices—the anchor for all of the other units. In this unit I especially hoped to widen my students' perceptions of the world and the critical choices people make. Unit 3 naturally fit after exploring implications since the characters' consequences are more significant in this unit. I particularly liked the set-up of this unit and how it was a progression of explorations from stereotypes to prejudices to social injustice. The
content of the unit originally included short stories about prejudice as well as young adult historical fiction novels such as Daniel's Story by Carol Matas and Chain of Fire by Beverly Naidoo.

Not only does this unit involve a lively discussion of choices and their implications, it is built around content which is closer to my definition of world literature. Yet this unit, as with the other units, has undergone several changes in the past year and a half. First, two other young adult novels have been added to the first two: Farewell to Manzanar by Jeannie Watskutski Houston and Waiting for the Rain by Sheila Gordon. These add a different voice to the larger picture of social injustice. Second, the selection of novels represent differing ability levels which is important since students have a choice for which novel they may read. An important change which occurred within this unit was the addition of the poem "Miss Rosie" by Lucille Clifton. I had been using this poem with my challenge class and it sparked an interesting conversation about homeless people. Wanting to expand the existing conversation of stereotypes beyond the typical discourse of race in my regular classroom, I added "Miss Rosie" to explore our stereotypes of homeless people. Finally, a third change came with taking out "Enemies" by Nadine Gordimer because I found that it was quite difficult for my students to read and comprehend. Students were so bogged down in trying to understand the text, they got bored, and this made it's contribution to the conversation almost meaningless. This is in keeping with Mayher's (1990) notion of uncommonsense that what students study must be meaningful.
The topic of Unit four, "Positive Role Models," unlike the previous units, was chosen before the content. In exploring choices, their implications, big and small, I wanted to conclude the trimester by returning my students to the idea of the choices they make. Most importantly, I wanted the conversation to shift so that students could apply the issue of choice to their lives by exploring how and why people make choices and then live out their implications. A natural choice for this was to look at characters who make choices which affect their lives, and possibly the world, in positive ways. My search for content seemed to automatically lead to biographies. From an old textbook, I found a short biography of Harriet Tubman. This became the anchor for unit four. I particularly wanted to use this text because it represents a different view of American slavery. My students have studied and heard of American slavery for years; they have been taught to dwell on the injustices that occurred among Africans Americans. My hope was that this text could be read in a different light: one which focused on triumph rather than tragedy. Two other selections also comprise this unit. "The Bet" by Anton Chekhov and "With All Flags Flying" by Anne Tyler are not stories which are normally read with the idea of a hero in mind. Yet, both characters make choices which impact the rest of their lives. I feel each adds a different voice to the notion of positive role models.
Helping My Regular Tenth Grade Students Enter the Conversation.

As I have stated previously, the manner in which I teach my tenth grade curriculum is just as important, if not more so, as the content I teach. Of all the changes I have undergone as a teacher, the manner or how I help my students enter the curricular conversation has received the most scrutiny on my part. Even after I returned to the classroom in the 1994-95 school year with a theme and an outline for what I wanted to teach in my tenth grade class, I had not fully conceptualized my approach to the conversation about choices. I had many new ideas, but at times I reverted to old approaches when I was fresh out of new because it was too time consuming to come up with more and often I had lapses into the commonsense ways of doing things. Since the previous school year (1994 - 95) seemed to be an experiment with a new theme and because it worked well, I concentrated the following year on creating each activity of the class to make sure it invited students into critical thinking and internalization of concepts learned. I found there were many standard activities which seemed to be quite effective.

It is important to classify the types of activities I use in the classroom. Some activities are more appropriate for initiating the conversation while others are designed to help students expand their thinking to deeper levels. Additionally, I always ask students to participate in culminating activities in which students are given the opportunity to exhibit what they have learned. In general, this
activity for each unit is a writing assignment in which students develop and articulate their ideas relevant to the curricular conversation.

Interviews and "opinionnaires" work nicely as "springboard" activities which introduce students to a new or changing conversation. One of the very first activities my students complete is a short interview with another student in class about choices they have or would make. (APPENDIX B) This activity serves two purposes: 1) it allows students to get to know one other student in class, and 2) it "warms" students to thinking about our theme of choices. Another type of springboard activity is role playing which serves to connect students' life experiences with the topic under discussion. For example, before reading "A Visit to Grandmother," a short story that deals with the implications of miscommunication in families, I divide my class into groups in which each group must simulate a situation that shows miscommunication in a family. The groups are responsible for showing how the miscommunication occurs as well as how the miscommunication could be avoided. This serves as a basis for viewing not only the choices we make but for the implications involved as well.

Group activities and games also serve to help students generalize their new concepts into broader life experiences. One of my favorite activities is a week-long game we play while reading the young adult novels which deal with social injustice. (APPENDIX C) Students play out what it's like to be responsible for making choices with how to spend their money in a situation where inequity is high.
On Monday, students are divided into groups of four in which they simply play the game "Uno." At the end of the game, the high scorer wins $1200 of monopoly money, second place wins $800, third place wins $400, and last place receives no money. For the rest of the week, I give students opportunities to spend their money such as in buying their way out of homework activities or buying snacks to eat while we watch a movie in class. Any student may stay and work for "welfare" money by helping me after class or by completing a new assignment. From day-to-day, students must decide what they need to spend and what they must save. On Friday, I have a doughnut party for the entire class, and it is then we reflect on the significance of the game. As a class, we discuss the inequity that students feel about how the money was distributed and the amounts of money students received. Students point out how this activity is similar to real life because they had to consider budgeting their money throughout the week. Most students make the correlation between the inequities that result in the game and the social injustices the characters of their novels face. I believe this activity creates an experience students can relate to as well as generalize to other people outside of themselves.

Additionally, movies, current television shows, and special speakers shape the class conversation for today's terms. For example, movies such as Bopha!, and Schindler's List give students a visual reference for studies of apartheid and the Holocaust. Oprah Winfrey has done many quality shows on racism and stereotypes. Each of these mediums add one more voice or point of view to the existing class conversation. Special speakers reinforce this idea.
real-life person, such as someone who has survived social injustice, allows students to bring an abstract concept into their real world. During the beginning unit, I have a special speaker come in and tell his life story. Joe is a friend of mine. He grew up in poverty and under difficult circumstances. Joe never learned to read and eventually, through a series of bad choices, ended up in prison later in his life. However, Joe made many crucial decisions while in prison which served to improve his life. Joe's most important decision was to take advantage of an educational opportunity which eventually allowed him to make something of his life after he was released from prison. Today, Joe holds two bachelor's degrees as well as a master's degree which he uses to focus on helping the youth of his community. Joe's story serves not only as a springboard activity for the entire conversation of choices but also as a real life example of someone who has faced decision-making that ultimately altered his life story. Joe's story is significant to many of my urban students since many are at critical crossroads in their own lives. Some may end up on the same initial path as Joe if they do not weigh the consequences of their choices early on.

Since the culmination activity of a unit under discussion is a writing assignment, I try to create many shorter writing experiences throughout the unit in which students can test out their thoughts and feelings. These reader's response or discussion response journals often serve as outlets in which students can generate their connections with the curricular conversation. It also allows me an opportunity to respond personally to the students' thoughts by writing
responses back to them directly in their journals. For example, while discussing stereotypes and prejudices, students write a series of journals such as "describe a stereotype you have," or "tell of a time you were a victim of prejudice." These are designed to have students think deeply about the issue. For the final writing assignment where students explore ideas of ways to end prejudice, they may return to the examples they wrote about in their journals and discuss how these situations or stereotypes could have been handled better.

I have found that it is critical that each activity has a purpose within the larger framework of the curriculum or otherwise students begin to question why they are doing what they are doing, which was a problem I faced often with my previous curriculum. When a purpose is clearly shown, most students will not hesitate to participate, and they are more likely to make the connections from the activities to their readings, as well as to their writings. When the activity is meaningful to students personally, I know that I can use that activity to broaden my students' perceptions of the world.

The Design of My Present Challenge Tenth Grade Curriculum

As I have mentioned before, because I am concerned with academic rigor for my college preparatory students, change in the tenth grade challenge curriculum has come much more slowly. The content has remained the same as from the early curriculum, and it is divided into four units based on the types of content studied and by grading periods. (APPENDIX D) Each grading period for the trimester is three weeks long; therefore, each of the tenth grade
challenge units last approximately three weeks. The class as a whole is still structured in the fashion of a "collection" as defined by Applebee (1996). However, the manner in which I teach the tenth grade challenge class has been modified. In attempting to make my classes more student-centered, I have developed a more process approach to the lessons I teach. But the changes have been slight, and the focus of the class is still mainly the text.

What My Students Study

Unit one of the tenth grade challenge curriculum is based mostly on reading a whole class novel. The Pearl by John Steinbeck is a novelette found in our textbook. Concurrently, students read choose a young adult historical novel and read it outside of class. Many of these are the same from which the regular class choose: Daniel's Story (Matas), Chain of Fire (Naidoo), Waiting for the Rain (Gordon), Farewell to Manzanar (Houston), Night (Wiesel), The Return (Levitin), and The Abduction (Newth). Students' outside reading is tied to the class novel, The Pearl, because of the similar themes of social injustices. After completion of both novels, students write a comparison/contrast paper in which they compare and contrast a main character from The Pearl with the main character from the young adult historical novel they have read. Because these novels take only a short time to read, the remainder of the unit is comprised of reading and watching Twelve Angry Men. It is not tied together in any way with the content of the class before or after it. I include this play mainly because students enjoy reading it so much.
Unit two is based solely on *Julius Caesar*. We complete a close reading of the text and afterwards write an essay on one of the major themes of the play. Depending on the class, I sometimes have students read young adult novels outside of class during this unit. Because they are a challenge class, it is expected by parents and the community that they receive more work than the regular class. Additionally, since *Julius Caesar* is so difficult, most of the work for it is done in class. Therefore, the young adult novel comprises the students' homework.

The third unit for the challenge class focuses entirely on poetry. Various poems are read; many do not come from our textbook but are poems that I have found from old texts. They include "A Traveler's Curse After Misdirection" by Robert Graves, "Miss Rosie" by Lucille Clifton, "Stopping By Woods on a Snowy Evening" by Robert Frost, "The Lake" by Ted Hughes, "Autumn Chant" by Edna St. Vincent Millay, and various poems chosen by the students. This unit has not changed so much in content but in the manner in which I teach it. For example, I no longer have students create a poetry notebook in which they include various types of poetry as well as analytical writing they have done for poems we read in class. Instead, I now attempt to take students through a process of reading and responding to poetry. I start simply by having students respond to and write about the feelings certain poems invoke. Next, I teach students to paraphrase and then analyze poetry. By the end of the unit, students write an essay in which they fully analyze one of the poems discussed in class.
Unit four for the tenth grade challenge class is not anchored on literature but on writing. We spend the entire three weeks working on a research paper. For many of these students, it is the first time they have completed a research assignment. My goal is to expose them to research methods which will be developed more fully in the eleventh and twelfth grades. In addition to the research paper, students complete yet another book report. The book is one of the student’s choosing based on recommendations they receive from several adults. Again, this is expected to be completed as a homework assignment.

The Manner I Teach My Challenge Tenth Grade Students

Although the class is still divided into units, I have changed the manner in which I teach much of the tenth grade challenge curriculum. Again, this is driven by my desire to make student responses the focus of the class, rather than the subject matter. For example, in the old *A Tale of Two Cities* unit, students read the assigned chapters and answered questions which helped them understand the text and its meanings. At the end of the unit, students took an essay test to prove their understanding of the novel. Not only did I take out *A Tale of Two Cities*, I also changed my approach to teaching a class novel. With *The Pearl*, instead of an essay test, students write a character analysis upon completion of the text. Gone are the questions which help students find the right answer. In their place, students complete a series of reader’s response journals throughout their reading of the novel which serve as building blocks
for analyzing the main characters. (APPENDIX E) In doing so, students can base their final analysis of the main characters on their personal opinions formed while reading the text instead of what they perceive the teacher believes is important in knowing about the characters.

Similarly, my approach to reading Julius Caesar has changed as well. Students still take notes while reading the play to enhance their comprehension of what they are reading, but they also complete a series of reader's response journals which build on the various themes throughout the play. One of my favorites is a journal entry students complete after Caesar is killed and the mob is out of control. I ask the students to place themselves in this scene, as any character they choose, and describe what they see and feel as the scene unfolds. Many students convey a sense of empathy for the victims of the mob as a result of this experience. I believe this enhances the students' understanding of the mobs' actions.

The poetry unit has changed as well. Gone is the poetry notebook in which students only regurgitate the poetic terms they learned in class. Instead I have created a more process-approach to reading and writing poetry. We begin with some exploration and application of basic literary terms. We then move on to writing poetry based on personal feelings. For example, when working with lyric poetry, I begin the lesson with having students do a ten minute free-write on an emotion of their choice. We share the free-writes aloud, and then go back and create poems incorporating alliteration, assonance, and consonance, focusing on creating the sounds which
exhibit the emotion they're trying to convey. (APPENDIX F) We later move on to analyzing and writing about poetry based on students' knowledge of terms and form which we've explored.

The last unit, as I stated previously, is a research paper. I try to take the students through each aspect of gathering information and writing the paper so that they are not left alone to try and guess how a research paper works. Additionally, I have attempted to choose topics for students which they can feel connected to so the information they learn is important to them and not just for the sake of learning to do research. These topics include researching a career choice, a college or university, a religion, or a family disease. During this final unit, students are also completing a book report outside of class. (APPENDIX G) This report is designed to encourage students to enjoy reading for leisure. The student must find different adults to recommend a novel to read. After choosing the novel, the student enters into a contract with the recommender in that they will have a conversation of the book after reading it. This counts for fifty percent of student's grade. Additionally, the student must keep a series of reader response journals while reading the novel which accounts for the remainder of the grade for the report. I have found that this assignment is extremely successful since students have a part in choosing the books they want to read.

In each curriculum, both regular and challenge, the emphasis for learning has changed from knowing content to experiencing content. I have made whole-scale changes in the regular curriculum's content so that it reflects what I believe is a more
culturally significant conversation that is meaningful to my students. Additionally, each activity is designed to allow students to enter and experience the curriculum in meaningful ways. Although the content of the challenge curriculum still resembles what is typical in many college preparatory classrooms, I have attempted to find ways to make connections between my students' lives and the content as well as create a context in which students can experience the content. However, I still find myself many times reverting to my old ways of emphasizing the importance of the text over the students' experiences with the text.

So how does my curriculum affect my students? Do they perceive the connections I have tried to incorporate in each class? Do my regular students find the class' conversation significant to their lives and to their learning? Are my challenge students relating to the works covered or do they find the text the central focus of the conversational domain? Answers to these questions are pivotal if I am to understand the effectiveness of the curricula I have devised and implemented. Their voices must be considered if I truly want to assess the worthiness of the curricula I have developed.
CHAPTER 5

STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS

Regular Students' Perceptions

The analysis I present in this chapter is an attempt at understanding my students' perceptions of the class curriculum, both in the regular and challenge classes. It is their engagement with the work which truly illuminates the learning environment I have hoped to create. Since the regular curriculum has been organized as a culturally significant conversation, I have attempted to find if my students view the curriculum in the same or another way. I have organized the regular students' statements from several interviews and writing samples around four aspects of a culturally significant conversation: quality, quantity, relatedness, and manner (Applebee, 1996). I have organized the tenth grade challenge students' statements in the same fashion in order to reveal the strengths and weaknesses of a curriculum designed as a "collection." My goal in this chapter is to explore students' perceptions of those elements of effective curriculum: Do they believe the literary selections are of high quality? Does the pace through the material allow them time to
think and reflect? Do they see connections among the reading and writing assignments? Finally, does my instruction invite them into and support them in exploring the curricular conversation?

Quality

Applebee (1996) defines quality as the worthiness of what is studied. In keeping with my goals for the curriculum, I have attempted to make the content of the course worthy by making it interesting to the students as well as ensuring that it enables them to take their learning to a deeper level. Did I accomplish my goals? In various interviews, all of the students commented at some point about their level of interest in what we were doing in class. John even identified that for something to be of value to him, it had to be interesting. "Yes, if it doesn't catch my interest sometimes it is harder to read...it kind of bores me. I can't read it anymore" (personal communication, April 18, 1996). But my class did not provide that kind of negative experience for him. "The books that she picked were usually pretty good. I liked that. She got movies to go with the books so that we found out more stuff" (personal communication, May 23, 1996). Dylan, speaking in a less personal way, commented on the quality of the discussions. "People (students) like the topic or whatever it's about. It's a neat topic or something that people don't usually talk about" (personal communication, April 18, 1996).

Danielle and Natasha each echoed John's and Dylan's sentiments, expanding them enough to show that the quality of the
conversation did in fact enable them to learn new ideas and concepts. When asked if she found the reading assignment easy, Natasha replied, "I enjoy doing it. Sometimes you have to work your brain at it. I find it refreshing" (personal communication, April 18, 1996). "Easy" was not defined by Natasha in terms that we usually use. For her, easy meant work which was enjoyable and "refreshing." Additionally, I find this comment particularly interesting considering Natasha is the student who enjoys reading for pleasure more than the other three. Evidently, the class offered her reading and writing experiences which made her think beyond her normal daily encounters. Yet, Danielle's comments reached even further.

I think I've learned a lot. From a different standpoint, I have. It's not the general, traditional, 'Read this book and write the essay.' There's been a lot of projects involved and stuff that I can relate to. It's helped me out a lot and given me a different standpoint on a lot of things that I understand better. The apartheid and stuff like that (personal communication, May 23, 1996).

For my students, the material was interesting because they had a personal connection to it. Additionally, they each moved beyond the interest level to information that they had not known before--information about which they thought deeply. These ingredients created a learning environment and therefore, the topic and materials are in fact valued as quality for my curriculum.
**Quantity**

In my analysis, I found that there were no overt indicators of what Applebee (1996) defines as "balance of works covered" in a curriculum. Not one student made any comment about how much or how little was covered in class. Perhaps this silence is actually a strong indicator of the pace of the curriculum. There were no complaints about the materials, readings, or discussions. Even Dylan, who had not received good grades, gave no indicators that the class material was paced inappropriately for him. He felt he could have been more successful if he had simply, "turned papers in" (personal communication, April 18, 1996). In fact, Dylan is quite accurate. Often I was surprised by his lack of academic discipline when he was actually quite involved in the conversation of the classroom. However, Dylan was never motivated to accomplish much for himself. When I reflect upon the other students in the class who were unsuccessful, I can identify outside factors, such as personal problems, which may have contributed strongly to their lack of success. But even many of these students were quite active, when they were present, in the ongoing classroom conversation. Therefore, what students did not say may express that the quantity of works covered was adequate for them.
Relatedness

Relatedness is the coherence of all of the materials, readings, activities, and discussions in helping to create a culturally significant conversation according to Applebee. (1996) In other words, the conversation needs to progress naturally, as a conversation between people would, with the participants being able to see the back and forth connections as the conversation moves ahead. While out to dinner with a group of friends one evening, I noted the nature of our conversation. When one person had a thought, another expanded upon it. Most importantly however, I noticed how often we returned to certain threads of the conversation. Even when joking around, elements that had surfaced earlier, resurfaced time and time again. If this is the nature of a conversation, the aspect of relatedness must not be ignored.

As a teacher, I could almost retire in satisfaction if my students simply identified the guiding theme of the class. I'm not sure that we expect teenagers to remember much more. So I was thrilled when all four students readily identified "choices" as the main topic of the class. As Dylan clarified, "She always says something about choices...I guess...she wants me to learn more things about people and life" (personal communication, April 18, 1996). But did the connections I tried to create within the conversational domain of choices become apparent to my students?

John cited specific examples of connections he had made. He noted that the movie Schindler's List expanded upon the novel Daniel's Story and that the vocabulary studied "was over the stories
that you read..." (personal communication, May 23, 1996). Danielle also noted the overall connection when she was asked what she liked about the class. "The topics, I guess, and the fact that there is a plan in doing things...everything leads into something else...everything kind of flowed into the next" (personal communication, May 23, 1996). But perhaps Natasha's perspective of the relatedness of the units is the most unique.

She started out with choices and she's breaking it off, kind of like a fruit. You know your thoughts of people and like even with all the stories we read have to do with like the choices we discussed. You know, what are the implications, what did we get out of it and why (personal communication, April 18, 1996)?

For me, this is Natasha's grasp of the holistic approach to the theme of choices. Every part is important within the context of the whole. Therefore, my students were able to grasp the cohesiveness of the curricular conversation, and as in Danielle's case, this contributed to her overall interest in the course.

**Manner**

The activities which enable the conversation comprise the manner in which the conversation will unfold. And as reviewed earlier, Langer and Applebee's (1987) notion of instructional scaffolding expands this concept of manner. Therefore, for the
purpose of this analysis, I have broken down Applebee's (1996) notion of manner into Langer and Applebee's qualities of ownership, appropriateness, internalization, collaboration, and support.

Does the manner in which I teach help students make a personal connection with the topic so that ownership is indeed a factor in the conversation? The theme of "choices" was immediately appealing to Natasha. "I know just by looking at it (life) that some people in my family, that the choices that they made...I know I'm not going to be like them" (personal communication, April 18, 1996). And some of the students made personal connections while doing various activities. Danielle viewed the journals as "a chance to think about what has been said and to kind of gather your thoughts" (personal communication, April 25, 1996). Dylan recognized that he wrote from things he knew or about his opinions. Danielle and Natasha each commented on the "Uno" game activity we did in class during the novel unit. "It was really neat. I know it all fits around choices. It's like real life" (Natasha, personal communication, May 23, 1996). Danielle applied it to herself. "It was kind of like how my life is, but you still got your education plan across" (personal communication, May 23, 1996). And Danielle seemed to assess the overall need for education to have a personal connection to students when she said,

If you get their attention by coming to their world and gleaning out some things that they have to go through every day, at that point you can shove your reading and writing in those spaces and then we've met you halfway. You are dealing with our lives and we are dealing with
what you want us to do. If you give us readings about
racism and several things like that, that we can relate to.
I don't want a story that has to do with poetry in the
sixteenth century. I don't care about that...so I think that
when you come into my life it kind of makes me pay
attention (personal communication, May 23, 1996).

Since racism was such a significant aspect of the class’s conversation,
I gather that Danielle identified or connected with much of what was
discussed in class. Perhaps however, Danielle would identify with
sixteenth century poetry if it were framed in a manner that connected
to her personally, such as one which also illuminated racism.
Obviously, my students felt a connection with many aspects of the
curriculum which at the least kept their interest. In this way, they
could see the point in which the activities applied to their lives.

The second aspect of the manner of teaching a culturally
significant conversation is in ensuring that the lessons are
appropriate for the intended audience. In this sense, lessons have to
build on what students already know. Since I’ve already established
that students felt a connection or had a familiarity with the topic of
discussion, the question remains, did the lessons move beyond this to
build more learning? John, in particular, identified how the writing
activities did build thinking. "You get good thoughts when you are
writing" (personal communication, April 18, 1996). Additionally he
saw the need for reading to enhance the discussions of the class.
Even though he recognized that the discussion could exist without the
readings, he stated, "I think you still need to read it because it will
give you your base and you wouldn't have anything to talk about if you
didn't read it. It is like some things don't make sense" (personal
communication, April 18, 1996). In other words, the discussions were
much more important when students had new information to
contribute from what they had read. Danielle, who is good at
identifying the big picture, noted that "she (the teacher) focuses on
building and collecting which are all important because you can't do
one without the other. (For example) You can't have an analysis if you
haven't read the story" (personal communication, May 23, 1996). As
with the issue of quantity, what the students did not discuss may be an
important factor. None noted that the class seemed to be repetitious
of ideas they already knew. In fact, the building and gathering does
allow students to take their learning to new levels, leading to an
internalization of new ideas and principles.

Langer and Applebee (1987) identify internalization as the
"inner world of knowing and remembering." In this sense, students
are able to apply what they have learned to contexts beyond the
classroom. Danielle offers a more concrete definition: "Go to school
with one idea and then move on. A big idea and then explain it and
then (move on)" (personal communication, April 25, 1996). It is
striking to see the interrelatedness of ownership and appropriateness
with the idea of internalization. Ownership and appropriateness are
the building blocks for internalization as seen in Danielle's definition.
"Going to school with one idea" explains the need for ownership and
background information. "Moving on" with a "big idea" describes the
process of building on what we already know in order to learn more.
For some students, they could clarify how they were able to identify points where they internalized a process or a concept they had learned. For John, the writing process of reader's response journals clearly led to more sophisticated writing. "These (journals) are like combined, and you want to get more into detail and deeper into it (the final essay)" (personal communication, May 23, 1996). Based on discussions, Natasha was able to "see things different now. Because when we were talking about stereotypes that some of the people have...ideas about some of the people made me change what I think" (personal communication, May 23, 1996). And Danielle was able to "stand in their shoes for a minute to see what roads they have had for them" (personal communication, April 25, 1996) after an activity in which her group had to explain the poem "The Road Not Taken" from a homosexual's perspective.

Perhaps most important for me were the moments in which I could see the light come on for many students. At this point I knew students were internalizing what they were learning because it had reached within them somewhere as if to say, "This is important." In a discussion in class and later in an interview with Dr. Newell, Natasha came to a conclusion from reading Daniel's Story and thinking about Hitler's control, which was deeper than we had broached in the class conversation.

I said I think it is just something about power because the white man was killing his own people...I think that is really what life is, some people, you know, can get that position where they can have power and they can get
all the money and all the attention...and they are going
to do that (control others)” (personal communication,
May 23, 1996).

For Natasha, she was now generalizing this concept beyond the book
and the classroom to the possibility of it happening in the world.
When Danielle was asked about one thing she didn’t know before, she
elaborated on a concept she had already written about in an essay on
apartheid and the novel *Waiting for the Rain*. "I never realized that
maybe there were some kids who truly wanted an education. Tengo’s
perspective of wanting a higher education and his depression about
fighting would have been the same feeling I would have had"
(personal communication, May 23, 1996). For Danielle, she not only
changed a misconception she had of a black South African teenager,
she empathized with his feelings as well. In a final essay on
stereotypes and prejudice, John opened his paper with "Everyone in
the world has prejudice. In my opinion. Just in saying that I’ve made
a stereotype." He, at this point, had internalized the classes'
discussions of stereotypes and that it is helpful to recognize how we
think about them. I find few teenagers who are willing to admit they
have stereotypes, much less be able to identify the thinking processes
which reveal them, and yet so many times we practiced this in class.
In another essay on racism, Dylan described a racist act of which he
was the victim and concluded, "Another way (to deal with it) is to
don’t do it to anybody else because you wouldn’t want that to happen
to you.”
Does the manner in which I teach, therefore, lead to internalization? According to the sampling of students it does. The culturally significant conversation, based on a topic the students are interested in, led to a deeper level of understanding of broader topics such as prejudice and social injustice, just to name a few. I think it's becoming obvious that my role as a teacher has to be one of collaborator who seeks to move students into internalization. If this element were missing, the whole manner of teaching a culturally significant conversation would break down. Since ownership, appropriateness, and internalization are present, I believe I have shifted from the teacher who dispenses knowledge to the teacher who orchestrates experiences in which students learn.

But I have also learned something in the process about what it is I teach. Yes, I want my students to consider the topic of choices, how they make choices, and how they apply it to their lives, but in orchestrating the learning within the context of a conversation, I want to teach my students meaningful ways in which to participate in discussions with civility and sensitivity. For example, John found it important to remember the emphasis I placed on discussion etiquette. While talking about stereotypes, I emphasized to the students that when we indicate that an entire group or race acts a certain way, we are making an unfair generalization which is stereotyping people unfairly. John noted the importance in prefacing a comment with words such as "some people are...in my opinion" (personal communication, May 23, 1996). How much less offensive this is in contrast to, "In my view all people of that race are..."
Danielle, knowing that she has strong opinions with which everyone does not agree, appreciated an atmosphere where discussion etiquette is stressed. "I'd say that one (ground rule) would be everyone has the right to disagree. If that's your opinion, that's it. Just respect other people to get your opinion across" (personal communication, May 23, 1996). Had this atmosphere not existed, Danielle probably would not have contributed to the conversation.

One other area students found support for was in developing their ideas through writing. It was a common practice that I made comments on their journals and their rough drafts. I focused mainly on students' ideas and in getting students to elaborate on those ideas. In interviews, Dylan, John, and Natasha referred to this method of support. Each commented that most of my remarks dealt with how they could expand their thoughts rather than on correcting their mechanical problems. Natasha noted "she wants us to know to put in periods in sentences and stuff" (personal communication, April 18, 1996), but in the same discussion, she elaborates that what is most important is clarifying what you are trying to say. "Some people will start off with talking about something and then end up with something else. She will say stick with the topic and do not go off and basically I think it is kind of easy to do that" (personal communication, April 18, 1996). John identified this support and acknowledged that it was helpful. "She goes over my rough drafts and if we need (more) thoughts in it, she will tell us" (personal communication, April 18, 1996).
At times students' comments were so overwhelmingly supportive that I am almost embarrassed to report them since I know I haven't become the teacher I envision. But we all know that teenagers usually say what they think when it comes to school and teachers. The class had been not only interesting for Danielle, Natasha, John, and Dylan, but each could readily identify what they had learned. The notion of a culturally significant conversation had enabled my students to find an atmosphere they could relate to and therefore, push their learning to new levels.

Challenge Students' Perceptions

Analyzing students' perceptions from my tenth grade challenge class has proven to be a more difficult task. As a teacher who has taken great strides in her thinking as well as in her teaching, I have had to not only admit but internalize the fact that the challenge curriculum is still very much structured around the importance of the text and the acquisition of information about texts. In analyzing students' interviews and documents, I have searched several times to find the existence of a culturally significant conversation. But wishing it there does not make it a reality. In agonizing more over what my students did not say, I have come to conclude that indeed the manner in which I teach is a change I have incorporated with the challenge curriculum. However, the classroom curriculum has not evolved to the point where I am focusing on how students learn. I am still focusing on what students learn.
Quality

As with the standard that was used with the regular students, I wanted to find my students' perceptions of the quality of the work studied in the challenge class. Was there a personal interest in any of the works studied, and did the work enable students to go into new avenues of learning?

There was only one assignment in which students seemed to express any type of personal interest. This is the recommended book report assignment which I described earlier. All four students, Angela, Shawn, Jeff, and Rebecca, mentioned that they liked the recommended book assignment because they were able to choose the book they wanted to read. Additionally, all four students were successful in completing the assignment (personal communication, November 16, 1995).

However, other assignments appealed to students for academic reasons. Since these are college-bound students, most take an interest in what will be useful to them as they continue their education. They want to receive good grades and they want to know how to complete assignments correctly in order that they may be successful down the road. Angela saw the need for writing the research paper, "because in future classes we will need to know how because in eleventh and twelfth grade it might be a little bit harder and they might not help us out as much as Mrs. Sweet because they think we should already know that" (personal communication, September 25, 1995).
So, is it possible that students moved into a deeper level of learning without an emphasis on personal interest but on academic interest? Yes, I believe the students learned, but what they learned did not include the insightful, provoking points made by my regular students such as how Hitler's power affected the world and even today's events. The challenge students did not and were not encouraged to move characters into their own worlds. Instead, students in the challenge class learned content and form as in how to organize an essay or how to perform a close reading of a text. For example, in Rebecca's essay comparing Christine from The Abduction and Kino from The Pearl, Rebecca concludes that:

Kino and Christine have totally different personalities from each other. Yet they can be similar in ways. Christine and Kino both have many difficult decisions to make. Christine just thought hers through better than Kino did. Kino didn't stop to think about the situation. Christine was a wiser person. She cared more and was a considerate person. Kino was just quick to act. Mostly he acted out of greed. Some people handle decisions better than others. That is the case of the characters in The Abduction and The Pearl (Comparison/Contrast Essay).

Rebecca has completed an excellent conclusion for comparing and contrasting the two characters, yet there is no insight or generalization of this information to inform us beyond the realm of
the classroom and in completing the assignment except for Rebecca's statement that "Some people handle decisions better than others." This is not Rebecca's fault; the assignment was not posed in this manner. So Rebecca's conclusion stops with the content of the reading and the form in which she writes it. Rebecca learned, but I must ask myself as an educator, how much more could have been explored with this assignment? The "culturally significant" portion of the classroom conversation is not present beyond wanting students to be prepared for the structure of college.

So what have I prepared Rebecca and the other challenge track students for? Has exposing students to "academic" types of study prepared them for college level courses? Will they fall into the same trap I did in high school and college where I refused to read for pleasure because I had been encouraged only in the academic discipline? Will their writing remain static and limited to only analysis of content? And most importantly, what happens if these students do not go on to college? How has my curriculum benefited them in any way for life after high school? Most of these students will be successful because they have it within them to be, even before I met them. However, I want my class to prepare them to be even more successful. I want them to not only be able to make a transition into the post-secondary educational experiences, but into life outside of high school as well.
Quantity

As in my analysis of the regular curriculum, I found that there were no overt indicators of what Applebee (1996) defines as having too much or too little in sustaining the conversation of a curriculum. Not one student made any comment about how much or how little was covered in class. Again, I believe this silence is actually a strong indicator of the pace of the curriculum. There were no complaints about the materials, readings, or discussions covering too little or too much.

In interviews, students continuously referred to the "steps" I used to pace the assignments they were completing. All agreed that these steps made the assignments significantly easier. Dr. Newell summarized the students' comments about the comparison/contrast paper from the first interview as, "what you're saying is that taking you through the steps and having you do these sheets really kind of got you ready. So, it was a hard paper to write - it was kind of complicated - but she kind of kept it up in a way (that made it easier)..." (personal communication, September 25, 1995). The students at times found the work difficult, but the lesson was usually paced in such a way that students were able to complete it in an amount of time that enabled them to learn and be successful with the assignment.

Relatedness

As I have described the tenth grade challenge curriculum previously, there are few connections between the works studied. I
have made some initial attempts as with the comparison/contrast assignment where the characters from the historical book reports and *The Pearl* face similar injustices. So, I'm not surprised that my students saw few connections between anything they studied in class. As Jeff stated best, "I think she tries to (make connections across readings) but sometimes it's not really easy to see" (personal communication, September 26, 1995). Angela stated that "it's like you're learning different things from different countries" (personal communication, November 16, 1995), and Rebecca stated that "they (the readings) are all from a lot of different cultures and stuff like that" (personal communication, November 16, 1995). But these connections were vague and not prominent for the students. At one point in the first interview, Rebecca stated, "I don't know. It seems like they (the readings) all have a problem in it that needs to be solved" (personal communication, September 26, 1995). But this was obviously a conclusion that Rebecca only came upon while discussing it in the interview. And for Shawn, the connections that the other students made were a problem for him. He did not see any connections across readings, "because mostly all of them guys have a different background and the settings and different time periods" (personal communication, September 26, 1995). There was no thread that bound the differences together for him.

While reading *The Pearl*, I had a spur of the moment idea to ask my students to read the short story "The Monkey's Paw" so that we could investigate the ideas of fate and luck as they are portrayed in the stories. In my regular class, "The Monkey's Paw" had generated a
lively debate about luck, and I thought it might work well based on a
discussion *The Pearl* had generated on the same topic with the challenge students. When asked if there was anything the students had read that was unimportant, Jeff referred to "The Monkey's Paw." "We just kind of read it and had a little discussion, but other than that there wasn't much to it" (personal communication, November 16, 1995). Angela saw what I was trying to do and she stated, "Yeah, she was trying to tie it into *The Pearl*...it was an interesting story though because at the end everybody (in the class) had a different opinion..." (personal communication, November 16, 1995). Evidently, the connection I was trying to make was not evident to all of the students. Jeff's statement is most telling, however, because he saw that this assignment was incongruent with the structure of the rest of the class. Since the classroom conversation was not established to be interrelated, any attempt to do so did not fit with the overall goals of the course.

How then has the structure of the challenge curriculum affected the learning of the students? Evidently, every unit was sectioned off to be a structure in itself. Any attempt to move beyond that unit created difficulties for the students as is obvious from Shawn's and Jeff's statements. Jeff had divided the class into units in the same way I had presented it. Throwing in a last minute reading and discussion did not fit. Yet the nature of a conversation is an ebb and flow of ideas, not a separation into different units. I had separated the study of literature which stifled any flow that may have occurred naturally. If Jeff and Shawn could not transfer ideas across units because I had
not designed a conversational tone for the curriculum, have I inhibited how they transfer learning experiences outside the walls of the classroom? Curriculum must be more coherent as I have structured it for the regular curriculum if I want my students to truly have learning experiences which are real and applicable to various situations.

Manner

The manner in which I teach the tenth grade challenge curriculum has shifted to be more student-centered rather than text-centered. Although the emphasis of the curriculum continues to be on the text or more specifically, how to read and interpret various literary genres, I have tried to find ways which enable students to have more meaningful encounters with the texts. As with the analysis of the regular students' perceptions, I have broken down Applebee's (1996) notion of manner into Langer and Applebee's (1987) qualities of ownership, appropriateness, internalization, collaboration, and support to try to discover if the manner in which I teach does aid students in learning the material covered in class.

To what extent were the students invited to have any ownership with what was happening in the classroom? For Angela, discussions provided an opportunity for students to explore their opinions of the texts studied. The importance of the discussions, as defined by Angela, included "to see how far everybody is getting and to see how the whole class feels about what you're reading or something" (personal communication, September 25, 1995). Rebecca felt the
same. "Like in *The Pearl*, some people thought the pearl was evil and others didn't. You hear other people's opinions on why they thought the way they did" (personal communication, September 25, 1995). Therefore, students at least had the right to discuss how they felt about what they were encountering.

The only other opportunity afforded for ownership was that students had a choice when finding what books they wanted to read for their book reports. "I'm glad we had a choice of reading our own book because we could choose what book interests us instead of having to be bored with any book" (Angela, personal communication, September 25, 1995). This was especially important for Angela because "before Mrs. Sweet's class, I hardly ever picked up a book and read it" (personal communication, November 16, 1995).

It is obvious from what students did not say that there was hardly any ownership invited with other reading and writing assignments. Students had no choice in their other readings such as *Julius Caesar* and various poems, or in their writings as well. The writing assignments reflect this. Students did not go beyond the required assignment with the organization or content that was given in class. To a large extent this must be because we didn't explore other possibilities in class and these students want to do what they feel the teacher defines as "correct."

The second aspect of the manner of teaching, appropriateness, ensures that the lessons are suitable for the students. In other words, lessons must build on what students already know as well as help students gain more knowledge. For the challenge class, the case
study students were asked to rate the activities they did in class on a scale of "very important" to "not important." All four students indicated that everything done in class was "very important" because they learned new information and at least for them, they could see the importance in all of it (personal communication, November 16, 1995). The list of items they rated included understanding what you read, spelling, grammar, and punctuation, making a good argument to support what you say, being creative, understanding what the author meant, and having your own ideas. Shawn indicated that spelling, grammar, and punctuation were important because, "she checks for that" (personal communication, November 16, 1995). And Jeff said, "I think we learned how to use commas better and apostrophes" (personal communication, November 16, 1995). Angela felt that the appropriateness of the poetry lesson helped her understand what the author meant.

When we did poems, it was good that we sat there when we read the poems and we all talked about it. We understood it more. Sometimes when you go through a poem, you just read it. We wouldn't understand it, but when we talked about it, we were understanding it (personal communication, November 16, 1995).

Since the lesson aided in understanding, students were brought to a point in which learning did take place.

This leads to the next step of manner: internalization. What were the challenge students able to internalize as a result of their
experience with the challenge curriculum? This aspect is most
telling for two reasons: 1) students did learn, but 2) what students
learned focused on the content of the literature and the discourses of
writing employed. It is this aspect above all others which shows the
limitation of a text-centered classroom.

First, students clearly defined that being successful in my
challenge class meant "knowing" what I was teaching. All of the
students indicated that the number one ingredient needed to be
successful in the class was in simply paying attention. In other words,
students realized that they must hear what I had to impart to them if
they wanted to be successful in understanding Shakespeare or in
writing an essay. Angela stated that "to me, I think when she's talking
about stuff like about how to do something, I think you should always
write down notes 'cause it will help you more when you have to do
some stuff at home. You can look at it" (personal communication,
September 25, 1995). Angela learned a useful skill which aided her
when she was on her own doing her work. But I cannot help but think
in reflecting upon this process, students become very dependent upon
the teacher for knowing and understanding. This is clear for the
manner in which I taught students to organize and revise their essays.
Shawn stated that "when we write a report, she (emphasis mine) finds
out how good we write it and if it's in the correct order" (personal
communication, November 16, 1995). However, if the learning process
were shifted so that students could come to know on their own in
experiences which fostered this type of learning, hopefully in a
relatively short amount of time, students would learn for themselves
and not be dependent upon the teacher. Another example is evident in that I tried to model for students how to read, comprehend, and write about *Julius Caesar*, but I never clearly defined the process or enabled students to do this on their own. As Angela pointed out, "like if she doesn't think that we understand what they're saying, we'll like go over that whole part that they just said and just summarize it so we can understand it" (personal communication, September 25, 1995).

Perhaps the most significant comment about what students learned came in the form of a list of material covered. When asked about what things were covered in class, Angela replied:

Book reports and learning how to write stories and how to do research papers and to prepare us for eleventh grade English. We learned different words from our vocabulary. We also learned how to form a paper correctly and how to write paragraphs and where to put parentheses and things where they are suppose to be" (personal communication, November 16, 1995).

This list reflects my course goals but it is also quite limited. Whereas, the regular students articulated learning as in broad cultural issues such as John's notion of stereotypes, Angela's list is limited to "school-type" information and knowledge. She and the other challenge students are being prepared to be successful in school, but even that learning is limited if these students do not become less dependent upon the teacher. Again, I must revisit my concept of curriculum and note that who I am teaching is just as significant as
what and how I am teaching. If the reality is that less than half of my college-preparatory students will actually go on to college, am I really preparing them for what they need most? And even if they do go on to college, has learning structure alone enabled students to be successful?

There is one final aspect of manner which must be explored. Under a curriculum which emphasizes genre study, have I given my students the support and collaboration needed to really learn? Yes, some support is evident. As the students described earlier about writing the comparison/contrast paper, the steps I provided in writing the drafts, which included prewriting charts and drafting, enabled students to take a difficult assignment and break it down into easier, more recognizable steps. Rebecca stated that she didn't feel the essay was hard "because of the chart she gave us" (personal communication, September 25, 1995). Additionally, individual conferences aided the students in understanding how to revise their drafts. Shawn viewed this as "She showed us our mistakes and corrected them for us" (personal communication, September 25, 1995). As reviewed earlier, I also gave students support for taking notes on Julius Caesar and in organizing their drafts. But the collaboration part of this issue is sorely lacking. It is obvious that in reality, much of what was being accomplished did not push students to think and do for themselves. Their essays were written not so much to be original and insightful, but to complete the structure I had
given them. So how will my students incorporate this learning into their daily lives? Will they be more like me and reserve this type of learning for school situations only?

From what students did say, learning was accomplished in my text-based challenge class. However, from what students did not say, there was a limited view of what counted for knowing. The conversation was organized in such a manner that Applebee's (1996) idea of a "collection" limited students' knowledge to more academic experiences and activities. Even attempts to create a more integrated curriculum were rejected, as with "The Monkey's Paw," because it was not an original design of the curriculum. Additionally, in attempting to change a text-based manner of teaching to a more reader-based approach, unknowingly I enabled students to become even more dependent on me in order to know how to complete a task. This aspect must change if I want my students to become individuals who learn and think for themselves.
CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR MY EVOLVING PRACTICE

I have gained a lot of insight into my teaching practices based on my own reflection and my students' perceptions. I have become a more reflective teacher and I believe, a better teacher as a result. But, in order to be an effective teacher, I can never become passive and think that I have learned all there is to know about teaching and learning. In fact, the opposite is true. I have only just begun to realize how my students learn best. I am now on a quest; one which will enlighten my teaching practices for the remainder of my career.

Conclusions of the Study

The purpose of this study was to answer several questions I have about creating and implementing my tenth grade curricula. From exploring these issues I have learned much about myself as a teacher and about my students and how they think. Indeed, it has been a rewarding process to reflect on why I teach the way I do and the way my students learn best. It has been a long road to develop the type of curriculum I feel works best for my students by reading
what the "experts" have to say about teaching and learning and curriculum development, but I have developed for myself a worthwhile curriculum which I enjoy teaching.

How did my high school and college experiences shape my earlier beliefs about the teaching of English? Both my high school and college experiences reinforced the traditional notion of teaching and learning of the text as the focus of study in a classroom. In this manner, learning experiences centralize on finding what the text means so that the learner is enlightened by the "greatness" of the text. The biggest drawback for me as a student of this approach was that it reduced learning about literary texts to only a school discipline. In other words, I came to believe that there were "good" texts that should be read and to be educated meant "knowing" about the text, but no personal interpretation or involvement with the work was of any value. For many reasons, this kept me from reading for pleasure for several years.

This traditional approach also heavily affected the way I taught in the beginning of my career. I attempted to impart knowledge to my own high school students so that they could be educated and prepared for college. My classroom could have easily been defined as one which simply covered the material so that students were exposed to as much information as I could give them.

Why and how has my teaching philosophy and curriculum changed? The traditional approach became a source of disillusionment for me after several years of teaching. When I realized that much of what I taught was not meaningful to my
students, I attempted to find lessons which were meaningful. Because of my school's reform efforts, I was forced to evaluate the content of my curriculum to see what was working and what was not. Additionally, I was beginning to hear about new methods which I wanted to try in my classroom. My paradigm for teaching and learning was beginning to shift as I began to consider that my old ways of teaching were not enabling students to learn.

This paradigm shift became permanent once I began my master's program and I learned how students really learn best. Mere memorization and regurgitation did not mean that my students were internalizing anything from my curriculum. Instead, I was now ready to find ways to help students experience concepts in such a way that students came to make meaning for themselves.

What is the current shape of my classroom curricula based on my existing philosophy for teaching? My regular tenth grade curriculum is now shaped in the manner of Applebee's (1996) culturally significant conversation. Based on the theme of "choices," my students explore the nature of making choices for themselves through literary texts and writing experiences. The curriculum is much more personally connected to students, and students are given opportunities to see how others (which include other students, adults, and literary characters) contribute their voices to the notion of choices and implications. Now students come to know for themselves instead of me distributing the information that they should know.

My tenth grade challenge curriculum has not evolved to the same point as my regular curriculum, but some significant changes
have slowly been made. The text is often still the central focus of the class, but I have attempted to help students find more personal connections with their experiences with the texts. I have tried to make the study of literature and writing more important to students, but it is evident that the text itself, as well as how to "correctly" read and write about the text is still the guiding notion of the classroom challenge curriculum.

What are my instructional practices today? Most importantly, I have attempted to change my instructional practices so that my classes become more student-centered. I scrutinize each activity of my regular tenth grade curriculum to make sure that its purpose is to invite students to participate in a culturally significant conversation. For the most part, I feel I have been successful in doing this by including pre-writing and pre-reading activities which expand the concepts being explored and culmination activities which allow students an opportunity to internalize their new learning. However, this is not the case for my challenge class. Even with some changes in the tenth grade challenge curriculum, such as incorporating reader's response journals, the focus of the class is still primarily the text. I have attempted to make most lessons process-oriented, but students still rely heavily on me to find out if they have read or written a text "correctly."

What are my students' perceptions of the tenth grade regular and challenge curricula? The case study students' perceptions of the regular curriculum reflect the attitudes I have tried to foster from the theme of "choices." Danielle, Natasha, John, and Dylan easily
identified the structure of the class as well as different concepts they learned. These concepts echoed evidence of critical thinking skills the students used to employ which enabled them to transfer their own ideas of the conversation into their ways of knowing about the world.

The case study students' perceptions of the challenge curriculum revealed its design: focus on a collection of texts. Angela, Shawn, Jeff, and Rebecca successfully read and understood such works as *Julius Caesar* and also effectively wrote about such texts. But this is where the students' learning ceased. They were never forced to, nor did they on their own, move their experiences with the texts outside the classroom into ways of knowing and doing in the world.

Evidently, there needs to be a balance struck between the traditional and progressive ways of learning in a classroom. It is good that my students could read and write about *Julius Caesar*, but their learning should not stop there. Students should be allowed the right to multiple interpretations of a text. If this is achieved, students will not only find new and creative ways to read and write about a text, but also new ways in which to view the world. Students will be empowered to take their own understandings to deeper levels.

**Future Plans Based on Findings**

In light of my students' perceptions as well as my own, there are many ways I still need to change my tenth grade curricula. As I have
stated earlier, I realize that to be an effective teacher means that I must continue to evolve. This is also true for my curricula. I am sure there will never come a point where I can state, "It has arrived."

My first major change will be a reconstruction of my challenge curriculum. Now that I am comfortable with the conversation of "choices" in my regular curriculum and because of my students' high perceptions, I will now structure the challenge curriculum in much the same way. There will be some modifications to make it "rigorous" in the academic sense, as in keeping a work such as *Julius Caesar*, but it will still remain the basic structure of a culturally significant conversation of choices.

A second change that is necessary is what Mayher (1990) refers to as "learning how to learn" (p. 96). As educators, we spend the majority of our time creating and implementing the circumstances in which students learn, but we never unveil our secrets to the students themselves. If students are really learning from experience in my classroom, I want them to be able to transfer this process from situation to situation. It seems only logical that students must learn the processes they go through so they can internalize them. The result will be that students can draw upon their knowledge of how they work out a concept or a problem when asked to do so on their own in other classes or in different settings.

One example which shows my students do not understand my approach to teaching is the comment I have begun to hear frequently that my class is "easy." The old, commonsense side of my teaching personality cringes when I hear this term. I want the work to be
challenging and rigorous, and the term easy implies that it is just the opposite. While I'll admit that there is room for more challenging and rigorous work in my curriculum, I must sit back and analyze what my students define as difficult versus easy, and conclude that semantics do not do justice to the activities going on in my classroom.

For students, "difficult" implies a curriculum which includes literature which is hard to read and understand, as well as objective tests over the literature, which "nitpick" at the so-called right answers of a work. Likewise, under the term of difficult, students are given one opportunity to write an essay with the hope that this attempt embodies all of the information for which the teacher is looking. This is the traditional, commonsense approach to teaching literature and writing. In contrast, "easy" implies that the readings are easy to comprehend and students have little difficulty trying to find meanings within the work. Additionally, students are not asked to guess at the correct answers on an objective test, but instead are asked to discuss how the work contributes to our lives. Writing assignments are no longer "a one shot deal," but students are expected to rethink and clarify their own writing on a regular basis. When I hear a student respond to another student's statement that this is easy with "Yeah, but it makes you think" or when students' biggest complaints with the revision process is "Mrs. Sweet, you ask too many questions," then I know what students define as easy is in reality easy only because now it is something within their grasp, something not so totally foreign or remote that students can barely grasp it. It is now my goal to make students aware of the differences in these terms, not to keep them
from making comments such as "This is easy," but to make them aware that it is easy because they can relate to it and understand it. Again, if students start to realize that this process is easy for these very reasons, they can learn to transfer their own learning processes to other learning situations outside of class.

Finally, the key ingredient for change which must be built into the structure of my curriculum is flexibility. Ironically, it is this characteristic which must become permanent in the curricular structure if the curriculum is to continue to evolve from trimester to trimester and year to year. This flexibility must be incorporated in every aspect of its design: quality, quantity, relatedness and manner (Applebee, 1996).

For quality to continue to be an aspect of my curriculum, new pieces of literature will nudge out old because they add a newer or stronger voice. I am constantly looking for new works which are meaningful to my students and which broaden the depth of the conversation. In particular, I am always looking for more "multicultural" and world literature to add to the conversation because I want to open new doors of the world to my students. My biggest struggle in this regard is finding the time to search for works as well as read them. As all teachers know, endless hours of grading papers and creating effective lesson plans often consume a teacher's spare time, so as teachers we don't have the time to read as much as we would like. Additionally, any search for books is a blind attempt on
my own either in going to the local library with a list of subjects or taking the recommendations of other teachers. This makes for a tedious and time-consuming search.

As with quality, the curriculum must continue to be flexible in the quantity of works studied. If I am not willing to balance works covered, too much will be added to the curriculum and students will not have time to think and reflect in-depth about the concepts covered. There is always room for new and interesting works, but often old works will be forced out to make room.

Again, flexibility is the key to the relatedness of the concepts covered. As the second unit of my regular curriculum was once titled "Bad Choices," and then "Miscommunications," it is now called "Implications." This was due to the relatedness of the concepts already studied. Bad choices and miscommunications never quite fit, but implications naturally grew out of the previous unit of choices for maturity. The class now returns to implications often as we explore social injustice and positive role models in the following units. The relatedness will change as works studied change and as my classes change from one trimester to the next. As I create a conversation about choices this trimester, next trimester that very same topic will take on a new look since the participants of the conversation have changed. I cannot predict what background knowledge each set of students will bring to the discussion nor can I predict what avenue we will explore next since every class is different. Again, flexibility is the key.
Just as the conversation may be altered with every class I teach, the manner in which I teach will also continue to change. Especially because I have so far to go in making each student have a personal experience with the curriculum, everything I do is up for scrutiny. Therefore, I must be flexible in the manner in which I approach teaching the conversation. One focus for change that I currently want to concentrate on is the manner of improving writing instruction. I want my students to learn more about writing by writing more and by learning their own strengths and weaknesses. In this way, students can become less dependent on me to help revise their drafts, and they can become better writers on their own. One way I will explore improving writing instruction is through the use of writing folders. Since all of the preliminary writing in the class in some way contributes to the bigger writing assignment students complete for a unit, a writing folder will allow students the opportunity to keep these preliminary writing assignments at hand so they can draw upon them when necessary for completing a more comprehensive essay. Additionally, because students never fully identify many of the writing problems which recur in most of their assignments, a writing folder would allow them to keep a record of the problems they face with each writing assignment. Thus, students are able to focus on certain problem areas until they have overcome the problems. A writing folder could also serve as a basis for conferences with students and for grammar lessons. Finally, even though students go through a writing process in my classroom, students still prepare a final copy
that is never revisited after the final draft is completed. Perhaps the use of a writing folder will allow my students and me ways to revisit writing pieces and even for integrating various assignments.

In conclusion, primary importance for an evolving teacher then, will be in continuing to revisit her curriculum to make sure an environment for learning is being experienced by all of its participants. The key seems to be in first, creating a curriculum in which students are invited to participate; next, in teaching the students the design of their own learning so that they are empowered to learn on their own; and finally, in constantly being open to change so that the curriculum evolves as the participants change and evolve. A reflective teacher who wants the best for her students will continue to learn herself so that her classroom is continuously revised so as to define a true student-centered learning community.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX A: Content Outline of Tenth Grade Regular Class

Unit 1: CHOICES FOR MATURITY
- Roadmap of Your Life (visual)
- "Through the Tunnel" - Doris Lessing
- Selection from *Kaffir Boy* - Mark Mathabane
- Special Speaker: Joe Foster
- *Bophal* (video / apartheid)
- Poems: "The Choice;" "Ex-Basketball Player;" "Mother to Son;" "Mattie Stevens"

Unit 2: CHOICES: IMPLICATIONS
- Miscommunication Role Plays
- "A Visit to Grandmother" - William Melvin Kelley
- Murder Mystery Game
- "Lamb to the Slaughter" - Roald Dahl
- "The Necklace" - Guy de Maupassant
- "The Monkey's Paw" - W.W. Jacobs
- *Twelve Angry Men* - Reginald Rose

Unit 3: CHOICES: A GLOBAL VIEW (Prejudice/ Racism)
- "By Any Other Name" - Santha Rama Rau
- "Stopover at Queretaro" -
- Book Reports: Daniel's Story (Matas), Chain of Fire (Naidoo), Farewell to Manzanar (Houston), Waiting for the Rain (Gordon)
- The Hiding Place; Schindler's List, Sarafina (video choices)

Unit 4: CHOICES: POSITIVE ROLE MODELS
- "Harriet Tubman"
- The Color Purple (video)
- "The Bet" - Chekhov
- "With All Flags Flying"
- Driving Miss Daisy (video choice)
APPENDIX B: Initial Interview About "Choices"
choices Interview

Interviewer’s Name: ________________________________
Interviewee’s Name: ______________________________

1. When you were little, who did you choose as your best friend? Why?

2. If you could choose to skip one grade in school, (any grade), which would you choose? Why?

3. If you could choose the age you are when you could get your driver’s license, what would it be? Why?

4. If you could choose any city in the United States in which to live, where would you choose? Why?

5. If you could choose to be President of the United States, would you? Why or why not?

6. If you could choose to be someone famous, who would it be? Why?
APPENDIX C: Instructions for "Uno" Game

Preparation
1. Gather one Uno game for every 4 - 5 students.
2. Make play money for the participants or use Monopoly money.
3. Buy snacks to supply 3 days - chips and drinks for about 10 students per day.
4. Gather various books and videos about the topics being studied. Schedule a television and vcr.
5. Buy doughnuts and juice for all students for day five.

Before the Activity
Do not tell your students about the events of the week. Inform that the week will be "different."

During the Activity
Day 1: Instruct students to get into groups of 4 or 5 and begin playing Uno.

Stop the game after about 30 minutes. Have the members in each group add up their scores and determine first through fifth places.

Give play money to the students as follows:
- first place = $1200
- second place = $800
- third place = $400
- fourth place = 2300
- fifth place = $0

Tell the students that they will be required to purchase this week's activities with their play money. If the students don't have enough "cash," they may obtain money from others by begging, bartering, or working for them.

Day 2: Show a video on one of the topics being studied. Sell snacks to students for their play money. Inform students who want to work for "welfare" that they may do various jobs around the classroom for you or they may complete an "extra" assignment. (For example, have
students write a response journal from new information they read in a source book.)

Competition and stealing may develop. Allow this unless it gets violent.

Day 3: Show another short video on the topics being studied. Again sell snacks for play money. Also sell an assignment for play money. (For example, give students an opportunity to buy a journal assignment - meaning they do not have to complete it.) Again, provide creative "welfare" work.

Day 4: Show another short video about the topics being studied. Again sell snacks for play money. Also sell extra-credit points for play money. Additionally, provide more "welfare" work.

Day 5: Announce to the students that the game has ended. Have an in-depth discussion about how the students felt about the activity. Possible discussion questions:
Which side of the financial scene were you on? Were you a "have" or a "have not?"
What did it feel like to have the financial status and situation you did?
What selfish attitudes did you personally show or feel during the week?
How do you think this game accurately reflected what goes on in our society?

Have a doughnut and juice party for the entire class so everyone is rewarded for their participation.

Adapted from a game called "Hard Bargain."
APPENDIX D: Content Outline for Tenth Grade Challenge Class

Unit 1:

The Pearl  John Steinbeck
Historical Book Report:
  Daniel's Story (Matas); Chain of Fire (Naidoo);
  The Abduction (Newth); Farewell to Manzanar (Houston);
  The Return (Levitin); Night (Wiesel); Waiting for the Rain
  (Gordon)
  Twelve Angry Men  Reginald Rose

Unit 2:

Julius Caesar
Young Adult Book Report  (Any young adult book title)

Unit 3:

Poetry
  "A Traveler's Curse After Misdirection" Robert Graves;
  "Miss Rosie" Lucille Clifton; Stopping By Woods on a Snowy
  Evening" Robert Frost; "The Lake" Ted Hughes; "Autumn
  Chant" Edna St. Vincent Millay

Unit 4:

Research Paper
  Recommended Book Report (APPENDIX G)
APPENDIX E: Reader's Response Journals for *The Pearl*

1) (Reaction of Others) After Kino slams his fist against the gate of the doctor's house (Chapter 1):
   What does this reveal about Kino to someone who is watching?

2) (Cultural Background) After Kino finds the pearl and decides Coyotito must go to school (Chapter 3):
   Pretend you are not educated, you're poor, and you're oppressed.

3) (Statements) After evil things begin to happen once Kino has found the pearl (Chapter 4):
   Kino tells Juana "I am a man." What do you think about this statement?

4) (Actions) Juana tries to throw the pearl back into the sea...Kino beats Juana (Chapter 5):
   Pretend you are Juana. How do you feel about Kino's actions?

5) (Alternative Ending - Moral Choice) Juana and Kino return to throw the pearl back into the sea (Chapter 6):
   Become Juana or Kino: Write a letter to the other telling them why you have decided to stay or why you have decided to go.
APPENDIX F: Writing Poetry

Alliteration, Assonance, Consonance

alliteration-

Example: Cold are the crabs that crawl on yonder hills, Colder are the cucumbers that grow beneath. -- Edward Lear

assonance-

Example: While in the wild wood I did lie, A child—with a most knowing eye. -- Edgar Allen Poe

consonance-

Example: Nothing lovelier than that lonely call, Bare and singular, like a gull, And three notes or four, that was all. It drew up from the quiet like a well, Waited, sang, and vanishing, was still.

Writing Assignment: Based on your free write, compose a poem which expresses a strong emotion. Use words that sound like the emotion you are trying to express. Include alliteration, assonance, and/or consonance.

After writing your poem, write a complete paragraph which explains why you chose the words you did to convey the emotion. Tell how your use of sound expresses the emotion.
APPENDIX G: Recommended Book Report

BOOK REPORT
English 10
Mrs. Sweet

You are required to complete a book report for the grading period. You may choose one of the following two ways to choose your book and complete your report.

* Interview 3 - 4 different adults (parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, teachers, etc.) and find out what some of their favorite books are. Choose one of their books to read for your report. You will be required to have a conversation with the person who recommended the book and you will receive a grade from him/her. This portion of the report will count for 50% of your total grade.

or

* Choose a book from a list of books that I will recommend. You will complete a conversation with me upon completion of the book. This portion of the report will count for 50% of your total grade.

Conversation Due Date: _____________

As well as reading the book and completing a conversation about the book, you are required to keep a written log as you read. You must make a minimum of 5 entries in your log which I will check periodically throughout the grading period. This portion will count for 50% of your total grade for the book report. The following page shows how to set up your written log.

Written Log Due Date: _____________
WRITTEN LOG
(Keep this sheet with your log!!)

1) Make a heading each time you make an entry into the log. Include date, time, and pages read.

2) Write a paragraph summary of what you have read.

3) Write your feelings about the book up to the point you have read.
(For example, write about if you like or dislike the character(s).)

4) Answer one of the following questions each time you make a log entry: (You may use a question more than once.)
   * Why did the author choose the setting of the story?
   * Why do you think the author wanted to write the book?
   * If you could be one of the characters, which one would you be and why?
   * Is there something about the story you would like to change?
   * Is there something in particular you like or dislike about the book? Why?
   * What do you predict will happen next in the story?
   * How has reading the book widened your world?

Example Log Entry (for The Return)
Tuesday, Sept. 12, 1995
3:00 p.m.
pp. 1 - 23

The story has started with Desta, the main character, and her life in Ethiopia as a black Jew. Her people have been treated badly by other Ethiopians because her people are Jews. They are called "falashas." Desta and her sister and brother live with their aunt and uncle. Desta is engaged to marry Dan but she doesn't really want to marry him. Desta's brother talks of leaving their homeland so he will not be forced into the army.

The story has started rather slowly. I hope the plot gets better. If Desta and Joas decide to leave their home, it will obviously be dangerous for them.

This book has already widened my world because I never knew there was such a thing as African Jews. It is also interesting that the other Ethiopians do not accept them. I wonder how there came to be black Jews?
English 10
BOOK REPORT AGREEMENT

Student's Name ____________________________________________

Recommender's Name _______________________________________
Phone # ________________________________________________

I have recommended for the student to read the book (title)
_______________________________________________________ by (author)
_______________________________________________________ . I understand that I
will be required to have a conversation with the student about the book
by (date) ______________________, and that I will give a written
evaluation for the student on his/her knowledge of the book and his/her
conversation based on the contents of the book. This evaluation will
total 50% of the student's overall grade for the book report.

Recommender's Signature __________________________________

Student's Signature _______________________________________

**If you have any questions about the book report assignment or evaluation
requirement, feel free to call me at 365-5372.

Mrs. Marcia Sweet
RECOMMENDER'S EVALUATION

Please write an evaluation about the conversation you have had with the student about his/her book. Did the student demonstrate knowledge of the contents of the book? Did the student also demonstrate an understanding and appreciation for the book? Did the student successfully complete a conversation about the book?

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Signature ________________________________
STUDENT’S EVALUATION

Write your own evaluation of the book. What parts did you like? What parts did you dislike? Why?
Would you recommend this book to others? What did you gain from your conversation about the book with
the person who recommended it?

________________________________________________________________________

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________________________________________________________________________

Signature ____________________________

147