CURRICULUM BIEN FAIT:
THE QUEST FOR A COHERENT HIGH SCHOOL LITERATURE CURRICULUM

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This thesis is dedicated to my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.
With Him, all things are possible.
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This literature review examines sources of incoherency—both macrocosmic and microcosmic—that impact the goal of establishing a coherent high school literature curriculum. Macrocosmic sources of incoherency involve the institutions through which standards and curriculum are constructed while microcosmic sources concern issues within the discipline of English. Among the macrocosmic/institutional sources of incoherency are an unclear division of power between federal and state government, the lack of a professional vocabulary in education, competing interpretations of standards and reforms, and a lack of educational infrastructure. Microcosmic/disciplinary sources include competing ideologies within English education as well as the weakening of the classical, ethical, and nonacademic teaching traditions of English; the distortion of New Criticism and reader response theory also account as a source of microcosmic/disciplinary coherency. Each of the sources are discussed at length, drawing from a range of sources by influential scholars in English education. The literature review concludes with three suggestions for administrators, educators, and policymakers to bridge the gap between theory and practice.
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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

The English dramatist George Bernard Shaw is best known for his play about a ruthless, fastidious linguist who transforms a poverty-stricken Cockney flower girl with no command of the standard dialect of the English language into an independent woman, refined with grace and remarkable felicity of expression. *Pygmalion* (better known by its musical interpolation, *My Fair Lady*) adheres to an old formula for structuring a play: la *pièce bien faite*, or the “well-made play.” Codified by French playwright Eugène Scribe, the model includes the noted structural characteristics:

1.) clear exposition of the situation
2.) careful preparation for future events
3.) cause-to-effect arrangements of incidents
4.) unexpected but logical reversals
5.) continuous and mounting suspense that builds to a climax
6.) a scène à faire (“obligatory scene”) which shows the hero at both his lowest point (beginning of scene) and his highest point (end of scene), also known as the climax of the play
7.) a logical resolution and moral
8.) often incorporates dramatic irony, mistaken identities, misinterpreted information or actions, letters that fall into the wrong hands, etc.

All of these characteristics, arguably, are found in the popular entertainment of any age and the great works that line the shelves of literary scholars.

At the heart of the *pièce bien faite* lies a want for order, structure, and coherency in a chaotic, ambivalent world. Consumers of media desire the “good guys” to win and the “bad guys” to lose, approaching texts—books, television shows, graphic novels,
etc.—with an expectation of a story featuring a defined beginning, middle, and end.

Somehow through these storytelling mediums, we, the reader, can order our world.

This same deep desire for coherency lies at the root of the discourse surrounding literature standards and curriculum in public education around the world: a need for order and structure, a need for the curriculum *bien fait*. But what a “well-made curriculum” looks like in practice differs widely among educationists, professors, teachers, and theorists, from E. D. Hirsch’s Core Knowledge Sequence to the Common Core State Standards. What if the pursuit for a “well-made curriculum” is an illusion, a goose-chase for a magical curriculum that will solve all of the dilemmas inherent within the discipline of English/Language Arts? Many questions surround the debate concerning what is taught in our schools and why, and who actually gets to make these important decisions. Ultimately, there are no easy answers.
CHAPTER II:
MACROCOSMIC/INSTITUTIONAL SOURCES OF INCOHERENCY

Curriculum & Standards: Two Words with Different Meanings

How do educators and curriculum specialists construct a “coherent” literature curriculum? As will be explained later, the answer to this question changes throughout each age within the history of English education. However, before notions of “coherency” can be discussed, two terms must be defined: standards and curriculum. These terms are often conflated and interchanged, and some would argue that there is no difference between the two.¹

For the sake of consistency, the terminology used by the Mississippi Department of Education will be employed in the forthcoming discussion of literature curricula. The following statements are taken from the 2016 Mississippi College– and Career– Readiness Standards for English Language Arts, a duplication with minor additions of the Common Core State Standards:

The standards are designed to be robust and relevant to the real world, reflecting the knowledge and skills that students need for success in college and careers and to compete in the global economy…This document provides an outline of what students should know and be able to do by the end of each grade level in preparation for college and career. The primary purpose of this document is to
provide a basis for curriculum development for K-12 English Language Arts teachers, outlining what students should know and be able to do by the end of each grade level and course. (MDE 8)

It is clear from this definition that standards serve as the overarching goals of students’ educational progress, and curriculum is informed by these overarching goals. In a letter to the Mississippi Conservative Coalition over the controversial adoption of the Common Core State Standards, Lynn House, former interim state superintendent, explains the following categorical distinction between standards and curriculum:

The state determines academic standards—the goals for what students should learn—but local school districts may build on these standards. Local school districts choose the curriculum—what is taught and how it is taught—in each classroom, as well as resources needed for teaching and learning. Each teacher determines his/her own instructional strategies to help students meet the standards. The standards, in and of themselves, are simply goal statements; it is what happens in the classroom that will impact student performance. [emphasis hers] (3)

Hence, House’s distinctions present a top-down, orderly hierarchy, from the state-level where standards are established to the local school districts where curriculum—the “what is taught” and “how it is taught”—is written. Like the definition from the Mississippi College– and Career Readiness Standards, House’s explanation illustrates the relationship between standards and curriculum: standards inform the curriculum; standards are not curriculum. Peter Cunningham, a former assistant secretary in the
United States Department of Education, offers a track-and-field metaphor to explain the difference: “The standard is the bar that students must jump over to be competitive. The curriculum is the training program coaches use to help students get over the bar” (Cunningham). By extension, the “bar” will inform the athlete’s “training program.”

**The Birth of Standards, Why They Matter & Educational Infrastructure**

As David Cohen notes in “Standards-Based School Reform: Policy, Practice, and Performance,” education reform in the mid-1970s and early 1980s concentrated on the basics—reading, writing, and arithmetic (Cohen 99). By the 1990s, a vision of “more intellectually ambitious instruction…rooted in the disciplines,” such as English, mathematics, science, social studies, etc., had emerged as a part of a “systemic [educational] reform” (100). The key idea was that “instruction should be intellectually much more ambitious; that those ambitions should hold for all students; and that learning and teaching should be pressed in that direction by a coordinated set of instructional guidance mechanisms, including means to hold schools accountable for students’ performance” (100). Hence, a chief component of systemic reform—and many prominent reforms of the past two decades in American education—including establishing standards to serve as a guide for instruction which “nudged educators toward more ambitious goals, higher standards, new assessments, and more substantial curriculum” (123).

However, as Cohen and co-author Susan L. Moffitt point out in their book *The Ordeal of Equality: Did Federal Regulation Fix the Schools?*, standards are, once again, distinct from and not a substitute for curriculum. Situating federal intervention in
America’s public schools within a historical framework, Cohen and Moffitt identify three indispensable, common instruments which influence teaching and learning: common curricula, examinations tied to curricula, and teacher education rooted in the curricula to be taught (3, 4). Together, these instruments, as found in most developed nations’ systems of public schools, constitute what both researchers call “educational infrastructure” which enables [1.] “a common language concerning teaching, learning, and academic content”; [2.] instruments “to set academic tasks that are referenced to curricula and assessment”; [3.] a framework “to define valid evidence of students’ work”; and [4.] “a common vocabulary with which to identify, investigate, discuss, and solve problems of teaching and learning—and thus the elements of professional knowledge and skill” (4, 5). In other words, educational infrastructure enables coherency among professionals and instructional practices.

**Macrococsmic/Institutional Sources of Incoherency**

For historical and constitutional reasons surrounding, “America’s deep ideological divisions over state and federal authority” regarding public education, Cohen and Moffitt explain that the United States never developed these three key components known as educational infrastructure described above, even after many years of public policy aimed at education reform (3, 5). In a pre-Title I era:

The absence of such an infrastructure posed large problems for U.S. education. If teachers wanted to offer academically demanding work, they had to devise an infrastructure of their own: curricula, student assessments, and ways to learn how to do the work. Some did just that, but given the enormity of the task, most
settled for less ambitious and more pedestrian work, based on what they happened to use that year. If any school, local school system, or state school system wanted a substantial instructional program, its educators would have to devise it themselves and try to sustain it through changes in school staff, policies and local circumstances. (5)

No Child Left Behind (NCLB), a bi-partisan product of the Bush administration, conformed to the goals of systemic reform from the late 1980s and 1990s, including emphasis on standards as a means to improve instruction. As Elizabeth Green writes in *Building a Better Teacher: How Teaching Works (and How to Teach It to Everyone)*, No Child Left Behind “took the standards movement and nationalized it, requiring every state to set learning goals and judge schools according to whether they met them. In many ways the accountability law would seem to be the perfect solution to the David Cohen coherency problem” (237). However, as the law unfolded across the country, NCLB did not create the coherence that infrastructure was supposed to bring: In place of Cohen’s common curricula, assessments tied to a common curricula, and teacher education, “NCLB created standards, tests, and accountability measures” (237). Viewed in this light, the creation of and emphasis on standards rather than curriculum as a mechanism for reform could be interpreted as a response to the lack of educational infrastructure in the United States.

On the whole, a lack of infrastructure and, moreover, a lack of coherency regarding guidance for instruction has weakened the goals and efforts of systemic reform (Cohen 102). According to Cohen, systemic reform’s emphasis on standards as a
mechanism to improve the rigor of instruction and create coherence has done the opposite: “While reformers agree that more demanding standards are desirable, they hold different views about what such standards are, how they might be developed and used, and how they might affect education…turning proposals for leaner, more focused, and more coherent guidance for instruction into a gathering babel of reform ideas and practices” (110, 111). Furthermore, standards must be interpreted, and as demonstrated in both Cohen and Green’s research, teachers’ responses to new reforms vary (Cohen 116; Green 102-107). Thus, a range of interpretations can yield a range of curriculums and a range of differing instructional outcomes, breeding more incoherency.

Any effort to create a curriculum *bien fait* must recognize and wrestle with previously existing macrocosmic and institutional sources of incoherency within the United States system of education, as shown through Moffitt, Cohen, and Green’s research. As discussed in endnote one regarding the semantic discrepancy between the terms “curriculum” and “standards,” the teaching profession in the United States lacks a common, professional vocabulary. How can standards, curriculum, and instruction cohere without a common understanding of these terms and their relationships to one another? The discrepancy of governance regarding centralized power in public education also accounts for another source of institutional incoherency. The constitutional debate over federal and state sovereignty has raged since the birth of the United States of America, and without any clear guidance from either entity, coherency is thwarted and confusion persists. And as already mentioned, competing interpretations of standards and
mandated policies at educational reform as well as a lack of educational infrastructure constitute two other sources of institutional incoherency.
CHAPTER III: MICRO COSMIC/DISCIPLINARY SOURCES OF INCOHERENCY

PART I – ENGLISH EDUCATION “THEN”: A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

Encased within an incoherent system of public education, the discipline of English studies and English education suffers from its own sources of incoherency, both historical and ideological.

A revered professor of English education and the single most-cited scholar in both editions of the *Handbook of Research on Teaching the English Language Arts*, the late Arthur N. Applebee wrote the seminal text that would chronicle the history of English education in the United States. Published in 1974, *Tradition and Reform in the Teaching of English* has become a classic in the field of English education studies, and his book offers a picture of an evolving subject for the first one hundred years of the discipline.

**Instructional Traditions**

As Applebee notes in the opening chapter of his book, instructional traditions which have shaped the pedagogical trajectory of English education emerged before English’s status as an official subject deserving inclusion in a school’s common curriculum (1). Three dominant perspectives emerge from Applebee’s research: [1.] the classical tradition, regarding the field of English as an intellectual discipline requiring close textual study and often aligned to the demands of higher education; [2.] the ethical
tradition, emphasizing the religious, moral, and cultural development of students through literature; and [3.] the nonacademic tradition, concerned with students’ “enjoyment” and “appreciation” of literature.

Each of these three perspectives have changed over time. For example, the classical tradition originally grew from the idea of teaching and studying the English language like a respected classical language, such as Latin. A current belief that the pedagogy of English should remain rooted within the epistemology of the discipline as codified by the perspectives and research of scholars and professors of literature can be interpreted as a modern response within the classical tradition. Another similar shift occurs in the ethical tradition: Applebee notes that spanning the late 1600s and early 1700s the “teaching of English [within the ethical tradition] was firmly linked with religious instruction and the teaching of religion” (1); today, teaching literature to proselytize or inculcate religious doctrine is prohibited, but empirical research is emerging around the link between empathy and reading fiction (Alsup 2015). As demonstrated by the evidence to follow, these categories remain virtually the same: each individual tradition changes as new research emerges, old trends become new again, and certain ideas become passé. Moreover, all of these traditions interact and engage with one another within the overall evolution of English education, and the interactions between these three sometimes complementary and sometimes competing ideologies of English education can be used as a hermeneutic for understanding some of the incoherency within the discipline.
English as an Academic Subject & the Work of the Committee of Ten.

In *Tradition & Reform*, Applebee notes in the second chapter entitled, “The Birth of a Subject,” “In 1800 formal instruction in literature was unknown; by 1865 it had made its way into the curriculum as a handmaiden to other studies; by 1900 literature was almost universally offered as an important study in its own right. College entrance exams were the moving force” (30). Much of the early decisions regarding the content and methodology of the infant discipline emerged from the discretion and research of university professors, namely German philologists at the turn of the century as well as professional organizations, including the National Conference on Uniform Entrance Requirements in English. Applebee continues, “Instead of facing secondary school graduation requirements, candidates for admission were assessed on the basis of entrance examinations set by each college. The topics for these examinations were announced in advance and had a way of dictating the preparatory school curriculum for the year. As the requirements changed, the curriculum changed with them” (30).

In 1892, the landmark Committee of Ten assembled administrators, college professors (including a professor of jurisprudence and political economy who would later go on to be president of the United States, Woodrow Wilson), educational officials, and secondary teachers from the across the United States to discuss and examine the study of the following school subjects: Latin; Greek; modern languages; mathematics; physics, astronomy, and chemistry; natural history (biological, including botany, zoology, and physiology); history, civil government, and political economy; geography (including physical geography, geology, and meteorology). The report considered questions such as:
1. In the school course of study extending approximately from the age of six years to eighteen years — a course including the period of both elementary and secondary instruction — at what age should the study which is the subject of the Conference be first introduced?

2. After it is introduced, how many hours a week for how many years should be devoted to it?

3. How many hours a week for how many years should be devoted to it during the last four years of the complete course; that is, during the ordinary high school period?

…

7. Should the subject be treated differently for pupils who are going to college, for those who are going to a scientific school, and for those who, presumably, are going to neither?

8. At what stage should this differentiation begin, if any be recommended?

(National Educational Association 6)

A report from each subject area was made to the chief committee of ten officials and solidified much of the content that distinguished English as a secondary school subject for the next one hundred years. The English sub-committee outlined the following “direct objects of the teaching of English”: “[1] to enable the pupil to understand the expressed thoughts of others and to give expression to thoughts of his own; and [2] to cultivate a taste for reading, to give the pupil some acquaintance with good literature, and to furnish him with the means of extending that acquaintance” (86). For high school, the
Committee outlined the following distribution of time and content in the high school English classroom:

*Figure 1: The Committee of Ten’s recommendation for English classes*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th># of Hours per Week</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Year 1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>The Study of Composition</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Composition</td>
<td>Rhetoric</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Composition</td>
<td></td>
<td>Grammar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Concerning the study of literature, the committee specified, “By the study of literature, the Conference means the study of the works of good authors, not the study of a manual of literary history” and “the committing to memory of names and dates should not be mistaken for culture” (90). The committee also made the following recommendation concerning differentiation of the English curriculum at the secondary level:

> These recommendations concern all scholars in high-schools, for the conference is of opinion that the high-school course in English should be identical for students who intend to go to college or to a scientific school, and for those who do not, and that the requirements in English for admission to college or to a scientific school should be so adjusted as not to contravene this principle. The practice now too prevalent of maintaining one course in English for pupils who intend to go to college, another for candidates for admission to a scientific or technical, and a third for pupils who schooling ends with their graduation from the high-school cannot be defended on any reasonable grounds. (93)
While outside their academic purview, the Committee went as far as to call for a uniform set of requirements for admission to college and scientific schools. At the time, each college set its own admissions criteria. Their recommendations for the examination’s potential content reveals much of the early thinking towards an academic approach to the teaching of English:

1. That the reading of certain masterpieces of English literature…should be required.

2. Each of these should be so far as possible representative of some period, tendency, or type of literature…The whole number of these works selected for any year should represent with as few gaps as possible the course of English literature from the Elizabethan period to the present time.

3. Of these books a considerable number should be of a kind to be read by the student cursorily and by himself. A limited number, however, may be read in the class-room under the immediate direction of the teacher.

4. In connection with the reading of all these required books the teacher should encourage parallel or subsidiary reading and the investigation of pertinent questions in literary history and criticism. The faithfulness with which such auxiliary work is carried on should be constantly tested by means of written and oral reports and classroom discussion, and the same tests should be applied to the required books read cursorily. (93-94)

The impact of the Committee of Ten on English education cannot be underestimated. In Tradition & Reform, Applebee notes that the committee’s work
brought together several minor studies (grammar, rhetoric, literature, etc.) into a single, umbrella subject named English which was the only subject recommended to be included in all four years of high school coursework (33). No longer would English be viewed with stigma as lacking, according to Applebee a “rigorous academic cachet” (13) or as Terry Eagleton puts it in *Literary Theory: An Introduction*, as the “poor man’s Classics” (24); English was a subject commensurate to the classics that warranted instruction at the secondary level. Furthermore, the Committee of Ten’s recommendations for English brought fresh material to the table of high school content and, along with the content specified in college admissions standards, gave rise to a canon of literature to be studied specifically at the high school level. As exemplified in criteria number one listed above specifying the study of English (i.e. British) literature, the Committee of Ten’s recommendation “hastened the evolution of literary content from classical works [i.e. of Greek and Roman literature] to chiefly British literature” (Stotsky 40). English would have a curriculum distinct from the classics, and only many years later would English absorb many of the works once studied in classics courses, such as *The Odyssey* and *Antigone* which are both frequently cited in high school literature anthologies. However, Applebee cautions at the end of chapter two in *Tradition & Reform*, “whether the high school or the college was leading the way in shaping the requirements…there is no simple answer: neither the colleges nor the high school reflected any sort of consensus about the specific works to be read” (35).

In a semi-parallel to the distinction between standards and curriculum that govern the discourse and practice of English education today, the academics of 1894 only
recommended standards to govern the curriculum: the Committee of Ten never specified any particular literary works to be read. Rather, as Sandra Stotsky explains, teachers were “explicitly encouraged by an academic and intellectual elite (the members of the Committee of Ten) to choose works for literary study based chiefly on their literary merit rather than on their capacity to develop character and desirable cultural values” (40) which, according to the early chapters in Applebee’s Tradition & Reform played a decided role in the literary selections found in primers (3). The clear priority for teachers of literature, Stotsky goes on to say, was the “cultivation of literary knowledge and literary taste in all students” (40).

Overall, the work of the Committee of Ten brought coherency to the subject of English and implied a set of standards through which a literature curriculum could be constructed, even if the subject appeared to be dominated by the discretion of college faculty.

**The Emergence of a Progressive Era**

Historians generally attribute Horace Mann as the champion of the Common School (Tozer and Senese 60-75). Between 1812 and 1865, a demand for universal common education to build “social, political, and moral character needed in a democracy” and teach basic skills became “an ideal for the American people” (Pulliam and Van Patten 146). As discussed in the previous section, by the end of the nineteenth century, the work of the Committee of Ten had established guidelines, standards, and a structure for what could be understood as a universal common education in secondary education—with perhaps the implicit aim of college preparation as “preparation for life.”
Over the next era in English education history, the power of colleges and universities in structuring the English curriculum as well as the dominance of the classical perspective on teaching English would eventually erode as progressive educators and philosophers with more ethical and nonacademic perspectives on teaching entered the discussion.

Percival Chubb, principal of the High School Department of the Ethical Culture Schools in New York City, wrote in his 1902 textbook entitled *Teaching English in the Elementary and Secondary School*, “In prescribing literature that is to be read during the High School [sic] period, two requirements must be kept in mind…the characteristics, the needs, and the interests of the adolescent mind…[and] the vocational needs and social demands” being placed on the high school curriculum (qtd. in Applebee 46: 239). The Progressive movement with forerunners such as John Dewey who brought a concern for vocational education into the high school curriculum had arrived to the field of English education: As demonstrated by the evidence to follow, educators and scholars alike began to turn their attention towards the emotional and physical development of adolescents as well as their interests and perspectives in order to shape the curriculum which would lead to new goals for education and changes in educational philosophy. This new concern for students led to change in pedagogy. Applebee writes, “[The] child suited movement was beginning to argue that the teacher should select materials that the child would find both manageable and interesting” stressing “the place of literature in [a student’s] moral development” (56, 57).

By the beginning of World War I, English education had been redefined as a subject “free from the college domination” through the push for a “school for the people”
and continued to be remade and redefined throughout the Great War and into the postwar period as progressive perspectives rooted in a more ethical and nonacademic traditions of teaching took hold of the discipline (79). However, with English’s academic thrust diminished in an emerging scientific era in the early twentieth century, new justification for the inclusion of English as a secondary school subject was needed as reformers “lambasted the [public] schools, saying that they were too academic and ignored the economy’s need for trained workers,” as noted education historian Diane Ravitch remarks in her bestseller, *Reign of Error: The Hoax of the Privatization Movement and the Danger to America’s Public Schools* (37). Regardless of the reformers’ cries, the changing landscape of American society, or the accompanying curricular changes that ensued, English as a secondary school subject continued to be protected under the widespread belief, as reflected in the ethical tradition of teaching and reaching far back into the early roots of English education, in the “importance of literature in character development and ethics” (Applebee 84).

Between World War I and World War II, the content and methodology of English changed as teachers of English searched for “a new and coherent framework around which to structure their teaching” (107). The National Council for the Teachers of English (NCTE) published a report that included the following goals: “The teaching of literature suitable to the age and development of pupils, and the elimination of those classics beyond their emotional and intellectual reach. The introduction into our courses of such contemporary material as will give pupils a better appreciation of present-day ideals” (qtd. in Applebee 84: 32-34). It is unclear what NCTE meant by “contemporary
Knighten 20

material,” but, nevertheless, the statement reflects the marked shift in the teaching of English from the Committee of Ten’s “the reading of certain masterpieces of English literature” to NCTE’s “appreciation of present-day ideals.”

The long-term ethical shift in the pedagogy of English, with a focus on themes such as contentment, honesty, industry, and patriotism, as well as a strong national spirit of citizenship generated from the first World War led to both the replacement of classic texts and the inclusion of American literature in the English curriculum (Applebee 56, 68). The modernist movement and its authors, such as Ezra Pound, Gertrude Stein, and T.S. Eliot, were shaping the American literary landscape in the decades between the two World Wars that “challenged the foundations of literary taste as well as the conventions of society” which in turn pushed against an ethical orientation in literary studies that proclaimed “the morally good was the aesthetically beautiful” (110). Thus, Applebee, “By the middle of the decade the ethical approach to literary experience was raising as many problems as it had solved” (110). Throughout the postwar period, American literature continued to find its place in the English curriculum; in 1933, a survey of 156 English courses from 70 schools across 127 cities in 35 states revealed the appearance of American literature in eleventh grade classes in the majority of the schools surveyed, marking a major change in the content in secondary English education (Smith, 1933; Applebee 126). By 1945, American literature had been institutionalized for study in grade eleven with authors such as Walt Whitman, Carl Sandburg, Robert Frost, and Emily Dickinson appearing in literature anthologies (Olson, 1969; Applebee 130).
Furthermore, changes in English methodology included the following: emphasizing “functional activities” (such as writing formal notes of invitation or introduction and reading legal documents), excerpting and condensing classic texts, adopting ability grouping of students, creating contracts between teachers and students as to the work to be completed in an English class (also known as the Dalton Plan which functioned as a sort of Individual Education Program [IEP] for all students), incorporating projects to broaden the experience of students, and the devising and incorporating of objective testing as a means of assessment in the English classroom (qtd. in Applebee 86: 16; Applebee 91-96). Instead of organizing the study of literature around a list of classic texts based on the college entrance lists, teachers began to use units to structure their courses and approach literary study from the perspective of types, or genres; however, Dora Smith’s 1933 study suggests that the teaching of literature was dominated by the selections contained in textbook literature anthologies (Applebee 93, 112, 128). Thus, it may be inferred that the literature anthologies of the 1930s filled the role that the old college entrance lists had played in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. While new strategies emerged throughout an era of progressivism in education, the survey revealed a mix of both traditional and progressive teaching methodologies employed in English classes, as many teachers lacked an educational background necessary to implement a progressive English program (Smith, 1933; Applebee 125, 127).

New ideas about the teaching of English as well as the questioning of time honored traditions of earlier years stimulated the field and spawned more research.
Researchers such as Sterling A. Leonard and Frank Bobbitt advocated for a progressive education focused on the student and “experience” rather than, according to Leonard, “literary” characteristics (Leonard, 1922; Bobbitt, 1924; Applebee 110). Ideas around literature and experience—discussed throughout the era—came to fruition with the research and publication of Louise Rosenblatt’s groundbreaking text *Literature as Exploration* in 1938, a text, in the words of noted English education scholar Sheridan Blau, that has shaped literary study at the secondary and postsecondary more than any other scholar or movement (4). Rosenblatt’s text put into practice what critics such as Roland Barthes and other post-structuralists had theorized: the “meaning” of a text lies not in its formal characteristics, the biography of the author, or even the words on the page; the reader and his or her “response” generate the meaning of a text.5

Moreover, through all the research and fresh ideas about what an English classroom could look like or what English could “do” as a subject, not much consensus emerged from the professional community, as Applebee’s account of the history demonstrates. In *Tradition & Reform*, he offers two comments paramount to understanding English education in the early twentieth century:

“A school for the people” was a good rallying cry, and as such it served its purpose well; but it was singularly vague in its implications for the teaching of English. Many varied and interesting proposals were made between 1900 and 1917, but as a set they lacked unity and direction…The decades that fell between the two world wars were a time of change and experiment within the teaching of English. The period began with the liberation of the subject from overt control by
the colleges; but that very liberation, as the leaders of the profession came to realize, raised problems of even greater magnitude than the ones it solved. When the teaching of literature had first come into schools, it had had a coherent—if somewhat circumscribed—function, and it had had a methodology…that had given it the aura of a systematic study. Indeed, without this demonstrable function and method it is doubtful it could have won a place as more than an ancillary part of the curriculum. (55, 130)

Applebee goes on to say that though scholars and teachers “carried through the task of generating a new framework for their teaching with considerable enthusiasm, the lack of a single unifying principle led to many false starts and long period of misdirected energies” (74). Thus, it may be concluded that the progressive movement, while noble in its intentions, was unable to bring harmony between classical, ethical, and nonacademic traditions of teaching English, removing much of the academic verve that distinguished the English curriculum which had given the subject coherency under the Committee of Ten. In turn, the movement paved the way for disciplinary incoherency.

The Decline of Progressivism

By the 1940s and into the 1950s, “the educational policies of progressive education were widely accepted by American educators” (140). Both Ravitch and Applebee, in their respective texts Reign of Error and Tradition & Reform, underline the social history that would inform much of the thinking behind education, and more specifically, English education, as America moved from World War I into World War II and then into a post-war culture. Ravitch writes:
In the 1930s, with millions of people out of work, reformers blamed the schools for their inability to keep students enrolled and out of the ranks of the unemployed. Reformers called on the schools to be more attentive to the needs of adolescents so as to entice them to stay in school longer. In the 1940s, reformers complained that the schools were obsolete and were failing to give students the skills they need for life and work (37).

Applebee adds, “Because the Depression left them [students] with little else to do, students who would previously have dropped out early were remaining through the high school and even into the college years” (139), and the United States’s entry into World War II necessitated a functionally literate military (140). As mentioned before, schools change as society changes; in other words, schools are a reflection of society (Tozer and Senese 4). The effects of the Great Depression plus an impending world war yielded a new brand of student and the need for a renewed vision of public education in America. The Progressive Education Association, whose work would play a significant role in educational research and theory in the forthcoming decades, posited the idea of “general education”: “education of post-elementary grade intended to foster good living. It rules out conventional planes of professional preparation and scholarship for its own sake when these prove extraneous to the single purpose of helping the student achieve a socially adequate and personally satisfying life in a democracy” (qtd. in Applebee 139: 3). How to take this theoretical notion, “general education,” and put it into practice would capture much of the history of English education into 1940s and 1950s as demonstrated by the evidence that follows.
As established in the previous section, progressive education in the early twentieth concerned itself with the needs of adolescents, drawing from the ethical and nonacademic perspectives of English education. However, with a new educational goal in mind, the social needs of students shifted into a concern with problems faced by adolescents, chiefly “the problem of adjusting to the demands of the adult world” (Applebee 139). In the words of Ravitch, “‘life adjustment education’ became the reformers’ battle cry” (37).

A shift in pedagogical thinking necessitated a new curriculum. The “life adjustment movement” prompted the Progressive Education Association (PEA) to pilot a new curriculum which would center on “mental hygiene” and “personality development” of the adolescent (Applebee 141). Thirty secondary schools participated in the study, which began in 1932. The work of the PEA would span eight years (and unfortunately be interrupted with the outbreak of World War II) and spawn five volumes of research. One of the reports conducted during the study is listed in the appendix of volume II, also entitled *Exploring the Curriculum*. “Typical Points of Focus of Concerns of Adolescents” lists forty subjects or themes, categorized into six headings, that were determined to be important to teenagers of the time period including the following: “Establishing Personal Relationships,” “Establishing Independence,” “Understanding Human Behavior,” “Establishing Self in Society,” “Normality,” and “Understanding the Universe” (315-320). Furthermore, the reports of the thirty surveyed schools signal the shift from what Applebee terms a “focus on important themes to a focus on themes important to adolescents”; situating the life adjustment within the context of English
education, Applebee adds, “By accepting adolescent needs as the focus of the curriculum, teachers were continuing their tradition of concern that the school serve the child, not the subject-oriented demands of the college” (142, 146).

As demonstrated by the evidence that follows, the life adjustment movement informed by the progressive idea of education as a means of social reform had severe implications for the secondary English curriculum. An overt and primary concern related to the immediate needs and problems of adolescents with topics such as “normality” yielded a “program” more akin to a “course in psychology or guidance than one in English” with “no guidelines for sequence or scope,” and “precious little attention to literature” governed the curriculum; without a scope and sequence, the only criteria governing content was that “students be kept interested” (147, 150). The literature that was included in English courses under this new reform was organized by themes as opposed to chronology and genres which had been used to structure the literature curriculum in decades past, including ideas of pairing novels thematically with teenage concerns and allowing members of a class to read different books without imposing a class-wide novel study (151). Attention by scholars and teachers of English turned towards the need for adolescents to identify with the literature they read (including the desires and goals of characters and their situations), the idea of literature as “a means by which the student could explore both himself and his society,” and finally, a body of literature for adolescents which could accomplish these goals (152, 155). Furthermore, the life adjustment movement paralleled another equally important curriculum trend: Prompted by World War II, a concern with functional aspects of language and
communication resulted in a curriculum concerned with vocabulary, spelling, and reading
skills. The American Association of Colleges remarked, “educators are not prepared to
assert to military authorities that the ‘intangible values’ of a liberal arts education would
make soldiers better fighters” (qtd. in Applebee 140: 285-287).

Early on, the progressive movement in education had established a concern for
meeting the needs of the students in public school, but by the end of World War II, life
adjustment education and the overt, excessive concern for the problems of adolescents
“ran the danger of ignoring the particular strengths of the subject area which it was
attempting to revitalize” (Applebee 150). To be fair, progressives had broadened high
school literature selections to include texts outside the nineteenth century and
acknowledged the role that interest can potentially play in structuring a literary program
of study. However, progressives had fundamentally and intentionally ignored the
strengths of the classic tradition in English education such as the importance of literary
scholarship and clear principles to structure a program of study; to quote Applebee
directly, the progressives’ “fear of college domination” left them out of touch with the
scholarship of their field, English (175, 176)! Instead, a program in literature was
dominated by “activities often having little to do with ‘literary values” (Applebee 175).

Louise Rosenblatt added portions of a 1966 essay she published in English
Journal to her seminal text Literature as Exploration (originally published in 1938),
offering an additional perspective on the progressive movement in English education:

The increasing number of students and the extension of school-leaving age
reflected the fact that our society had undertaken the noble—and unparalleled—
responsibility for educating all our children. The early response to mass
education fostered the “life adjustment” movement. Unfortunately, this anti-
intellectualistic effort to prepare pupils to serve, to “adjust” to the needs of the
status quo, was confused with the progressives’ concern for meeting the needs of
students. The progressives sought rather to help them to develop their capacities
to the full, a view of education assuming a democratically mobile society.

(288-289)

Nevertheless, as the historical literature demonstrates, an anti-intellectualistic disposition
stripped English as a subject of its distinguishing demarcations (literature and literary
study, composition, etc.) resulting in an incomplete curriculum with little to no
coherency, a curriculum with a narrow goal of “adjustment,” implying that the humanistic
ideal of a liberal education was irrelevant to anyone not seeking a post-secondary
education.

A Return to the Classical Tradition

The curricular incoherency wrought by progressives repositioned English for a
revival of the classical tradition during the 1950s and 1960s, an era in which, in the words
of Applebee, in which the “subject area rather than educational principles” would shift
the landscape of English education (192). Ravitch writes, “Reformers said that the
schools had forgotten the basics and needed to raise academic standards and return to
time-honored subject matter disciplines” (37). Ravitch’s accurate appraisal of the 1950s
supports the historical record within American education: The launch of the Soviet
Union satellite Sputnik “became a symbol of the failure of the schools” and in the words
of admiral Hyman G. Rickover, nicknamed the “Father of the Nuclear Navy,” “only massive upgrading of the scholastic standards of our schools” would “guarantee the future prosperity and freedom of the Republic” (as qtd. in Applebee 189: 15).

The roots of the academic revival had been planted in the late 1920s and 1930s with new developments in the field of literary criticism, chiefly the movement known as New Criticism. The term “New Criticism” naturally implies that there was an old criticism before the new took its place. So, what was the old criticism? To quote Rosenblatt from her influential text on reader-response criticism, “literary history, philology, or a watered-down, moralistic didacticism mainly constituted the study of literature” where “the poem,” or any kind of text for that matter, was viewed either as “a biographical document or as a document in intellectual or social history” (285, 267). The New Critics, including English educator I. A. Richards, developed a new way of reading a text, rooted in a formalism that moved away from impressionistic, maudlin, sentimental opinions of a reader or critic and centered on the language and content of the text itself without regard for extrinsic contexts (Barry 15). In his article, “The Aesthetic Confusion: The Legacy of New Criticism,” Jeremy Francis summarizes the central tenet of New Criticism: “When it comes to reading, a critic needs only the text itself, not anything outside the text.” He continues:

New Criticism, in the grand scheme of aesthetic theories, is situated as an objective or formalist theory. These theories view meaning as arising from the art-object itself and its formal components rather than as meaning being situated in the perceiver of it. In this, the study of literature for New Critics is prominently
the study of the text itself, not the culture or author that produced the text or the experience one has while reading the text. (29)

As such, a “mark of much twentieth-century criticism became its avoidance largely of the social or biographical approach to literature” (Rosenblatt 267).

Like Rosenblatt’s reader response theory, New Criticism would impact the world of English education and the way in which literature would be taught to students for generations to come (Foster 15; Francis 28-32; Jones 54). Based on the work of these critics, “teachers of literature immediately grasped the implication that reading is hard work” and equally complex, changing the orientation of teachers and students towards the reading process (Applebee 159). Applebee points outs that the goals of New Criticism and a renewed interest in reading skills initially did not “conflict with the concurrent stress on adolescent needs, but by the end of the forties it was gradually becoming clear that there was a fundamental antagonism between the basic principles of the two movements” (164). In the end and as demonstrated by the following evidence, New Criticism would become a central tenet within the academic revival and classical tradition of English.

Long-term developments in literary theory ran concurrent to new conversations about the English curriculum, which had been rendered incoherent by, in the words of Applebee, the “excesses of the ‘life adjustment movement’” (185). “Liberal education”—not “general education”—became the rallying cry: “Where the progressives had come to stress immediate needs and the characteristics of the student, the new programs placed their emphasis on long-term goals and the nature of the subject. At the
same time, liberal arts faculties became involved in curriculum reform in a way
unparalleled since the late nineteenth century” (185, 191-192). One of the critics of
progressive education, philosopher and educator Mortimer Adler remarked in his
bestseller *How to Read a Book: The Art of Getting a Liberal Education*, “In their false
liberalism, the progressive educators confused discipline with regimentation, and forgot
that true freedom is impossible without minds made free by discipline” (as qtd in
Applebee 184: 82). Adler’s recipe for freeing the mind and erasing “the almost total
neglect of intelligent reading throughout the school system” was simply to read the Great
Books defined by the Oxford English Dictionary as “the body of literary works
traditionally regarded as the most important or significant in (esp. Western) literature” (as
qtd. in Applebee 186: vi-ix).

The idea of a curriculum centered on a set of time-honored texts reflected a return
to the classical tradition within the field of English education. However, it is important to
note that this return to “classic” texts is distinct from the work of other strands within the
classical tradition, namely the Committee of Ten. While colleges and universities had
influence in the content of the secondary school literature curriculum through reading
lists constructed from higher education entrance examinations, the Committee of Ten’s
1892 report never specified any list of works to be taught to students. In fact, the term
“great books” did not appear in the vernacular until 1920 and is specifically associated
with the courses established at Columbia University and the University of Chicago with
which Adler was involved. Furthermore, the Great Books list complied by Adler
included titles outside the realm of “literature,” including writings on philosophy, science,
and psychology. Ultimately, the Great Books model recaptured the classic notion of English educators as the teachers of “the cultural heritage of Western civilization,” a paramount responsibility according to the committee on the Right to Read for the National Council for the Teachers of English (as qtd. in Applebee 206: 10).

However, not all classically-oriented curriculum reformers sought to prescribe a list of books to be read. In a joint conference between the NCTE, the Modern Language Association (MLA), the American Studies Association, and the College English Association, the idea of a sequential and cumulative English curriculum was considered, a portrait of an English program as a “continuous furnishing of the mind” (as qtd. in Applebee 194: 42). Applebee offers a description in Tradition & Reform:

The skeleton course they provided was distinctly traditional, beginning with the simple literary forms of folklore, legend, and fairy tales in the early elementary years, progressing through myth and legend in the upper elementary grades, and the backgrounds of the Western culture heritage (through, for example, selections from Homer and from the Bible) in junior high school. The high school would be the place for an emphasis on intellectual development and ‘mastery of certain blocks of knowledge’ important to the literary heritage. (194)

Nevertheless, Applebee remarks that the work of this conference established that the most important assertion was that English must be regarded as a ‘fundamental discipline,’ a body of specific knowledge to be preserved and transmitted rather than a set of skills or an opportunity for guidance and individual adjustment…
College professors of English rather than of education or psychology became the body of expert opinion of most importance in curriculum development… (193)

Two other reformers contributed to the surrounding discussion of the English curriculum during this period of academic revival. Harvard president and education reformer James B. Conant asserted the importance of the secondary education in his 1959 text *The American High School Today* which viewed the institution as “the proper embodiment of the American commitments to excellence and to democracy” (Applebee 189). In his report, he affirmed the importance of basic high school subjects, including English, which helped sustain the humanistic subject through an emerging technological, scientific era of the 1960s. In addition, Conant highlighted the growing concern for the academically talented and gifted students which began to be addressed in the mid-1950s through the work of six elite private secondary schools and universities. These institutions called for “a set of achievement tests for the primary subjects taught in high school that would enable colleges and universities who supported such examinations to grant entering students ‘advanced placement,’” leading to the birth of the Advanced Placement Program, and subsequently, AP English (Jones 51). The exams themselves stressed the “textual analysis and literary criticism on the model of the New Critics” and “very little attention was given to the philosophical or ethical dimensions of literature” (Applebee 190). The AP English examinations and the courses that were later to be developed would affect the secondary English curriculum at all ability levels.

While some may argue that the academic revival of English was attributed to English professors as opposed to educationists, Jerome Bruner, another reformer of the era and an
educational psychologist, devised the idea of the “spiral curriculum.” Bruner envisioned “a structure for teaching that introduces the fundamental structure of all subjects—the ‘big ideas’—early in the school years, then revisits the subjects in more and more complex forms over time”; this way, in Bruner’s words, “any subject can be taught effectively in some intellectually honest form to any child at any stage of development” (Woolfolk 378; qtd. in Applebee 195: 13). Applebee remarks, “Many of the later attempts to build an academic curriculum in English would try to implement Bruner’s ideas” (195) as well as social studies education, which would also have implications for the English curriculum under the present-day Common Core State Standards (Stotsky 127-128).

The English curriculum, with a renewed emphasis on content, continued to be revised which brought structural coherency back to the classroom. Moreover, reforms in curriculum reflected a strong professionalism which emerged through the collegial discourse between university faculty and secondary educators. However, much of the pedagogy in English classes did not change. In a report from the National Study of High School English completed during the 1960s, the study found that most English classes were “overwhelmingly teacher-dominated” and “recitation and lecture dominated,” essentially “a glorification of the college classroom” where students of “lower tracks were being shortchanged” (Applebee 211-212). Essentially, the classicists had ignored the pedagogical perspectives of scholars rooted in the ethical and nonacademic traditions of the teaching of English. At the end of the 1960s, scholars and teachers had failed, once again, to maintain a peaceful balance between the three traditions in teaching, research,
and scholarship; as the evidence demonstrates, English education remained an incomplete portrait, lacking all the necessary colors for a gorgeous tableau, far from a curriculum bien fait.

Progressivism Renewed & the Dartmouth Conference.

Arthur Applebee’s text Tradition & Reform in the Teaching of English chronicles the history of the school subject up to the 1960s. Until his death in 2015, Applebee had plans of revising and expanding his Tradition & Reform. In fact, Judith Langer, his wife and research partner, called upon the scholarly community of English educators at the 2016 annual convention of the National Council of the Teachers of English to take up the work of writing a history of the field where Applebee’s text ended in 1974. Other than Tradition & Reform, no other comprehensive history of English education exists.

The fifties and sixties marked a revival of the classical tradition in English education, but it was not long before the “schools were too academic and that students were stifled by routine and dreary assignments,” and “reformers wanted more spontaneity, more freedom, and fewer requirements for students” (Ravitch 38). In 1966, forty-seven English educators from Canada, England, and the United States met in New Hampshire on the campus of Dartmouth College to discuss the future of English education. Top scholars in the field considered the following questions and topics: “What Is English?,” “What Is Continuity in English Teaching?,” “English: One Road or Many?,” “Knowledge and Proficiency in English,” and “Standards and Attitudes.” The Anglo-American Seminar on the Teaching of English, later known as the Dartmouth Conference, centered on two distinct epistemological positions on English as a subject.
The Americans viewed English as a body of knowledge to be mastered; indeed, when compared with the National Survey of High School English and the curriculum reforms of the era, such as Mortimer Adler’s “Great Books,” this position reflected the dominant ideas—and teaching traditions—of the era. The British, however, had a completely different perspective; they viewed English as something a person “does.” Examining the conference in retrospect, scholars agree that the British, with their progressive view of the subject, won the debate (Applebee 1974; Dixon, 1969; Hamilton-Wieler, 1988; Miller, 1970; Sublette, 1973; as cited in Zancanella, Franzak, Sheahan, 2016).

The pendulum had shifted once again. Joseph Harris’s article “After Dartmouth: Growth and Conflict in English” captures the impact of the conference. “For many teachers then and since,” Harris writes:

Dartmouth…symbolized a kind of Copernican shift from a view of English as something one learns about [his emphasis] to a sense of it as something one does. After Dartmouth, that is, one could imagine English not simply as a patchwork of literary texts, figures, and periods…but as the study of how language in all its forms is put to use…An old model of teaching centered on the transmission of skills (composition) and knowledge (literature) gave way to a “growth model” focusing on the experience of students and how these are shaped by their uses of language. (631)

Noted scholar of English education, Peter Smagorninski remarks in his 2002 article “Growth through English Revisited”:
Dartmouth and *Growth through English* have been credited with major changes in the teaching of English: the launching of the National Writing Project in 1974, renewed attention to Rosenblatt’s transactional theory of literature, a shift in attention from learning product to learning process, and other changes based on the British ‘growth model’ for viewing the discipline of English. What was common to all of these changes was a shift in attention from the subject matter of English to the learners of English classes. (23-24)

At the 2016 NCTE annual convention—half a century later—scholars reflected and paid tribute to the Dartmouth Conference, in a paper presentation “Dartmouth Revisited: Three English Educators from Different Generations Reflect on the Dartmouth Conference.” “Central to the British perspective,” the authors write, “was an emphasis on personal growth” of the student (14). Don Zancanella, writing from his point of view teaching high school in the 1970s and 1980s, describes on the impact of Dartmouth on his career:

Suddenly here were educators from England presenting not the stuffy, Oxbridge version of the subject American teachers might well have expected them to promote, but something open, student-centered, even liberating, as an alternative to the back-to-basics ideas about English that had been emerging in the United States in the post-Sputnik years. (17)

The British scholars’ ideas reflected a shift back to the ethical and nonacademic teaching traditions. However, a “growth model” of the subject posited by John Dixon, one of the chief academics at the conference whose book *Growth through English* captured the
British perspective, did not generate a national reform in English (ix). While the ideas of Dartmouth live(d) on, the conference was unable to blend its staunchly progressive stance with the existing classical approach. As such, the work of Dartmouth did little to bring about a comprehensive, coherent literature curriculum. The next major shift in English education, however, would come from neither university presidents nor English teachers nor college professors of literature nor educational psychologists, as had the reform movements of the decades past, but instead from the White House itself.
CHAPTER IV:
MICRO COSMIC/DISCIPLINARY SOURCES OF INCOHERENCY

PART II – ENGLISH EDUCATION “NOW”: A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

1983: a year that would irrevocably shape education in the United States for decades to come, for “we were a nation at risk” (Ravitch 36). Why? “Low standards and low expectations in our schools,” writes Ravitch, or to use the words of those who wrote the alarming report entitled A Nation at Risk, “a rising tide of mediocrity that threatens our very future as a Nation and a people,” rhetoric similar to Rickover’s call to raise scholastic standards in the post-Sputnik years (Gardner). The result? As explained earlier, “standards, testing, and accountability” (Ravitch 36)—the three political substitutes to David Cohen’s educational infrastructure (common curricula, assessments tied to curricula, and teacher education) that would dominate the thinking and policy agendas of Bill Clinton’s Goals 2000, George W. Bush’s No Child Left Behind Act, and Barack Obama’s Race to the Top as well as affect each of Applebee’s three major teaching traditions in English education and the idea of a coherent literature curriculum as the forthcoming discussion demonstrates.

Three Teaching Traditions & Three Curriculum Models

Before moving further into a discussion of the three teaching traditions of English education in the twenty-first century as well as a later discussion as to if and how a
coherent literature curriculum can be built from standards, it is necessary to introduce a framework for understanding shifts and changes in English curricula. Shortly before the publication of *A Nation at Risk*, NCTE commissioned a report regarding the status of English curriculum of the day, pre-kindergarten through college. The report sought to answers to the following questions: “What is it [the English curriculum]? What is being taught and how? To whom? What ought to be taught? How? To whom” (Mandel 1).

By the end of the study, three curriculum models emerged:

*Figure 2: Three Curriculum Models from the 1980 NCTE Report*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Competencies Model</th>
<th>The Process Model</th>
<th>The Heritage Model</th>
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<td>“based on behavioral studies, holds that a child matures in predictable and recognizable stages… introduces pupils to new knowledge and skills at the appropriate developmental moment and in amounts that are easily learned, or ‘mastered’…points to the segmenting of teachable skills and processes into levels and amounts deemed appropriate to the individual child…learning is incremental [and] children learn what they can learn only when they are ready” (6)</td>
<td>“advocates the creation of an environment in which students can ‘discover’ what has heretofore been unknown to them…stresses student’s own power to uncover intuitively what is true or what will work in each given situation and maintains that this discovery is usually accompanied by a shock of recognition since one has known the truth all along…the process approach is more descriptive than prescriptive” (7, 8)</td>
<td>“the way to acquire skills and knowledge is to submit to something larger than oneself, that is, to the culture…[i.e.] traditions, history, the time-honored values of civilized thought and feeling (including the time-honored resistance to these values) and the skills that make it possible to share in one’s culture and pass it on…meaning of life comes from knowing who one is in relation to the societal, religious, moral, ethical, and esthetic forces that characterize civilization at its best” (8, 9)</td>
</tr>
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All three of these models contain influences from the Applebee’s three traditions: the Heritage model is decidedly classical whereas the process model blends ethical and
nonacademic perspectives. Ironically, all three of these models bear striking resemblance to the three models of English that emerged from the 1966 Dartmouth Conference which Dixon discusses in *Growth through English* (1975), and like the three main teaching traditions of English, these three curriculum models will surface and resurface either explicitly or implicitly throughout discussion of standards and curriculum in the twenty-first century.

**The Academic Tradition**

The ACT is one of the two primary examinations used in undergraduate admissions and scholarship decisions. In 2006, the nonprofit organization that develops the test (also called the ACT) released a report on the reading skills of high school students, analyzing data from the reading portion of the test which requires students to respond to four different passage types (prose fiction, natural science, social science, and humanities) and answer ten questions from each passage in thirty minutes. The ACT College Readiness Benchmark for reading “represents the level of achievement required for students to have a high probability of success (a 75 percent chance of earning a course grade of C or better, a 50 percent chance of earning a B or better) in such credit-bearing college courses as Psychology and U.S. History—first-year courses generally considered to be reading dependent” (1). The 2005 test results of the students were dismal: Only 51% of ACT-tested high school graduates met the benchmark. Across the four reading passages, students encounter two types of comprehension questions (literal and inferential) and three types of texts that are classified according to established criteria (including structure, vocabulary, style, etc.) as “uncomplicated,” “more challenging,” and
“complex.” Upon analyzing the data, the researchers concluded that the single difference between students who achieved the benchmark and those who did not was their ability to read and understand the texts classified as “complex”: “performance on complex texts is the clearest differentiator in reading between students who are likely to be ready for college and those who are not [emphasis theirs]” (ACT 16-17). Moreover, the “degree of text complexity differentiates student performance better than either the comprehension level or the kind of textual element tested” (16).

The test results, however, are not shocking. At the time of the study, only twenty-eight states had “fully define[d] grade-level standards in reading”—but “only through the eighth grade” (8). As the evidence reflects, the classical tradition of English with an emphasis on complex, canonical texts and college preparation had clearly diminished from the beginning of the twentieth century. Nevertheless, in its first recommendation at the end of the report, ACT called upon the incorporation of “reading expectations into state standards across the curriculum so that they can specify the inclusion, by grade level, of increasingly complex reading materials in English, mathematics, science, and social studies” (26)—a recommendation, when compared to the definitions in figure two, implicitly favoring a competencies curriculum model for English classes.

In 2010, the Association of Literary Scholars, Critics, and Writers (ALSCW) published a report on the content of high school literature curricula. The study surveyed English teachers of standard and honors courses (excluding Advanced Placement, International Baccalaureate, elective, basic, or remedial courses) for grades nine, ten, and eleven from across the United States. The study examined the number of book-length
works of fiction, poetry, drama, and nonfiction taught, the approaches teachers use to teach literature, and the time they allot to literary study. The survey revealed that of the top twenty major works assigned in English classes, only four were on a high school readability level, and the mean readability level of the number of assigned titles by grade for all classes was between fifth and sixth grade (Stotsky, Traffas, Woodworth 13, 18). With regards to time dedicated to literary study, the study found that over half of the surveyed teachers across all three grades spend less than 20% of class time teaching a major literary work, and by grade 11, over 40% of teachers reported they spend less than 10% of class time on a major literary work (28). Researchers drew the following conclusions: 1.) “Because of the small percentages for almost all of the titles listed overall and by grade level, one may reasonably infer that most American students experience an idiosyncratic set of readings before they graduate from high school,” 2.) Mean readability levels of titles across grades “suggest that students in standard or honors classes are as classes [their emphasis] not reading a more challenging group of major titles from grade to grade,” 3.) “There is no evidence to suggest that these changes [in literary study in American classrooms] have led to improved reading and writing by the average high school graduate” (13-14, 18, 16). Moreover, the researchers, went as far as to suggest that “the remediation rate for traditional college freshman…suggests that the changes in content of the English curriculum have perhaps lowered academic achievement, given the results of ACT surveys in recent years on the percentage of American students who are capable of doing college-level work” (16).
The study by the ALSCW was conducted alongside a parallel study by the University of Arkansas surveying Arkansas English teachers of grades nine, ten, and eleven. The findings of the Arkansas study were identical to the national ALSCW study: Only four of the top twenty titles most frequently assigned in high school English classes were on a high school readability level,\textsuperscript{12} the mean readability levels across the grades was between fifth and sixth grade, and over 75% of teachers reported spending 30% or less class time teaching a literary work (Stotsky, Goering, and Jolliffe 18, 21, 30). The researchers found “much has changed in the content of the high school literature curriculum in standard or honors courses” and the “most frequently assigned titles (usually described as the “classics”) are assigned in only a small percentage of courses and, overall, the texts they assign do not increase in difficulty over the grades,” thus acknowledging the “absence of a coherent, progressively challenging literature curriculum” (iii). The thrust of both studies implicitly reflects the researchers orientation towards the classical tradition of English education and the Heritage model curriculum, and their research captures the demise of both, particularly in the following quote in the national survey which was also included in the Arkansas study: “The low frequencies suggest how little is left of a coherent and progressive literature curriculum with respect to two of its major functions—to acquaint students with the literary and civic heritage of English-speaking people, and to develop an understanding and use of the language needed for college coursework” (14)

Noted standards author and reviewer Sandra Stotsky, who was the chief researcher on the ALSCW and Arkansas studies, followed the results with a book entitled
The Death and Resurrection of a Coherent Literature Curriculum: What Secondary English Teachers Can Do in 2012. In her text, Stotsky analyzes some of the causes of the weakening of the secondary literature curriculum, including her own historical appraisal. She makes the point that incoherency of the current literature curriculum is linked to a devaluing and exclusion of literary knowledge—both of which are hallmarks of the classical tradition in English education and the Heritage curriculum model. Nevertheless, Stotsky acknowledges that a coherent literature curriculum that challenges students does not necessarily mean an identical curriculum for all students; moreover, at no point in the history of English education have students received an identical curriculum, and, as her book suggests, curriculum coherency is not coterminous with an identical, prescriptive curriculum (189).

First, Stotsky points out flaws and incoherency wrought in the narrowing goals of the movement to bring more multicultural texts written by minority authors to the English classroom. Stotsky cites literary anthologies of the 1960s and 1970s with texts that incorporated the diversity of African, Irish, Italian, and Jewish Americans. By the 1990s, “Multiculturalism came to conceptualize diversity in very narrow terms…The extraordinary range of ethnic and religious diversity among people of European descent was barely acknowledged if at all” (57), and this “literary ethnic cleansing had profound consequences for the content of high school literature programs” (56). She asserts that in determining literary selections for the high school curriculum the “color, gender, and vital signs of the authors were, apparently, the critical features to watch for” and not literary quality (65). However, “what was not pointed out,” she writes, “was that older works,
British or American, were typically much more difficult works to read than their replacements in the literature curriculum” (65). Nevertheless, she concludes:

Curricula designed to achieve social, not academic, goals inevitably violated the cognitive principles underlying coherence. Social goals weaken and ultimately shatter the coherence of any academic curriculum and eliminate its intellectual benefits. Not surprisingly, there is nothing to suggest that literature curricula redesigned for social purposes produced discernible intellectual benefits for any group of students, regardless of race, ethnicity, or parental income. Reading scores have been mostly flat at the secondary level on NAEP tests since their inception.¹³ (185)

Second, Stotsky criticizes the standards written by National Council of the Teachers of English, citing them as a cause of incoherency in the high school literature curriculum. The NCTE standards, developed in 1996, mentioned “literary study in only two of the twelve standards” implying that “it was, or should be, a small part of the total English curriculum” and “the study of a literary work was to serve as a springboard for class discussions on a vast range of social studies topics, not to develop literary taste or literary knowledge” (71, 72). Stotsky remarks:

By the mid-1990s literature had been stripped of its status as “privileged discourse” in college and university English departments, and the object of study was now “textuality,” which could be studied in anything labeled a text, ranging from comic books and campaign posters to popular song lyrics¹⁴…NCTE’s failure to highlight the role of literature in the English curriculum in its 1996 standards
can be seen as a reflection of a cultural and political shift that had already taken place in leading college and university English departments.\textsuperscript{15} (87)

As Applebee’s and Rosenblatt’s texts documented, literary history and study had once been a part of the English curriculum, but knowledge of authors, movements, and periods seems to have vanished. Coined by E. D. Hirsch in the late 1980s, the idea of “cultural literacy”—the ideas, concepts, and people that a citizen should know in order to be able to participate in society—has surfaced and resurfaced over the decades. While Hirsch’s ideas have been ridiculed as “a narrow set of privileged, specifically western, masculine, White values masquerading as universal truths” (Schweizer 51), new discussion is emerging within the classical tradition of English about its importance.

Bernard Schweizer, professor of English at Long Island University, noticed in a discussion with one of his freshman classes, a class that was discussing a nonfiction text that incorporated several cultural allusions, that “one student out of 15 could identify Mahatma Gandhi; none had ever heard of Ernest Hemingway; none had a clue who Thoreau was; two could identify Job as a biblical character; one had a vague recollection of George Orwell; and as for ‘in the offing’ or ‘excretions of our economy,’ only one or two could do anything at all with these expressions,” and all of these allusions were necessary to understanding the text (52). Schweizer remarked in his article, “Cultural Literacy: Is it Time to Revisit the Debate?”

If undergraduate students have never heard of Ghandi, Orwell, or Thoreau (or have no reason to remember them), they obviously have such a huge gap in general knowledge that four years of college education are not likely to make up
for what has been missing since middle school…we no longer live in a culture that encourages and reinforces a shared knowledge basis with regard to history, geography, literature, and the sciences. (53)

Schweizer’s arguments parallel the sentiments expressed in a 2015 article from The Atlantic by writer Eric Liu:

Cultural illiteracy, he [Hirsch] argued, is most common among the poor and power-illiterate, and compounds both their poverty and powerlessness…he was right. A generation of hindsight now enables Americans to see that it is indeed necessary for a nation as far-flung and entropic as the United States, one where rising economic inequality begets worsening civic inequality, to cultivate continuously a shared cultural core. A vocabulary. A set of shared referents and symbols. Yet that generational distance now also requires Americans to see that any such core has to be radically reimagined if it’s to be worthy of America’s actual and accelerating diversity.

Liu ends his article with a call to revisit the notion of cultural literacy saying, “The culture wars can give way to a conversation about the culture we are.” Both Schweizer's and Lui’s calls to reclaim, reappraise, and value cultural literacy and shared cultural knowledge, including literary knowledge, reflects the weak position of the classical tradition within present-day English education. However, when compounded with an incoherent literature curriculum as indicated by the ALSCW and University of Arkansas surveys, the results are, once again, not surprising.
The Ethical & Nonacademic Traditions

In 2004, the National Endowment for the Arts released a comprehensive report of literary reading in America based on twenty years of polling from the U.S. Bureau of the Census. Among more than 17,000 adults, a group covering most major demographic groups, researchers found that “for the first time in modern history, less than half of the adult population now reads literature” (vii). The report, entitled Reading at Risk: A Survey of Literary Reading in America, went on to detail other declines in many sorts of reading. To expand upon the 2004 report, the NEA released a report in 2007 entitled To Read or Not to Read: A Question of National Consequence. This report analyzed multiple surveys and studies conducted by U.S. federal agencies as well as those from academic institutions, foundations, and businesses. All of these surveys and studies told the same story: “Americans are reading less; comprehension is eroding, and the consequences of these developments are ominous, inasmuch as reading is correlated with academic achievement, economic success, civic participation, and enjoyment of cultural activities” (195).

Responses to the 2007 NEA study are mixed: Some affirm the results and conclusion of the study, while others discount them due to its supposed narrow definition of reading and over emphasis on literature. Mark Bauerlein, professor of English at Emory University and former director of the NEA from 2003-2005, remarked, “Despite the divergent aims of outlooks of the reporting institutions, the finding is consistent. People—especially young people—read less, and they read less well, than they used to” (198). Nevertheless, the NEA’s research is different from the national literary study
surveys mentioned above which call attention to the titles assigned in secondary English classes; NEA’s study examines reading for pleasure and fun, outside of the academic realm of literary study, which rest at the core of the ethical and nonacademic traditions of English education and process model curriculums.

Although the study focused on reading habits of Americans, it also examined the activities and lives of those who read for pleasure and those who do not. For instance, “literary readers were three times more likely than non-readers to volunteer” and “reading correlates…with more involvement in social activities such as attendance at sporting events” (199). By contrast, “lower reading rates damage civic life…If people don’t read newspapers or books about U.S. history, or statements of civic principle, they have weaker grounds for judging their representatives” (199).

Several researchers offered more perspectives on the study’s findings regarding the connection between participation in civic life and reading literature. Lynne Munson and Lauren Prehoda, affiliates of the Common Core organization which is devoted to liberal learning in American education, were intrigued by the notion that readers “simply do more.” They wrote:

Why is this? What is it about reading great literature that lends itself to such an active lifestyle? We believe that reading good books opens people up. It broadens an individual’s experience. It creates connections to others whom the reader has never encountered or previously even considered. It stretches and enlivens the imagination, and reveals new ideas to get excited about and share. It,
quite simply, expands your base of knowledge. In short, it makes the reader
realize that there is a great big world out there. (202)

Reading for fun and allowing the act of reading to stir one to civic participation
and creating “connections,” as Munson and Prehoda write, are all goals within an ethical
and nonacademic orientation towards teaching. Yet the NEA studies seem to suggest that
these goals are not being reflected in present-day society and culture, which raises a
similar question regarding English education: Are these specific goals a part of the
present-day secondary literature curriculum?

Before this question can be answered, more discussion is needed regarding the
current state of the ethical and nonacademic traditions. As discussed earlier, the
Dartmouth Conference embodied a shift in the thinking of English as a school subject
from a defined body of knowledge to a process of personal growth, or to re-quote Peter
Smagorinsky, a shift from “the subject matter of English to the learners in English
classes” (24). However, in his article, “Growth through English Revisited,” Smagorinsky
makes another observation; in spite of Dartmouth’s progressive thinking and
redeclaration of ethical and nonacademic goals of English education,

fact-and-skill-based curricula are what we continue to see [in English
classrooms], including those mandated by state departments of education. And
they are frequently tied to curriculum-driving high-stakes tests that have
consequences for students (promotion), teachers (merit pay), and schools
(censure, consolidation, and closure). (24)
As already noted, the British party of English scholars were responsible for the progressive “growth” model. However, Britain seems to be suffering from a fate identical to Smagorinsky’s description in the above quote. In an article detailing her recent classroom observations of student teachers, Gill Andersen, lecturer in English education at the Institute of Education in London, writes:

Surely you need a *standardised* curriculum so that you know what to teach and a national curriculum so that pupils across the land will get something close to a *common experience* – isn’t that likely to ensure ‘consistency’, and that every pupil gets their *entitlement*? It is precisely terms such as *standardisation, common experience* and *consistency*, thinly veiled behind a rhetoric of democratic *entitlement*, that have succeeded in emptying out and flattening that notion of culture in the English classroom. (113-114)

All of these elements, Andersen believes, have regimented and narrowed the English curriculum, resulting in a “narrow assessment culture of the English classroom” while simultaneously neglecting the student’s cultural development (120). She critiques the lesson components she sees too often in English classrooms, including the ‘Do Now’ (the absence of any subject or object in this phrase is instructive) that often operate to ‘control behaviour’ rather than support learning and erode teacher agency in planning for their own pupils; ‘a starter’ (focused on technical terms, aspects of language or ‘genre conventions’), ‘a model’ used to highlight generic features, a short writing exercise, a ‘plenary peer assessment’ activity with institutionalised structures…designed to draw attention to progress made against
the stated learning objectives; the foregrounding of lesson objectives derived from an atomized curricular list of writing skills, and specific prescriptive criteria drawn from assessment frameworks; the strong framing discourse of fixed and precisely measurable individual ability (measured in levels and labels); the palpable presence of ‘the third voice’…shaping the agenda and the resulting attempts to accommodate this through some kind of routine institutional response (‘get in a bit of pupil voice’). (118)

Scripted curriculum and mechanistic models of lesson planning signal “a profound shift in the orientation of the teacher” where “the role of the teacher is set out in advance, lesson by lesson and very strongly framed by a narrow set of lesson objectives, focussed on techniques and generic conventions”; “what is lost,” Anderson continues, “is the complex interplay of a teacher’s sense of a text and tasks, dense knowledge of and interest in pupils, and in the elusive, and unpredictable quality of learning” (121). As both Smagorinsky’s and Anderson’s research suggests, standardization of a curriculum (as opposed to thinking of curriculum as a non-fixed entity) and standardized, high-stakes testing are in conflict with progressive goals of the ethical and nonacademic traditions of English education, where goals such as “appreciation of literature” and “ethical development” are not immediately observable (especially when codified in a standard or learning objective) and not easily quantifiable on a traditional, standardized test. Moreover, the absence of both of these traditions and their goals encourage what Anderson calls “a culture of separateness [emphasis her]” as “each pupil is simply on their own point on the ladder of progression, working in isolation towards the next
rung” (121). In other words, “they [the students] have nothing to learn from one another” (121).

This current posture of English education is a point of contention not only with Anderson but also Smagorinsky. While Dartmouth’s legacy emphasizes personal growth, the “shortcoming is the way in which personal growth is valorized without attention to the social responsibilities that accompany growing and participating in a society” and the fact that personal growth “of individuals often comes at the expense of the goals and growth of others” (26). Smagorinsky concludes, “By elevating the individual’s growth as the object of education, the Dartmouth tradition has overlooked the need to take a more social view of teaching and learning” (26); “the question then becomes how to embrace a student-centered, personal growth approach, while raising awareness of the power relationships so that they are less imposing” (29). A more “social view of learning” resides in a tradition that concerns itself with how students develop ethically and relationally to the texts they read as well as other readers and learners. Returning back to the language of the NEA reviewers, are students “connecting” to one another, and, more globally, are the goals of reading literature for fun and enjoyment reflected in the current literature curriculum?

In response to the previous question, Janet Alsup, professor of English education at Purdue University, says no. Her book, *A Case for Teaching Literature in the Secondary School: Why Reading Fiction Matters in an Age of Scientific Objectivity and Standardization*, chronicles the deemphasis of the ethical and nonacademic traditions in present-day English education. In her view, the reading of fiction rests in a precarious
position in the current secondary literature curriculum as educational policy and society in general privilege objective knowledge (the kind of knowledge touted in STEM fields) over subjective knowledge (found in fields within the humanities as well as literary study). She raises a call to arms in the following quote from the introduction of her book:

I argue at a time when the humanities seem to be losing the culture war, when the standardization and objectification of the educational and literary experience of our youth is rampant, English teachers and English teacher educators must keep discussions about the power of literature to positively affect the lives of young people at the forefront. We should argue that all worthwhile knowledge isn’t objective, that all things worth learning cannot be relegated to, or assessed by, a formula. If we wish our young students to become citizens of the world who can make ethical decisions about the many scientific discoveries, ecological challenges, and human tragedies coming across the newspapers daily, we must nurture and preserve their opportunities to experience narrative worlds…Truth in the humanities is not objective, nor does it claim to be. In fact, scholars in the humanities would argue that personal, or subjective knowledge is central to the search for real truth, or meaning. However, in an age when objectivity connotes fairness, honesty, and even truth, and subjectivity indicates bias, prejudice, and partisanship, it is becoming harder to argue that study of the humanities, and its hallmark subject, literature is important or worthy. (6, 13)

To further validate her concerns of the declining importance of fiction in the English curriculum, Alsup cites a quote from influential English education scholar Judith Langer:
Since the early 21st century...there has been a turning away from the centrality of literature in the English and English language arts curriculum as a source of intellectual, moral, civic and/or ethical development, and a focus on English and ELA coursework as preparation for a set of more general literacy skills considered necessary to do well in college and the job world. (as qtd. in Alsup 54: 162)

The need for Alsup’s call to arms in order to save the reading of literature in the secondary school, including her battlecry that English teachers craft a “cogent argument for the teaching of literature,” contrasts severely with Applebee’s history. As his historical record indicates, literature has held a firm place in the English education curriculum, which reverts back to the work of the Committee of Ten and their emphasis on literature in high school English studies; no English teacher in the past decades would have ever questioned the legitimacy of “literary fiction” as an important part of secondary English.

Nevertheless, with fiction under fire, Alsup in both her book and a recent journal article presents a series of arguments rooted in research studies (humanistic, social scientific, and cognitive) to support the reading and teaching of the time-honored disciplinary component. A selection of her claims are bulleted below, as reading literature:

- “can increase our emotional intelligence” as “reading fiction simulates brain activity parallel to that of real-world experience” (28, 30).
• helps “develop the self” as “identifying with characters in fiction is a complex, reciprocal experience that leads to increased empathy and engagement with texts” (36, 30).

• “results in enhanced cultural awareness or global citizenship” while “providing a space for readers to work out their responses to others” and increasing “inference-making abilities, empathizing with others, and valuing diversity” (36, 30).

• can increase “helping” and “incidences of prosocial behavior” (72, 30).

• can “encourage ethical decision making” (30).

Alsup summarizes her research near the end of the book in four discrete subtitles: “reading changes readers,” “readers can change society,” “all knowledge is dependent on creative and imaginative thought,” and “human connections further humanity” (123, 124).

All of these reasons for teaching literature reside within the ethical and nonacademic traditions of English education. However, in Alsup’s view, the reading and studying of literary fiction is being replaced with curriculum and standards that “focus on transferable, measurable, and decontextualized skills” that are “easier to identify, assess, and compare across schools, districts, states, and even nations” and scripted curriculum “designed and packaged by publishing companies for teaching use, often with accompanying, explicit instructions for how teachers should deliver lessons, including pacing, activities, topics, expected student responses, and even precise scripts for teachers to read,” all of which are infiltrating the secondary literature curriculum (88). The push
towards value-added assessments of teachers, the increased standardized testing of students, and the view of education as “a pathway to a quantifiable outcome” redefines American education as an “input/output business-like procedure” under the control of “a few powerful individuals with monetary agendas” (120, 122). As a result, literature is being “oversimplified, quantified, and re-packaged for assessment and subsequent application to materials goals, such as high employability and income, goals important to a possession-driven culture” (122). Alsup accurately characterizes the decline of literature in the secondary curriculum in the following paragraph:

When schools, policy-makers, corporations, cultural myths, and policies decide and convey that literary studies, and by extension the humanities are content-less, rigor-less, non-intellectual pastimes that can only be defended by their use in service of other, more important, quantitative, objectively defined scientific disciplines and careers, then the literary experience begins to disappear in schools, as teachers, administrators and then students oust literature in favor of explicitly tested and externally valued knowledge. Young people stop reading. Teachers stop teaching novels and short stories longer than a few sentences. The lifelong reader no longer exists. Narrative experience is confined to Hollywood movies and video games—no one is any longer lost in a book…Today we need young people who will be thoughtful, caring, understanding, yet open to considering the point of view of others…At a time of school shootings so common that they seem normal…when bullying is so rampant…when leaders can’t compromise on any issue however small, we need education that opens rather than closes…[and]
policies…concerned with helping students learn and think and feel and imagine…

Without literature, without the literary experience, we continue to dehumanize the humanities, segregate and sanitize disciplines, and turn school into a means to an end rather than a holistic preparation for life, a goal not assessable through a standardized test and not affected by ever-changing standards or large corporations writing and selling tests. (122)

“Narrative experience,” Alsup beckons,

is not only about learning skills and outcomes that can be measured and used to compare students and schools and place them in a hierarchy of success. Reading and responding to literature is about thinking, feeling, considering, guessing, predicting, wondering, and imagining. It takes time and human interactions. It does require certain reading skills, but these skills are heightened and transformed in the process. Truncating or simplifying the reading experience to make it faster, more efficient, and easier to evaluate will only succeed in draining it of its power. (90)

Furthermore, the assimilation of evidence from the NEA as well as several English education scholars present two traditions in decline—a decline paralleled alongside that of the academic tradition, highlighting the incomplete and incoherent literature curriculum in English education today.
CHAPTER V:

MICROCOSMIC/DISCIPLINARY SOURCES OF INCOHERENCY

PART III – THE DISTORTION OF TWO LITERARY THEORIES

All of the discussion above has examined the sources of incoherency in the current secondary literature curriculum as rooted in a historical understanding of English education. Moreover, there is one additional source of disciplinary/microcosmic incoherency that has significantly affected the secondary literature curriculum, more specifically, the way in which literature is taught to students today.

First, unlike recent reforms in composition pedagogy which, as characterized by past NCTE president and chair of English education at the Teacher’s College at Columbia University Sheridan Blau, are process-oriented, learner-centered, and collaborative, the pedagogy of literature has remained, “product-oriented, text-centered, and top-down” where many teachers, particularly in the past, “once thought it necessary to communicate” authoritative readings “as valid literature knowledge” (3). Furthermore, literary criticism or theory plays a role—whether implicitly or explicitly—in the teaching of any text. As mentioned earlier, biographical and historical modes of interpretation were the primary mechanisms for teaching texts until roughly the 1940s and later in 1960s and 1970s when developments in literary criticism and theory shifted the landscape of literature pedagogy (Rosenblatt 285, 267; Stotsky, Traffas, and Woolworth 22). The
2010 survey commissioned by the ALSCW, also mentioned above, examined not only what students were reading in high school but the particular approaches used by teachers to teach literature. Out of four identified approaches to teaching imaginative literature, “close reading” (also termed “New Criticism” in the study) and “reader response” were the top two approaches used by teachers across all three grade levels (24).¹⁸

These results are not surprising when the historical record concerning the influence and legacy of both New Criticism and Louise Rosenblatt’s reader response theory is taken into account. However, it can be argued that each of these dominant literary theories present and embodied in classrooms today through the literature curriculum and the assessment of literature standards bear little resemblance to the original work of these theorists, resulting in significant ramifications for secondary English.

**New Criticism & Standardized Testing**

The aim of New Criticism was to move away from impressionistic musings about a text as well as the exclusive focus on the biography of the author and the history of the work to establishing a relationship between the meaning of a text and its formal elements. The practice of “close reading” is often aligned with New Criticism. However, as Deborah Appleman writes in her book *Critical Encounters in Secondary English: Teaching Literary Theory to Adolescents*, “close reading” and New Criticism in practice today exist as a “teacher game” of “transparent symbol hunts” as students go “fishing for themes” using literary vocabulary terms (xv). When literary study becomes a scavenger
hunt for technical terminology, “close reading” becomes, as coined by Sheridan Blau, “mechanistic reading” (103). He remarks,

What bothers many of us about what I am calling mechanistic readings, I believe, is not that they interrogate or analyze a text according to procedure identified with a school of criticism we don’t like, but that they appear to produce the analysis for no genuine intellectual reason at all, except to satisfy an externally posed assignment. Thus, students searching for paper topics will often settle on a comparison-contrast essay not because such an exercise might reveal something worth knowing about the text or texts they are writing about, but because the comparison-contrast is one that has been taught to them in their English class as a method for producing required literary papers for English teachers. (103)

In a separate essay entitled “Transactions Between Theory & Practice in the Teaching of Literature,” Blau links New Critical practices to single, authoritative readings that are often conveyed in English classes by teachers of literature and the damage this practice does to emerging readers:

Instruction directed at achieving an authorized interpretation of a text may provide readers with literary knowledge in the sense that it offers them information on what constitutes a “right” reading, but insofar as it invalidates their own experience as readers, it disables their capacity to function as aesthetically literate persons: It will therefore be “false knowledge,” precisely as Milton used that term—knowledge that opens their eyes but closes their minds. (39)
Rosenblatt cautioned teachers in *Literature as Exploration* (1995) against treating literature as a “body of knowledge of to be transmitted”: “Teachers often forget that if students know that they will be tested on factual aspects of the work (often by multiple-choice questions), a full aesthetic reading is prevented” (292).

Neither a fish-hunt for literary terms nor mechanistic readings nor authoritative interpretations of a text were ever the goals envisioned by the New Critics. However, this enduring legacy of a bastardized understanding of New Criticism persists in today’s standardized tests, including, as David Foster explains in “The Theory of AP English: A Critique,” the Advanced Placement English exams. Faced with multiple-choice items where there is only one correct response, students participate in, according to Foster, “a grim guessing game with unknown interlocutors who alone possess the key” to a text’s “‘real’ meaning”; thus, students experience “the pedagogical fallout from the rigid, often arbitrary, textual objectivism inherent in the multiple-choice approach to literature” (17).

Furthermore, in a presentation at the 2016 annual convention of the National Council for the Teaching of English entitled “A Corrective Perspective on the History of Close Reading and New Criticism,” Alicia Pilar Perez, a graduate student at Columbia University’s Teacher’s College, explained that “close reading” is a beneficial practice for teaching texts but has been distorted through standardized testing. She urged, “multiple-choice testing immediately distorts the idea that you can have multiple interpretations of a text” which is a hallmark of the subjective—not objective—disciplinary structure of literary study and life itself. As Diane Ravitch remarks, standardized tests “teach false lessons. It teaches students that questions have one right answer, and in life” and
especially in literary study “that is seldom correct…In real life, people do not always agree on the right answer” (266). Moreover, “close reading” Perez continued in her presentation, “is not arriving at one correct interpretation”; in fact, “none of these critics ever argued for one single interpretation [of a text],” rather, the New Critics simply argued that the “interpretation be grounded in the formal elements of the text.”

**Reader Response & Anything Goes**

Reader response, Louise Rosenblatt’s transactional theory of literature, has suffered similar distortions. Her theory, like the New Criticism, sought to move away from literary history and the “message” of a text (290). Unlike the New Critics, however, Rosenblatt stressed the dynamic interrelationship between the reader and the text. She writes,

> In the teaching of literature, then, we are basically helping our students learn to perform in response to a text. In this respect we are perhaps close to the voice teacher, even the swimming coach, than we are to the teacher of history or botany. The reader performs the poem or the novel, as the violinist performs the sonata. But the instrument on which the reader plays and from which he evokes the work is—himself…under the guidance of the text, out of his own thoughts and feelings and sensibilities, the reader makes a new ordering, the formed substance that is for him the literary work of art. The teacher of literature, especially needs to keep alive this view of the literary work as a personal evocation, the product of creative activity carried on by the reader under the guidance of the text. (266)
Rosenblatt’s imagery offers an alternative vision of a literature class where instead of “traditional and formalist methods of teaching” that “treat it [literature] as a body of information to be transmitted,” texts offer “experiences to be reflected on” (292).

Sheridan Blau praises Rosenblatt’s reader response theory; in his book, cited previously, *The Literature Workshop* (2003), he writes, “The most influential and successful attempts of the past thirty years or more to reform literature teaching—particularly in secondary schools—have drawn on Rosenblatt’s transactional theory (1938, 1978) to develop a rich body of student-centered practices (especially Probst 1988) that honor the individual responses of students” (3). Janet Alsup offers a similar approbation: “If we believe that the act of reading is a transaction, and the reader brings to a text knowledge and experience which affect its meaning, then we should teach literature by honoring the student reader’s response” (Alsup 84)

In a chapter entitled “The Lens of Reader Response: The Promise and Peril of Response-Based Pedagogy,” Deborah Appleman situates reader response theory within a historical framework, writing, “As we look back at literature instruction over the last 60 years, it is easy to see how reader-centered teaching fit perfectly with the goals of constructivist education and with the progressive education movement” where the student was “the center of the educational enterprise” (30). However, the aim of honoring the responses of readers was, in the words of Sandra Stotsky, “taken further than Rosenblatt herself intended or approved” (22). Appleman, Stotsky, and the authors of the 2010 National Survey of Literary Study in Grades 9, 10, and 11 share discontent with the current, mainstream use of reader response in today’s English classrooms, where reader
response is both “atheoretical” and “non-analytical” as “any interpretation of a text can be considered valid in a radical approach” (Appleman 33; Stotsky, Traffas, Woodworth 23; Stotsky 106). In an anecdote at the beginning of her chapter on reader response, Appleman describes her experience as an outsider examiner for the International Baccalaureate program in an urban high school and her conversation with a 16-year old student named Leah about Nathaniel Hawthorne’s *The Scarlet Letter*:

> Leah spent about two or three sentences on plot summary and then exclaimed, ‘You know if my man ever treated me the way Hester’s man treated her, he’d be out of my life before you could say ‘The Scarlet A.’ I can’t believe the crap Hester took. Actually, last week my boyfriend Rob and I almost broke up. Okay, well, it all started when…’ (29)

Appleman tried to move the conversation back to Hester Pryne or any of the other texts Leah had studied in her English course, yet “Leah’s inability to craft a response that was textual in any way might have been inadvertently facilitated by her…teacher who encouraged personal responses to literature” (30). It is no coincidence then that the national survey of literary study in grades 9, 10, and 11 as commissioned by the Association of Literary Scholars, Critics, and Writers, revealed that teachers favored non-analytical approaches to literary study, as “close reading was checked off far fewer times than reader response at all three grade levels,” which suggested that “today’s high school students do not engage in close, careful reading of assigned texts for most of their classroom study” (23). In the words of Appleman, a former teacher of English and “true-blue believer” of reader response, “As English teachers we may have been guilty of over-
privileging and romanticizing the individual at the expense of considerations of context” (Appleman 32). In the same vein, Sheridan Blau concurs with Appleman:

Response-based classrooms, as much as they have accomplished in humanizing teaching and fostering student involvement are sometimes limited or misleading in what they accomplish intellectually, given their self-referentiality and the illusion they foster of an entirely independent and naïve reader whose response has not already been shaped and situated by the culture of school and other less visible cultural forces (Gilbert 1987; Patterson 1992, 1993; Purves 1993). (Blau 3)

Just as Alicia Pilar Perez reappraised New Criticism at NCTE’s 2016 annual convention, Appleman, Rosenblatt, and Stotsky all offer reconsiderations for reader response theory. First and foremost, Rosenblatt writes, “The term reader response took on such broad usage that some theorists, though giving lip service to the reader, ended up with positions even more remote from mine than was the New Criticism” (294).19

Rosenblatt clarifies,

There is, in fact, nothing in the recognition of the personal nature of literature that requires an acceptance of the notion that every evocation from a text is as good as every other. We need only think of our successive readings of the same text, at fifteen or thirty or fifty, to know that we can differentiate. Undisciplined, irrelevant, or distorted emotional responses and the lack of relevant experience or knowledge will, of course, lead to inadequate interpretations of the text. The aim is to help the student toward a more and more controlled and more and more valid or defensible response to the text. (267)
In *The Death and Resurrection of a Coherent Literature Curriculum*, Stotsky responses, for teachers who faithfully followed what Louise Rosenblatt has written, there may not be a contradiction between close reading and a reader response approach if they taught students to read a text closely after an initial response to it in order to arrive at a justifiable interpretation. However, such teachers did not comprise a majority of those replying to the survey. If they did, the survey would have found a better balance between analytical and nonanalytical approaches. (190)

Considering Rosenblatt’s perspective in 1995 and Stotsky’s remark in 2012, it is possible that reader response theory, like New Criticism, has suffered distortions. However, scholars like Alicia Pilar Perez and Deborah Appleman are working to reclaim and reappraise these literary theories. Appleman writes in *Critical Encounters*

> Even a reader-response lens is limiting if it is the only possible theoretical frame in which one can produce a reading. Offering students several ways to look at texts does more than help them learn to interpret literature from multiple perspectives; it also helps them to develop a more complex way of thinking as they move from the dualism of early adolescence to the relativism of adult thinkers (Perry, 1970). (9)
CHAPTER VI: EPILOGUE – FROM THEORY TO PRACTICE

In the spring semester of 2014, my freshman year at the University of Mississippi, I received the Benjamin Franklin Travel Grant from the French Embassy and a fellowship from the Sally McDonnell Barksdale Honors College for travel to France to observe middle and high school language and literature classes. The schools in which I observed I had a visited three years before as a student through my high school’s exchange program, where I had developed an interest in French education.

As I observed classes over roughly two and a half weeks, I was struck by the richness of their curriculum, the pedagogy of the professeurs, and the French approach to assessment, all of which had contrasted severely with my experience as a student in a Mississippi public school. I noticed an absence of multiple-choice testing; all assessments featured some sort of written composition and an authentic demonstration of what the students had learned throughout their units of study. Cathie Gaïta, one of the teachers of English, explained the implicit idea undergirding assessment, “The final task is always production, not comprehension.” And in literature classes (both in English and French), texts, including novels, poems, and multimedia texts, formed the basis of study—not route skills or the demands of a standardized assessment as I had been exposed to for nearly all of my secondary education. French education, specifically their standards and curriculum, was built not on mastery of discrete, objective skills and
performance on multiple-choice standardized testing but on the knowledge and wisdom acquired through centuries of the country’s best scholars, writers, and thinkers. France holds the record for the most Nobel Prize-winning authors in the world, and the country’s literature standards paved a way for a curriculum that celebrates France’s literary heritage.

I wanted to learn more about France and their approach to a literature curriculum, which motivated my initial thesis research. However, this research led me back to my home country: Why was the United States so different? Why had I never studied a text by a Mississippi author in high school? Why was “literature” conspicuously absent from my secondary English classes? It was not difficult to find an answer: In the most recent set of standards reforms beginning chiefly with the No Child Left Behind legislation, emphasis on “skills” and “competencies” have overshadowed teaching great literary texts and wrestling with the legacies of prolific writers. The Common Core State Standards, which Mississippi re-branded as the Mississippi College– and Career–Readiness Standards in order to avoid the negative stigma that has become associated with Common Core, contains ten standards related to reading literature for high school students. For grades nine and ten, no specific study of American or British literature is mentioned in the ten standards, and for grades eleven and twelve, the only required author to be studied is Shakespeare. Mississippi’s CCRS retained Common Core’s language and disposition towards a skills-based approach to literature, making no significant changes to the standards. While the Common Core standards do include a document concerning text complexity, novels, poems, dramas, and other texts, they are to
be used as tools to meet the demands of standards—not necessarily to inspire a love for
literature or allow students to cultivate their own literary tastes.

I dug deeper, and I read Sandra Stotsky’s *The Death & Resurrection of a Coherent Literature Curriculum: What Secondary English Teachers Can Do*. Stotsky served as senior associate commissioner for the Massachusetts State Department of Education and is credited with developing what is considered by many (including the authoritative Fordham Institute and their annual review of state standards) among the best English Language Arts (ELA) standards in the country (Fordham 162). Massachusetts, it seemed, had succeeded in incorporating all three of Arthur Applebee’s major instructional traditions into a cogent set of standards which offered numerous possibilities for a coherent literature curriculum:

*Figure 3: Guiding Principles from Massachusetts’s 2001 ELA Framework Correlated with Arthur Applebee’s Historical Traditions*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tradition</th>
<th>Guiding Principles from Massachusetts’s 2001 ELA Framework</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Classical</td>
<td><strong>Guiding Principle 3:</strong> An effective English language arts curriculum draws on literature from many genres, time periods, and cultures, featuring works that reflect our common literary heritage.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethical</td>
<td><strong>Guiding Principle 10:</strong> While encouraging respect for differences in home backgrounds, an effective English language arts curriculum nurtures students’ sense of their common ground as present or future American citizens in order to prepare them for responsible participation in our schools and in civic life.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonacademic</td>
<td><strong>Guiding Principle 8:</strong> An effective English language arts curriculum builds on the language, experiences, and interests that students bring to school.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
While Stotsky’s book examined the issue of an incoherent literature curriculum through her own prior research and perspective on ELA education, I elected a historical approach. Through my research, I identified sources of both institutional (macrocosmic) sources and disciplinary (microcosmic) sources of incoherency, all which impact the ability to construct a coherent literature curriculum for high school students (see graphic below).

*Figure 4: Sources of Incoherency, Macrocosmic/Institutional & Microcosmic/Disciplinary*
Nevertheless, talk is cheap; standards are not enough, and a coherent literature
curriculum will not reach its full potential without effective teachers who are responsible
for delivering instruction. Furthermore, I offer the following bridge from theory to
practice:

1. *Discussions among teachers concerning standards and curriculum are critical to the
life of English education.*

In independent reviews conducted by the Fordham Institute, Mississippi’s 1996
English Language Arts standards were on-par with standards from states across the
nation. Through the next set of revisions in 1998, 1999, 2000, Mississippi’s standards
continued to reflect an average expectation of what students should know and be able to
do in English courses. Fordham chief ELA reviewer, Sandra Stotsky, praised Mississippi
for its speaking and listening standards, considered to be a “real strength of this
document”, the clear expectations that students will learn and use “Standard English for
speaking and writing”, and the reasonable coverage of literary study at the high school
level (Stotsky 1997: 101; Stotsky 2000: 73; Stotsky 2005: 49). However, Fordham’s last
review of state standards in 2010 which examined Mississippi’s 2007 standards, a
document that radically departed from the 1996 standards and the subsequent revisions,
labeled Mississippi’s ELA standards “among the worst in the country” (Carmichael 187).

Who created the 1996 standards? Teachers (Mississippi State Dept. of Education
1996: 7). Who created the 2007 standards? Teachers (Mississippi State Dept. of
Education 2007: iii-iv). Thoughtful discussion regarding standards and curriculum must
take place among well-read teacher-scholars if the possibility of a coherent literature
curriculum is ever to be actualized. As a student teacher, I collaborated on a daily-basis with two other outstanding English educators, Elisa Bryant and Katie Szabo, and together, we discussed the meaning of our standards, continually asking ourselves: What are our students learning? Are the instructional activities, texts, and content we are delivering meeting these standards? Are we teaching texts that challenge our students while also honoring their individual, personal responses? Out of this dialogue, we created a coherent set of expectations for what we would teach, what our students would learn, and why our content mattered.

2. English education is at its strongest when it reflects and embodies all three of the major instructional traditions within the discipline.

Every English teacher has a bias and a tradition with which they most strongly identify. For me, it is the classical tradition; I believe English education has lost sight of its true academic goals in favor of emphasis on literary terms and objective-based multiple-choice standardized testing.

Arthur Applebee’s *Tradition & Reform in the Teaching of English*—detailing English’s emergence as a subject to its establishment as part of the high school curriculum to the reforms of progressive educators and subsequent rejection of reforms and academic resurgence—and my review of the literature illustrate the major shifts in English education, all of which highlight some of the inconsistency and incoherency that have plagued English education and hindered the effort to create a coherent literature curriculum. Whenever English loses sight of its classical tradition, content is sacrificed, structure vanishes, and the subject becomes a broad mass of disjointed topics; whenever
English neglects the voices of the ethical and nonacademic traditions, reforms in pedagogy and psychological insights are excluded from curricular conversations, resulting in a narrow curriculum and constrained educational experience. Any attempt to create a coherent literature curriculum must involve contribution and consensus from all three teaching traditions and attend to the academic, ethical, and maturational needs of all students. When English education excludes any one of these three major voices—voices rich in research, theory, and practice—our curriculums are left weak, incomplete, and incoherent.

I took this matter to heart this semester when I taught my eighth graders L. Frank Baum’s *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*. First, the novel, while primarily classified as a work of children’s literature, has a quantitative middle school readability level, and as this would be the last literary work they studied this year, I knew they needed a text that would challenge them in terms of vocabulary. I also wanted students to engage with the text on a sophisticated literary level both in class discussion and composition. My students participated in discussions in which I asked them to consider archetype, allegory, irony, symbolism, and theme in the novel using the specific language from the text, all of which culminated in a Socratic circle and final essay. Through these aims and activities, I drew from the classical tradition and its emphasis on literary study. Simultaneously, my students considered the ethical questions surrounding politics and leadership in the novel and its parallels in our world today. Using a recent adaptation of the novel, the Broadway musical *Wicked*, my students discussed whether it was acceptable for the “wonderful Wizard” to lie to the citizens of Oz in order to gain and maintain political power. A
costume technologist on the Disney film *Oz the Great and Powerful* visited our classroom to discuss the hard work of building garments for actors and the role of design in rendering a new adaptation of a beloved story. My students connected the novel to their own individual lives, building a physical yellow-brick road of their own personal responses to the text. Through these activities, I managed to include both the ethical and nonacademic traditions in the unit which offered a robust range of content-rich experiences for my students.

3. **Literary theory shapes how teachers teach literature.**

I doubt any teacher of high school English requires students to read Lacanian psychoanalytic criticism or post-colonialism, but literary theory, nevertheless, plays a silent but significant role in English classes. The literature review demonstrates this principle, specifically with regards to New Criticism and reader response theory, both of which have made lasting impacts on English curriculums.

For my unit on *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, I drew from Deborah Appleman’s research on teaching literary theory to adolescents in *Critical Encounters in Secondary English*. I established five different “literary lenses” through which we would encounter our text: historical, which focused on how the novel can be understood as an allegory for the Gilded Age and Populist party; heroic, which concerned reading the novel as monomyth à la Joseph Campbell’s “hero’s journey”; political, which dealt with how the novel relates to government and politics; reader-response, which drew from Rosenblatt’s ideas of the personal interaction between reader and text; and the lens of adaptation, which examined how novel has been retold in both film and theatre over the past century.
For the final essay assignment, students chose a single lens to explore and offer their own interpretation. By incorporating literary lenses into the unit, I avoided simply imparting my own reading of the novel to students and asking them to reproduce this reading on an objective assessment; moreover, I gave them more than one way of experiencing a text and, hopefully, more than one way of seeing the world around them.

As detailed in this review, there are significant challenges to creating a well-made curriculum. Nevertheless, a “curriculum *bien fait*” is possible. Faye Louise Grindstaff, in reviewing NCTE’s three curriculum models (see figure 2), wrote that it might possible to “formulate a super-model of teaching excellence as well as a curriculum design” (227). The history of English education reminds educators, administrators, and policy makers of the professional lineage of past English teachers; all stand on the shoulders of their traditions, failures, and successes, always offering the hope of new pedagogical possibilities.

Arthur Applebee, who passed away last year, leaving the task of a new expanded history of English education uncompleted, wrote the following lines at the end of *Tradition & Reform*: “Though the shape of the ‘new English’ may be unclear from the perspective of the present, the next chapters of this history, when they are written, will surely describe a curriculum better than any we have seen in the past” (255). I do believe that in 2017, English education is one step closer to a curriculum *bien fait* so long as we not forget the wisdom of the past.
1 Part of the reason for the discrepancy in the terminology of “standards” and “curriculum” lies in the nonexistent professional vocabulary related to the field of teaching in the United States, unlike France and Japan which do have explicit vocabularies (Cohen 4-5; Green 148).

2 “President Bill Clinton’s Improving America’s School Act (IASA) and Goals 2000 Educate America Act in 1994 and President George W. Bush’s NCLB in 2002 were the federal expression of a broad reform movement that sought to use academic standards, tests, and accountability to improve schools” (Cohen and Moffitt 9-10).

3 This is highly evident in the “babel” and politicized rhetoric that have dominated discussions of the Common Core State Standards Initiative.


5 It must be noted that Louise Rosenblatt’s scholarship from the 1930s would not become a conceptual framework for teaching literature until the revival of English as an academic subject during the 1950s and 1960s.

6 A thematic approach to teaching literature would eventually be reflected in literature anthologies of this era which continued to play an important role in the dissemination of texts studied in the secondary English classroom (Applebee 170).

7 It is important to note that at this time the genre of “adolescent literature” had not yet emerged. It would not be until the 1960s that writers and publishers began to see a viable audience in teenagers and began to publish more works specifically for teenagers (Oliphant-Ingham, Hopper, & Parker 35). One may speculate concerning the impact of the life adjustment education movement on the history of young adult literature.

8 These conversations were facilitated in part thanks to federal dollars that helped establish curriculum study centers across the United States which “produced the first sets of academically oriented material for the high school course, involving university professors of the liberal arts once again the process of curriculum development” (Applebee 203).

9 “What we want is something less specific than curriculum and more ordered than chaos” (Dixon 91).
The titles were *Julius Caesar*, *The Odyssey*, *The Scarlet Letter*, and *Macbeth* (Stotsky, Traffas, Woodworth 13). By contrast, many titles appearing on the college entrance exams in the late nineteenth century are on a high school readability level including *David Copperfield*, *Gulliver’s Travels*, *The House of the Seven Gables*, *Ivanhoe*, *The Last of the Mohicans*, *Pride & Prejudice*, *Silas Marner*, and *A Tale of Two Cities* (Applebee 275-276). Nevertheless, readability formulas are only one factor used to select texts in English courses and one factor in Common Core’s text complexity (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, Council of Chief State School Officers 4). *To Kill a Mockingbird*, a text that deals with complex themes such as a racism, has a readability level of 5.6, but many would justify this text as a part of the high school—and not elementary—literature curriculum.

These percentages reflect an overall decline in the amount of time dedicated to literary study in high school classrooms, especially compared to the recommendations set by the Committee of Ten in which three hours per week were to be dedicated to literature.

The titles for the Arkansas survey were the same for the national survey, except *Macbeth*; the other title was *Great Expectations*.

Mark Bauerlein, professor of English at Emory University, supports Stotsky’s position on multiculturalism. He remarked in a 2016 issue of *The Chronicle of Review*, “The promise of multiculturalism in the humanities was that it would yield a richer, more accurate sense of tradition and merit. But there’s no evidence that college students know more about African-American literature, for instance, than they did in the Dead White Male days. Instead, multiculturalism has brought incoherence into the curriculum and identity politics to aesthetic and moral judgement” (B5).


It should be noted that the U.S. Office of Educational Research and Improvement chose to discontinue funding the standards work of NCTE in 1994 due to “several philosophical differences” according to a letter dated May 11, 1994 from the then president, Janie Hydrick (Stotsky 88). Arthur Applebee, offered a different perspective on the cancellation of funding, writing that liblibNCTE and IRA “had its funding cancelled after two years of work, at least in part because it took a relatively constructivist view of curriculum and instruction” (25).

No relation to the Common Core State Standards; the organization is now known as the Great Minds organization.

Many of Alsup’s claims are championed by Annmarie Sheahan in the journal article from *English Education*, “Dartmouth Revisited: Three English Educators from Different Generations Reflect on the Dartmouth Conference” (2016).
For ninth grade, a “multicultural” approach tied with “close reading/New Criticism.” However, “close reading/New Criticism” was “checked off far fewer times than reader response at all three grade levels”; the results were slightly different for the teaching of literary nonfiction where the top two approaches across all three grade levels were “biographical/historical” and “reader response” (Stotsky, Traffas, Woodworth 23, 24).

In fact, Appleman’s review of reader response research includes many variations of the practice (35).
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