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New Criticism—Not So New to Tennessee’s High School English Teachers

A thesis

presented to

the faculty of the Department of Literature and Language

East Tennessee State University

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Master of Arts in English

by

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TNCORE

ABSTRACT

New Criticism—Not So New to Tennessee’s High School English Teachers

by

Seth William Grindstaff

When Tennessee Department of Education adopted Common Core in 2010, Tennessee implemented New Critical ideas associated with the college classroom, but did not present this connection to English teachers. Comparing high school education reforms like *A Nation at Risk* (1983) and TNCore to the New Critical works of Cleanth Brooks, T. S. Eliot, John Crowe Ransom, Robert Penn Warren, William Wimsatt and Monroe Beardsley, reveals that New Criticism is the literary method grounding current ELA education reform. Referencing Deborah Appleman’s *Critical Encounters in Secondary English* (2015), Diana Ravitch’s *The Death and Life of the Great American School System* (2010), and questionnaires completed by Tennessee teachers, this study tracks New Criticism’s influence from the college classroom to the high school classroom. Presenting English teachers the history behind what and how they teach will equip them to explain their methodology to students.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In the summer of 2013, just before my second year of teaching high school English, I participated in my first multi-day Common Core (CC) workshop in Greenville, Tennessee. Each summer, teachers across Tennessee are presented opportunities to acquire professional development hours in order to maintain their secondary-teaching licensure. Although professional development credits are available all year long, this particular workshop in Greenville was particularly significant. Hundreds of English teachers from the region were shown, many for the first time, how to implement Common Core ideology into their high school classrooms in order to meet the state's newly adopted, more "rigorous," CC standards. In July of 2010, Tennessee had adopted the Common Core standards of learning and planned to fully implement them by the 2013-14 school year ("Tennessee"). For teachers, the new standards were expected to not only change *what* content was taught, but also, and more significantly, *how* that content was taught. Educators knew that the changing standards would also require a new type of standardized test to measure the new standards. At the beginning of the school year, many teachers like me were handed a packet of "future" CC standards, but we were provided no guidance about how to teach them since students were currently still being tested according to the "old" Tennessee state standards. Professional development trainings, such as the one I attended in Greenville, focused on the "implementation" of CC techniques in the classroom, which gave the workshop a noteworthy feel because of the brand new information being presented that would affect everyone's teaching.

During this three day instructional course, the sessions were led by instructors who were trained by the state. This meant that all the teachers in Tennessee who attended that summer's training received the same set of information within a training booklet. This booklet acted not

only acted as a guide for the session leaders, but also provided example lessons with grade-appropriate texts. For example, many English Language Arts (ELA) teachers read “Ain’t I a Woman” (1851) by Sojourner Truth. We were asked to read the text multiple times and look for specific textual characteristics during each read. Each “assignment” was designed to point us towards the ultimate goal: our ability to write an essay about how the text achieved its overall effect. The course leaders modeled pedagogy that informed the instruction of CC standards. In each lesson, teachers participated in tasks as students. This was meant to enable teachers to view the activities from the students’ perspectives. The sessions focused on a few of Common Core’s most basic principles: fostering text-centered discussions, performing multiple readings of short texts, demanding example-driven answers, and limiting the pre-teaching of a text’s background information. During our “Ain’t I a Woman” assignments, we were taught little about the text’s original background and asked to use textual evidence to back up our claims.

As a high school teacher, I acknowledged that the Common Core philosophy was not directly taught by its creators or even by those at the state level who chose to implement the standards in Tennessee. Teachers, like me, were taught how to directly apply the Common Core’s methodology by other teachers who represented the state’s decision. We were presented the notion of “this is the way it is going to be now”—that CC was created and chosen for the benefit of the students’ learning. As teachers focused on the immediate matters at hand, such as learning the standards and fashioning new lesson plans to incorporate CC ideology, there was no direct explanation or clear conversation about how or why the Common Core Initiative came into existence. Teachers were simply given a new expectation. Neither the resource packets nor the official CC webpage provided a bibliography or reference page that linked the new ideology to its creators, a group of people.

This passing down of knowledge—from the national level, to the state level, to the regional level—created a gap because the peer teachers passing down new expectations did not create them. I understood how the standards could be taught—application was clearly exemplified in workshops and on the Common Core website’s resource material. What I lacked was a clear picture of the theories upon which the Common Core creators base their own ideology. CC was presented to educators as a much needed improvement on older standards and philosophies, which made it appear as if looking backward to reference older pedagogical practices was indeed a step backwards in the wrong direction since data showed that they had obviously failed the students. Justin Calhoun, an ELA teacher in Tennessee during this shift, explains that the CC trainings “showed us how CC embodied the idea of the old standards in a new and better way” (Calhoun). Tim Davis, another Tennessee ELA teacher, recalls that “It [the switching of ELA standards] was cast as a dramatic shift” (Davis). This focus on the “new” overshadowed any narrative about the CC movement’s historical grounding and heritage. Understandably presenters concentrated on the students’ less than stellar test performances in order to motivate Tennessee’s teachers to buy-in to improved standards, but those responsible for designing the CC approved professional development workshops overlooked valuable opportunities to unify these book-loving teachers by uniting them with their subject’s own literary and critical history.

One stereotypical complaint about any profession is that the employees doing the actual groundwork do not have a say in their rule and regulation making. But what if Tennessee’s English teachers were told that many of the same problems they were facing had been contemplated by college professors (who were also authors and poets) over fifty years before the CCI (Common Core Initiative) was created? What if Tennessee educators knew that the professors responsible for much of the groundwork that the CC built upon were from not only the

South but strongly associated with the state of Tennessee because of their time at Vanderbilt? In other words, in order for the state to adopt CC standards, the CC must first have adopted criteria created by scholars who went to college in Tennessee.

I became acquainted with the seminal foundations of Common Core English ideology by accident. After teaching for four years, I began graduate school in order to pursue a Masters of English degree. The first course I studied was *Criticism and Theory*, in which I learned about a movement from the early 20th century called “New Criticism”—a movement that I immediately recognized, but under a different title: Common Core. Vocabulary such as “unpacking” a text alongside a heavy focus on “textual evidence,” as opposed to a focus on bringing one’s own experiences to a text, was not new to my ears. I had been taught the same method through my professional development opportunities; I was reading about the same practical reading skills that I taught to high schoolers on a daily basis. Through the graduate level class, I was introduced to foundational pieces of New Criticism such as *The Well Wrought Urn* (1947) by Cleanth Brooks, *Understanding Poetry* (1938) by Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren, “The Affective Fallacy” (1946) by William Wimsatt and Monroe Beardsley, and *The New Criticism* (1941) by John Crowe Ransom, but I already understood their methodology because it was not New Criticism to me—it was Common Core for high school English Language Arts. There was not an assignment that I gave my students in which they did not have to “close read” for “textual evidence” to support their claims. In many classrooms there even hung large, mostly hand-made, posters reminding students to “cite evidence.” I now find it ironic that many English teachers who teach the difference in primary and secondary sources—I being one of them—did not have the background knowledge in literary criticism to connect what we were teaching to its true source, which is not Common Core but New Criticism.

Instead of only looking back as far as student testing data allows, to remind teachers of students' lack of proficiency, the Common Core Initiative and Tennessee's education department might find it beneficial to also connect English teachers back to the rich history of their own subject matter. This connection would help explain where the creators of Common Core found their inspiration for many of their foundational beliefs and vocabulary. This transparency between the CC and teachers who use its methods could also kindle a sense of trust between teachers and the program chosen by the state. At their hearts, both have something more tangible than their love of student improvement. They both share a handful of books about New Criticism that sit on the dusty shelf of college libraries.

Common Core's Lasting Relevancy

It is important to note that the purpose of my study is not to critique Common Core standards or practices. Nor is the purpose of my research to challenge or promote what or how high school ELA (English Language Arts) is taught to students. Instead, my aim is to link literary criticism to the Common Core Standards in order to demystify its origins and in doing so provide high school ELA teachers with opportunities to associate "new" techniques and ideas with their often overlooked academic groundwork.

One of the first questions that arises when studying Common Core methods in 2018 in the state of Tennessee is the question of relevancy. Tennessee's State Board of Education approved the CC standards in 2010 for schools to implement by 2012, but in 2017 the Board replaced the CC standards with their own Tennessee Academic Standards ("Academic"). So why study the history of CC when the state does not adhere to it anymore? The answer, in short, is that the current state-approved standards mirror the CC standards. The current standards were unquestionably shaped by CC ideals. Tennessee districts were even provided with a "crosswalk"

document to help them transition from CC to Tennessee standards. One of the major roles of these documents was to explain what had not changed through the transition.

It is helpful, when comparing the current Tennessee state ELA standards to the prior Common Core standards, to refer to the state's "crosswalk" document entitled "11th-12th Grade ELA Standard Changes" (2017). This document was provided for "Educator Team Training" during the summer of 2017. Its primary purpose was to show teachers how the Tennessee ELA standards had not changed. The document provided a side by side comparison of "old" and "new" standards. Its authors literally highlighted the standards that did not change at all in yellow, highlighted reworded phrases in blue, and provided an explanation for each change ("11th-12th Grade"). The document clearly shows that the changes do not alter the overall ideas or expectations within the standards; instead, the changes are a product of diction. For example, in the first standard presented in the document, the state changes the phrase "cite strong evidence [...] to support analysis" to "analyze [...] by citing [...] relevant textual evidence" ("11th and 12th Grade" 2). The authors explain that "analyze" is "a higher-level action verb," yet the heart of the idea stays the same: back an analysis up with textual evidence.

The press supported the common misconception that the Tennessee Department of Education (TDOE) uprooted the Common Core curriculum from its classrooms completely, as opposed to relabeling it. *The Tennessean* published an article in 2016 entitled "Tennessee phases out Common Core" (Balakit), and the popular educational news website *Chalkbeat* published an article titled "Common Core is out. Tennessee Academic Standards are in. Here's how teachers are prepping for the change" in 2017 (Alrich). These articles failed to compare the "new" standards to the "old" standards, which left them to judge the standards' differences only by their name. After spending four years in the Tennessee ELA classroom and seeing the CC expectation

raise the level of “rigor” expected out of students, I recognize that Tennessee’s politicians needed a new, less controversial label to place over-top of the often misunderstood Common Core title.

Chapter Layout

This body of research is arranged into five chapters, each of which serves a key purpose: Chapter One works as an introduction; Chapter Two focuses on New Criticism; Chapter Three focuses on the Common Core Initiative; Chapter Four works to connect the Advanced Placement Program to its New Critical legacy, and Chapter Five presents the conclusion. By inspecting influential literary criticisms that laid the foundations for Tennessee’s current educational ELA model, I will shed light onto possible explanations about why educators are not commonly presented a narrative that illuminates the history of their craft. I will also demonstrate how a knowledge of the New Critics’ body of work can help current ELA educators by aligning their pedagogical issues with similar issues that New Critics dealt-with half a century ago. Not only do both sets of teachers react similarly to their challenges, but their methods also face the same scrutiny. Present day educators can learn from the past since the New Critic’s challenges foreshadowed their own.

Chapter Two focuses on the New Critical heritage crafted by the essays of Cleanth Brooks, T. S. Eliot, John Crowe Ransom, Allen Tate, and Robert Penn Warren. After an analysis of their works is presented, it is clear that these professors created their method to help guide students away from mistakes that are common in high school ELA classrooms today. An emphasis on the nature of their works helps to highlight the New Critics most important tenants—tenants that were later adopted for the high school ELA classroom. The chapter provides Tennessee teachers with more than a history of these famous critics, as the narrative enables teachers to identify how college pedagogy, in the form of New Criticism, has slowly but surely

made its way to the high school level. This study connects pedagogical methods to the professors who made them famous and draws attention to how the methods that are currently being used were not created in a boardroom.

Chapter Three includes a close study of the training that the CCI provided teachers through professional development sessions. Because it is imperative to analyze how these trainings were perceived by attendees, I have surveyed a number fourteen of teachers, from five different school systems, who either led or participated in these workshops—all of whom have taught through the transition of standards. How ELA teachers understand their standards is just as significant as the standards themselves because educators' interpretations of CC-based methods provide students with activities and also structure how the students are taught in the classroom. Teachers' voices are also important because they are an integral part of how the TDOE (Tennessee Department of Education) spreads the word about education reform. In most cases, information about state-led reforms passes from District Teacher Trainers to School System Trainers (teachers from within the school systems) who then bring the material back to their school and present it to their department. Therefore, it is teachers who are not only instructing students by the standards since teachers are also teaching their peers the standards.

The teacher questionnaire is included in the appendix. I created the questions to discover how teachers learned about CC expectations and how they learned about what events provoked the state-wide switch to CC. The questions, just like the overall study, do not lead teachers to express their personal feelings about Tennessee's standards. Rather, the questionnaire asks teachers to express how they learned new expectations and also what they learned or did not learn. Their answers help to illustrate how the TDOE originally attempted to frame how ELA

teachers viewed CC standards and methods. Again, teachers' understanding of the standards and methods are just as important as the quality of the standards and methods themselves.

Chapter Three also works to provide a short history of America's education reforms at the end of the 20th century, beginning with *A Nation at Risk* (1983) which spurred the search for better educational instruction across the United States. Short surveys of federal documents such as *A Nation at Risk* help provide a much needed backing to find out why CC was implemented by Tennessee in the first place. My main argument throughout Chapter Three is based on Deborah Appleman's *Critical Encounters in Secondary English* (2015). I explain that literary criticism is being performed in the high school ELA classroom, but students, and many teachers, do not recognize that they are using methods that are grounded in New Criticism.

Chapter Four continues to present the "invisible link" between New Criticism and strategies associated with Common Core, and also compares the New Critical methods to the Advanced Placement Program. A few connections that I address are their emphasis on "close reading" of texts, their specific and analogous vocabulary, their disapproval of "reader response," and the way their instructors taught key skills by example. Just as New Critics William Wimsatt and Monroe Beardsley highlight in their 1949 criticism "The Affective Fallacy," TDOE and the Advanced Placement Program (APP) desire to shift away from asking students to write emotional responses to texts. Instead, both the TDOE and the APP follow the New Critics' example which inspired pedagogy focused on teaching students how to respond less subjectively to the text.

Within Chapter Four, I also explain how high school ELA teachers are expected to teach differently than high school AP ELA teachers. TNCore asked high school teachers to do less "pre-teaching" of a text by spending less instructional time on the history of the author and less discussion about the time period in which the text was written. While AP teachers also focus on

the text, the APP asks them to teach students how to differentiate between different literary-critical “lenses.” Therefore, instead of analyzing the text the “Common Core way” or the way the “state test” will expect them to answer, students recognize that they are using the New Critical method to perform their state-mandated tasks. I believe that by labeling the literary methods and by explaining the methods’ histories, teachers and students alike are more likely to “buy in” to the program in which they are involved.

In the Conclusion section of this study, my hope is to show that although New Critical and more current educational movements look similar, it is important to allow teachers to identify with the history of the techniques they teach from day to day. This will not only help ELA teachers relate their work to a historical and academic movement, but will also add a weightiness to their belief in the strategies since the techniques do have a solid critical foundation that is often difficult to see through their constant relabeling. The New Critics worked to define and defend the way we commonly view and study literature. With the knowledge of how these critics helped form our subject, high school ELA teachers, too, can continue to explain to their students and the public why literature is worth studying.

As a teacher, I know that we often spend time learning the newest state-mandated methods without having the opportunity to directly speak with their creators. It feels as if the reason for the changing methodology is more linked to impersonal statistics and data than students or content. Because of this focus on statistics, teachers often feel reduced to a statistic themselves instead of a part of the lengthy history of literary interpretation. Since the collection of data is a relatively new phenomenon, as school systems focus on such a limited “testable” history, they fail to see the grand picture of what they are involved in. I believe it is the responsibility of educators with knowledge about literary criticism to empower fellow teachers to make these significant

connections about the hidden history of our subject. Teachers cannot rely on reformers, publishers, or the state to grant us this knowledge. After tracing education reform across the 20th century, I foresee that no matter what reform take place that reform will have roots in literary criticism.

I have confidence that my findings will give life to the current pedagogical expectations through the writings of the New Critics. This study will provide high school ELA teachers with more than an appreciation of the skills they teach on a daily basis. Teachers will be granted an in depth understanding of where their methods come from—an understanding of a story that for high school teachers has no easily accessible narrative.

CHAPTER 2

THE HISTORY OF NEW CRITICISM

The Tennessee Department of Education has been clear about what standards they expect secondary teachers to cover in their ELA classrooms, even as they continually update and improve English standards. For instance, Tennessee has recently shifted from the TNCore standards to the newly organized Tennessee Academic Standards. Yet as reformers have worked to continually improve the ELA standards, the state has not achieved a clear way of communicating the foundational narrative behind their improvements. The story that helps to define reform is often caught up in complicated and controversial statistical student data. Most teachers associate educational reform with politics or publishers because we have not been granted an alternative. Because the TDOE does not present the clear link between the historical traditions of English criticism and today's educational movements, English teachers are denied what we love: the chance to discover relatable stories and feel connected to authors. As the story that acts as a backing for the current reforms is lost, teachers' chances to feel a part of that overarching story is also lost. The result of this is that many teachers simply do what they are told without feeling as if *how* they teach is connected to *what* they teach, when in fact it is. We are just missing the historical contexts and knowledge of literary criticism which shows us how to connect what we do to what we love.

Since educational reform is inherently data-driven, the narrative or story aspect of current ELA reform is easily lost—especially since it hinges on the relatively dated academic movement New Criticism which began in the late 1920s and early 1930s. Yet by understanding the historical context and narrative of the New Criticism movement—and the scholars associated with it—ELA teachers can have a firm grasp of their own history.

In Garrick Davis' work titled *Praising It New* (2008), he establishes that New Criticism was “*an academic movement*” because its effects within the college English classroom and academic journals were undeniably large (xxvi). Davis firmly believes that labeling New Criticism a “movement” is not a “romantic” notion at all. New Criticism was more than just what was going on at a scholarly or elite level at that time; the New Critic’s work *changed* what was going on at that time as their pedagogy became widely implemented in college classrooms (xxiv). ELA teachers in Tennessee can relate to this type of drastic change—and they should—because the change the New Critics brought to colleges in the 1930s is the same change that Common Core brought to the ELA classroom around 2013.

Because New Criticism is a movement that did not name itself or directly define itself, its definition is commonly oversimplified. Even the influential New Critic Allen Tate begins a 1951 essay by stating, “Since I am not able to *define* literary criticism...” (Tate 61). It is therefore helpful to define the word “critic” as associated with New Criticism. William Logan presents a workable definition of the task of a New Critic as he explains: “A good critic...must say something, not just about a particular work of art, but about the structures of the art itself; and to understand [the critic] you need to know the work criticized” (Logan x). Logan’s definition of “critic” parallels what high school teachers expect of students, as students are expected to stay on topic as they write about “the art itself.” It may also be useful to view “criticism” in terms of a task that involves literary-deciphering skills, not uncommon from the ELA skills currently taught by English teachers. In short, current ELA teachers are developing what one could label New Critics. To more fully understand the history of New Criticism, one must not only be familiar with the academic environment in which its creators taught and wrote, but also be acquainted with the work of its creators. The New Critical method may not sound groundbreaking to ELA

teachers today, but in the early 1900s, the New Critics' ideas on writing about literature were "new" (or at least different) than their contemporaries. As with any literary movement, the New Critics' reacted against their time period's way of viewing literature, by writing essays that expressed their views. And as with any movement, it did not happen overnight.

Davis tracks the origins of what would only later be labeled as New Criticism, to a collection of essays titled *The Sacred Wood*, written by T. S. Eliot in 1920. One of Eliot's main goals in this writing is to defend his stance that literature is worth writing about, not for the sake of historical or language study, but for the sake of English studies—a new idea at that time. Eliot explains that the role of any critic who writes about poetry should be to acknowledge "poetry as excellent words in excellent arrangement and excellent meter. That is what is called the technique of verse" (qtd. in Davis xii). Eliot's words may not seem novel in our current educational climate, but this is because New Critics, like Eliot, informed so much of our perspective on the subject. New Critics are the founders of the way we teach in the Common Core-era ELA classroom.

Davis helps paint Eliot's academic environment as he explains that just ten years prior, around 1910, "the study of English literature did not exist as an academic discipline at all, [and] literary works were considered primarily as source documents for the more important fields of philology [the study of language] and history (1). Eliot's essay "The Perfect Critic," published in *The Sacred Wood*, highlights why it was necessary to point out the "arrangement," "meter," and "technique of verse" as he defines literary criticism against emotionally based criticism. He writes that it was common for critics to express their "impressions" of a text instead of explaining the author's techniques which evoke such impressions. Eliot labels this technique "impressionistic criticism." With "impressionistic criticism" in mind, Eliot examines an essay by Arthur Symonds on *Anthony and Cleopatra* to conclude that it "is not an essay on a work of art or a work of

intellect; but that Mr. Symons is living through the play as one might live it through in the theatre; recounting, commenting” (8). Eliot finds that the essay fails to be of any significance to anyone who has already read or seen the play since it only summarizes the text.

Eliot’s criticism shares common language with current ELA models, as many teachers assign essays that go “beyond summary” of the text and work to explain it, but most attribute their pedagogy to “Bloom’s taxonomy” and not the ideas of T. S. Eliot, as lower level thinking involves “summarizing” and higher level thinking involves “explaining/analyzing” according to Bloom’s chart (Anderson). Eliot views Mr. Symons’ essay not as a work of “criticism” but as a work of personal, creative writing (9). Eliot concludes the essay by establishing three major ideas associated with New Criticism: “bad criticism... is nothing but an expression of emotion,” “the ‘historical’ and the ‘philosophical’ critics had better be called historians and philosophers quite simply,” and “the critic and the creative artist should frequently be the same person” (14-15). His influence would live on through the work of other New Critics as (1) emotional responses were avoided, (2) a focus on what a text says about itself instead of its place in history or about philosophy was maintained, and (3) many of the New Critics were, themselves, authors *and* critics. When Eliot published these ideas, he was creating a foundation for others (like Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren) who took these ideas into the classroom, which made the ideas common practice.

Allen Tate’s essay “Miss Emily and the Bibliographer” (1940) also helps us picture the early 20th-century educational environment from which New Criticism sprang. He paints the scene of a college classroom where an English professor tells his class “there must be no literary criticism. Anybody can write that” because only “historical criticism” was acceptable to scholars (39). In other words, it was not necessarily scholarly to be a critic. In academic writing, scholars

merely collected facts about the text, its author, or its environment. This method of instruction was prevalent because it was how the leading professors of that time were taught to view literature. Tate explains his past generation's view of criticism was that "the [text] expresses its place and time, or the author's personality, but if the scholar goes further and says anything about the work, he is expressing himself," which is not academic (43). Ironically T. S. Eliot also condemned this sentimentality, but where Eliot means to avoid emotional responses by focusing on the text, others focused on a text's historical context. Tate's fear was that students earning a Masters of English degree could not "discuss the literary object in terms of its specific form; all that he [could] do is to give you its history or tell you how he feels about it" (44). This fear is comparable to ELA teacher's fears today since state ELA exams do not test the history of a text or a student's opinion of it; they test a student's ability to explain or criticize it. As Tate supported an objective way to write about the value of a text (45), the same objective means are now used to rank student's abilities to use the methods.

John Crowe Ransom asks that English educators create "intelligent standards of criticism" so that "the students of the future must be permitted to study literature, and not merely about literature," within "Criticism, Inc." (1938) (50 and 51). He even calls out literature professors of being "learned but not critical men" (50). Ransom's ideas mirror Eliot's; he defines criticism as focusing on the text by neither summarizing nor reflecting, nor by focusing on the text's historical, linguistic, or moral context (57-58).

With his goal of widespread objective standards and critical thinking, it is easy to connect his call for college reform to Tennessee's recent education reforms. Nationwide objectives and critical thinking were two major selling points for the Common Core. Ransom entitled his essay "Criticism, Inc." because he knew that he was creating a "whole enterprise... [to be] taken in

hand by professionals” (50). College classrooms would soon be under his “enterprise,” since Tennessee ELA teachers are now the “professionals” who teach his methods—whether we know it or not. Even the TDOE mandated ELA exams are graded according to New Critical values—whether their mandators know it or not.

It is important to note that before the Common Core movement in ELA education, the New Critical way to view a text had been present in higher education for eighty years; but for the New Critics, they were creating an acceptable method to approach literature because it was not taught at all—not yet. Their primary goal was not to create better thinkers as much as it was to defend their claims that literature was *worth* thinking about. The New Critics defended what educators now take for granted. They created a way for students to use literature to think critically, and they defined the structures ELA teachers use to communicate about literature. A Cleanth Brooks biographer, Mark Winchell, provides an excellent example of how the radical nature of our thinking about literature has changed: in the early 1900s, most colleges placed *Moby Dick* not in the literary section of their library, but in their Cetology (the study of whales) section (Winchell 241). At that time there was no set criteria for literature. The New Critics desired to create a method which distinguished literature that is worth studying.

New Critics created an objective way of viewing literature so that literature could be granted stand-alone value, regardless of its ties to history, author, or anything beyond its page. T.S. Eliot acknowledges the belief that well written criticism “creates” good literature, and that good literature also “creates” good criticism (15). With this creation of New Criticism, literature as a genre was undoubtedly strengthened because it was lifted up by critical pillars. New Criticism helped to define the “greatness” of literature, and subsequently these critics granted ELA educators new pedagogical tools. Tools that were first made to judge texts—in order to

expose their stand-alone strengths—were soon used to teach students how to read texts, which involved testing students according to their ability to use those tools—in order to prove the students’ strengths. Tennessee uses the same objective way of viewing literature to test whether students can articulate their ability to explain texts. Allen Tate explains that a failure to understand criticism results in “the failure to know what literature is,” but he also warns that when criticism overshadows the literature itself, the critic is dabbling in “critical idolatry” (Tate 65 and 70). This idea most certainly interests the ears of any English teacher that feels that testing is valued over content. Tate’s words help demonstrate the high regard in which New Critics held literature. These critics worked to create more than just a means to study literature—it shaped the discipline of literature studies as we know it today.

In the 1920s any New Critical approach to literature was isolated in academic journals. The academic movement began to affect education as the views began rooting beyond scholarly journals and into the English college classroom. In his study *Cleanth Brooks and the Rise of Modern Criticism* (1996), Mark Winchell tells the story of Cleanth Brooks’ role in helping New Criticism spread across English academia. Brooks and Warren met in 1924 as undergraduates at Vanderbilt University in Nashville, Tennessee. Throughout their academic careers, they collaborated on five textbooks and an anthology. They also founded literary journals (the *Kenyon* and the *Sewanee*) which published examples of their philosophy. They also taught near one another throughout much of their busy careers: Oxford in the 1930s, LSU from 1934 to 1942, and Yale from the 1950s until their retirement (Grimshaw). During this time period, writing textbooks was not a highly respected endeavor in academia (Grimshaw), but it was the success of their textbook *An Approach to Literature* (1936) that shaped the public face of New Criticism.

As a teacher, I realize it is often disheartening to see curriculum and textbooks that are clearly created by those who do not spend time inside the classroom, but this is not the case with Brooks and Warren. Winchell explains that as Brooks and his friend Robert Penn Warren were writing their name into literary history, by publishing articles and textbooks, they were making money by teaching (153). James Grimshaw collects the friend's correspondences in *Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren: A Literary Correspondence* (1998). In the article "Forty Years of 'Understanding Poetry,'" Brooks recalls:

Robert Penn Warren and I found ourselves in the mid-1930s teaching at the Louisiana State University. ... [and] each of us was teaching a section of the department's course in literary forms and types. Granted that Warren and I were young men excited by the new trends in literature...and granted that our heads were full of literary theory—drawn from the poetry and critical essays of T. S. Eliot [...] Our motive was to try to solve a serious practical problem. Our students, many of them bright enough and certainly amiable and charming enough, had no notion of how to read a literary text. Many of them approached a Shakespeare sonnet or Keats's 'Ode to a Nightingale' or Pope's *Rape of the Lock* much as they would approach an ad in a Sears-Roebuck catalogue or an editorial in the local newspaper. (qtd. in Grimshaw 3 and Winchell 153)

Their solution to this classroom dilemma was to create their own textbook. Brooks believed, "The available textbooks were of little help" (Winchell 153). He continues, "Warren... began composing a booklet to distribute to his section of the course. It was mostly on metrics, but he provided some remarks on imagery. He showed the booklet to me and invited comments" (qtd. in Grimshaw 3). This mimeographed, 126-page booklet was labeled the *Sophomore Poetry Manual* and was later edited into their first published textbook *An Approach to Literature*. The initial

purpose of their manual was to teach LSU English students “how to go about reading, what one looks for in reading, and how one judges the value of a work” (Grimshaw 5). They first implemented their manual into college classrooms during the spring semester of 1935 (Winchell 154).

Mark Winchell explains that *An Approach to Literature* (1936) contained primary texts—just like other textbooks common to that period—but what made it stand out was that “it also includes critical introductions that examine the various genres as analytically as an auto mechanic would examine the engine of a car” (155). The authors modeled New Criticism in these introductions by focusing on the textual features instead of solely on the author’s life or facts about the work’s popular reception. By 1939 most major textbook companies were trying to buy the copyright from the LSU Press, which proves the textbook’s popularity (155-56). It is Brooks’ approach to teaching, exemplified in his textbook and by his methodology, which remains attractive to today’s education reformers. Brooks believed that literature must be taught differently than from other subjects, such as foreign languages. In his essay “What Are English Teachers Teaching” he writes:

I think that [literature] might be taught nearly as well as football is taught. I am quite in earnest. The analogy is a fair one. In both cases, native ability will carry greatly from student to student, but good coaching is indispensable; and in both cases, a self-disciplined must be acquired in action. No player is developed by merely studying diagrams of plays chalked on the blackboard. But the average student of literature gets little or no practice in trying to evaluate literature for himself. He is condemned to a perpetual skull practice. (qtd. in Winchell 112)

Brooks found that for all his students knew about literature, they could not put what they knew into practice. His textbooks, which will be compared to CC methodology and further explained in Chapter Four, helped guide students toward these critical thinking skills.

The 1938 publication of *Understanding Poetry* would ultimately bring Brooks to teach at Yale in 1947 (250-251). Yale professors began using Brooks and Warren's textbook and methodology in a freshman seminar in 1938, and the textbook was a critical part of Yale's "revamped freshman program in 1940" (250). Winchell writes, "Although [Yale] did not adopt it themselves, they allowed younger men to make it the basis for undergraduate teaching in English" (251), which permitted the New Critical method to become ingrained in a new generation of future English professors. A New Critical approach offered Yale a new way to structure their outdated model, which had focused on only the "greats": Shakespeare, Carlyle, Ruskin, Tennyson, Browning, and Arnold (249). Winchell explains, "It was not unusual for an English major in the forties or fifties to encounter the new criticism by reading *Understanding Poetry* as a sophomore, [and] progress to the more sophisticated [New Criticism] in the *Kenyon* and *Sewanee*" (Winchell 173). John Crowe Ransom's 1939 review stated that it was the "first textbook of its kind" (Grimshaw 4), and John Michael Walsh writes that *Understanding Poetry* "revolutionized the way poetry is taught in this country" (qtd. in Grimshaw 4). Walsh explains that Brooks and Warren's textbook "stresses the importance of an inductive approach that concentrates on the works themselves and attends to the system of relationships among the parts within each work" (qtd. in Grimshaw 4). *Understanding Poetry* helped to expand the literary canon to include American authors such as Edgar Allan Poe, Emily Dickinson, Walt Whitman, T. S. Eliot, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and Allen Tate. By its third edition (1960) it included Robert Frost, Robinson Jeffers, Ezra Pound, Herman Melville, and Wallace Stevens. The editor's wide

variety of authors allowed more student the chance to become acquainted with contemporary styles of poetry.

From T.S. Eliot's theoretical basis to Brooks and Warren's classroom influence, and with academic support through scholars like Allen Tate and John Crowe Ransom, New Criticism established itself as a leading way to write about literature at the collegiate level. With this history of how New Criticism came to shape America's collegiate English classrooms firmly established, Chapter Three will provide a history of the CC movement. It will be apparent that the educational reform's environment, its public reception, and its values mirror the culture of the early 20th century that necessitated New Criticism. TDOE's search for a better English education guided teacher's toward New Critical methods, which followed academia's footsteps from 80 years before.

CHAPTER 3

A HISTORY OF HIGH SCHOOL ELA REFORM

If any high school ELA teacher wonders about the relevance of literary criticism in the classroom, Stephen Bloore's words from 1934 might help illuminate its importance: "Good literary criticism is good thinking about books" (qtd. in Thomas 53). This simple yet significant statement is reminiscent of Allen Tate's thoughts from "Is Literary Criticism Possible?" In the essay, Tate asks the rhetorical question, "Can a given work...be 'taught' in such a way as to make it understood, without criticism?" (65). Tate desires to show that criticism is being done in the classroom as long as a text is assigned to read; the most pressing question that remains is who is doing the criticism, the teacher or the student?

In *Critical Encounters in Secondary English* (2015), Deborah Appleman, professor of educational studies at Carlton College, expresses ideas that are similar to Tate's. She demonstrates that although criticism is often only associated with college English courses, high school ELA teachers can use these methods effectively in their classrooms too. More importantly, she uses criticism to tackle what she views as a major problem: teachers often perform the interpretation and criticism of the text, leaving students responsible for only reading the text (6-7). Because high school student expectations have been raised, her concern echoes professor Allen Tate's words from the 1950s. In "Is Literary Criticism Possible?" Tate wonders, "Shall the instructor...set before the class his own 'evaluations'? He will do so at the risk of disseminating a hierarchy that he may not have intended to create, and thus may be aborted, or at least stultified, the student's own reading" (66). It is clear that English educators' concern about their student's ability to interpret a text has not changed over time. In 1934, educator Stephen Bloore wrote that "The question of the value of a particular piece of literature will always be highly personal...its

consideration by the students, however will lead, not necessarily to some set standards of value in literature, but to a knowledge of what others have found valuable and of why they have judged it to be so” (qtd. in Thomas 53). Bloore knew that a teachers’ framing of a text could overshadow a student’s critical thinking about that text. Through years and levels of education, the English teacher’s challenge remains the same: how does an instructor help students to independently discover a meaning within the text?

While Tate is mainly concerned that students will “parrot” the “insights” and “evaluations” that they do not truly understand (66), Appleman’s worry is that students will acknowledge only the “privileged” interpretation that their teacher chooses for them (6-7). P. L. Thomas, whose article will be referred to closely later in this chapter, points out that the critical method teachers ask their students to use when deciphering a text will be the method that the student assumes is the only “correct” method—unless it is explicitly labeled “a” method instead of “the” method (Thomas 55). Appleman explains that as a young teacher—who taught her students to describe their personal responses to the text—she did not define the type of criticism they were performing: Reader-Response. She writes that she was teaching using a method “that was never articulated” (34-35). Yet as she continued to teach, Appleman found it imperative to “name the parts” of what was done in her classroom; her students now associated “close readings” to New Criticism and emotional reading to Reader-Response.

One critic that is closely associated with opposing New Criticism and supporting Reader-Response is Louise Rosenblatt. Critic Jeanne Connell explains that New Criticism’s “text-based approach [...] privileges the expertise of [the new] critics,” (Connell 400) whereas, “Rosenblatt’s transactional theory of reading stresses the interconnectedness of reader and text in the process of constructing meaning (Connell 395). Instead of focusing primarily on “the text itself,” Rosenblatt

believes that the meaning of a text is constructed “between” the text and the reader. Connell adds that “While Rosenblatt and New Critics share a common interest in restoring literature as art, they differ significantly on how to achieve this goal” (400). Ultimately, Rosenblatt believed that the New Critics placed too much emphasis on the text, and the New Critics believed that Reader-Response theory placed too much emphasis on the reader.

Appleman’s desire to present her classes critical perspectives—that they can differentiate—in order to interpret a work, parallels the New Critic’s wish for students to share a common and articulable way to write about a text. Both educators’ techniques present students with a means to clearly express the foundational techniques behind their work. She explains, “I had been withholding from the high school students themselves the power of being able to name what it was they were doing” (35). She even evokes *Wizard of Oz* imagery as she describes how it felt to “draw back the curtain” for her students. If it is important for students to know exactly what they are doing—and it is—how much more important for the teachers to know the same about the methods with which they teach? With Chapter Two’s history of New Critical pedagogy in mind, it is an important task to connect New Criticism to what has recently been going on in the ELA classrooms across Tennessee, with the implementation of Common Core inspired standards. The same empowerment can be granted to teachers that Appleman granted her students—the empowerment that comes from the ability to name what we are doing.

To help provide a backing to the Common Core/TNCore movement that took place in the United States around 2010, it is essential to first look at the reform movements that came before it. In Diana Ravitch’s work *The Death and Life of the Great American School System* (2010), she tracks modern school reform starting around the time of the publication of the influential *A Nation at Risk* (1983) [ANAR], written by the National Commission of Excellence in Education.

Ravitch's work explains that although educational reports are often overlooked, the popularity of *ANAR* was created by its appeal to common citizens. She writes that "all roads eventually lead back to [this] major report" (22). Ravitch also describes the prevalent culture of public education that led up to *ANAR*. She makes it clear that "no [teacher] who lived in [the 1960s and 1970s] will forget the proliferation of experiments and movements in the nation's schools" (23). This comment will strike a chord with any Tennessee teacher who taught during the recent transition to TNCore standards, who know what wide spreading effects reforms can create. Ravitch notes that *ANAR* was the government's response to a 1975 *New York Times* report titled "College Entry Test Scores Drop Sharply," which stated that SAT scores "had fallen steadily for over a decade" (23). Significantly the article found that "less thoughtful and critical reading" was taking place in the high school classroom, and that "careful writing has apparently about gone out of style" (qtd. in Ravitch 23). It is important to notice how similar these comments are to that of Brooks and Warren, who essentially saw the same deficiencies in reading occurred in their classrooms at LSU 65 years prior.

The *A Nation at Risk* study discovered similar information to the *New York Times* findings. SAT scores had declined from 1963 to 1983, fewer students scored highly on the SAT, and colleges were having to offer more remedial courses (Ravitch 25). Ravitch explains that the popularity of *A Nation at Risk* was that "its argument and recommendations made sense to nonspecialists. People who were not educators could understand its message" (24-25). This made it easy for the popular media to cover the "crisis in education." As an example of the document's tone and language choice, *ANAR* begins by stating:

The educational foundations of our society are presently being eroded by a rising tide of mediocrity that threatens our very future as a nation and a people. What was unimaginable

a generation ago has begun to occur—others are matching and surpassing our educational attainments...been committing an act of unthinking, unilateral educational disarmament.

(qtd. in Ravitch 24)

Through clear and emotional language, the government's education report was able to gain the public's attention. Because "the federal government is prohibited by law from imposing any curriculum on states or school districts," what *ANAR* developed as a solution to this "educational disarmament" was voluntary standards and curriculum (Ravitch 7). The government's commission proposed that the study of high school ELA should:

equip graduates to: (a) comprehend, interpret, evaluate, and use what they read; (b) write well-organized, effective papers; (c) listen effectively and discuss ideas intelligently; and (d) know our literary heritage and how it enhances imagination and ethical understanding, and how it relates to the customs, ideas, and values of today's life and culture. (qtd. in Ravitch 26)

Ravitch finds that states' plans to "craft genuine curriculum standards in many subjects" lost all momentum when states had trouble creating standards for the subject of history. Creators simply could not agree on what or whose history should be taught, so, according to the author, "education leaders retreated into the relative safety of standardized testing of basic skills...a poor substitute for a full-fledged program of curriculum and assessments" (22-23). Brooks and Warren were able to create their own private English "standards" and "curriculum," and their good relationship with Yale spread their pedagogy. Yet making a set of standards and curriculum in such a public space proved to be much more difficult.

In P. L. Thomas' article "The Rise of New Criticism" (2012), he helps to describe the ELA classroom environment before *ANAR* was published to help show what specifically the

commission was reacting against. As Thomas researches pre-*ANAR* ELA classroom practices, he tracks how New Criticism began to influence America's public education system. He finds that before *ANAR*'s publication, America's schools were absorbed in Reader Response theory. Although Louise Rosenblatt championed Reader Response theory, T. S. Eliot and the New Critics referred to it as "impressionism." After *ANAR*'s publication, ELA reformers commonly implemented more New Critical techniques. The suggestions within *ANAR* were similar to New Criticism techniques because they were both reacting to the practice of Reader Response. Allen Tate believed that "a detailed description of my emotional state on reading certain works has little to do with indicating to an interested reader what the work is and how parts of it are related" (88). Similarly, in 1946, Bertha Handlan blamed secondary schools' failures on the lack of objective reading process. Handlan wrote, "Free reading is unguided reading" (Thomas 53).

Thomas writes that as he searched through articles from the *English Journal*—a scholarly journal which focuses on high school education—that were written during the first half of the 20th century, "The field of literary criticism and the pedagogy for teaching textual analysis to students were intense[ly] debate[d]" (53). He notes that although the journal included much "argument and thought" and "debate" about the topic, New Criticism had ultimately failed to reach the high school classroom (Thomas 53). New Criticism was stuck at the college level. It has not yet "trickled down." It took *ANAR* to speed New Critical pedagogy into the high school classroom.

Thomas similarly cites Blake and Lund, who shared their 1986 reaction to the post-*A Nation at Risk* culture: "It seems to us that the most powerful influence on teaching literature has been the new criticism...of Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren" (qtd. in Thomas 52). Blake and Lund continue: "If we read a poem as a new critic, we are implicitly guided by assumptions like these: interpretation means discovering the objective meaning of a piece...responding

objectively...., not to the biography of the writer or to the cultural or social history of the time” (qtd. in Thomas 52). The “unguided reading” that Bertha Handlan had criticized in 1946 quickly found its guide in New Criticism after the findings of *A Nation at Risk* were published.

Thomas’s began teaching secondary education in 1984, and in 2010 he believed that New Criticism had “an increased influence” because of “a New Criticism norm within the Advanced Placement Literature and Composition courses and exam[,] as well as the rise of technical approaches to literature driven by standards, texting, and accountability” (Thomas 52). Because New Critical techniques are objective, New Criticism is easily testable. The author acknowledges that New Criticism’s objectivity lends itself to “text-based” questions and “selected-response assessments” (52). Yet Thomas believes, just like Appleman, that telling students to follow a script without calling the script “New Criticism” is “narrow and dishonest” (56). Yet to tell students “this is how a New Critic would unfold this poem,” this is how a Feminist would approach the poem, or this is the Reader-Response technique, “is quite a different and more thoughtful thing—a critical thing” (56). And “critical” in more than just a literary sense, but critical to a student’s ability to learn different ways to think for him/her self.

Brian White, author of the article “John Dewey, the Common Core, and the Teaching of English,” makes connections from Common Core author David Coleman, to standardized testing, and finds Coleman’s influence to be rooted in New Criticism (White 17). Coleman is referred to as one of Common Core’s “most visible advocates” and “most prominent and articulate promoters,” since Coleman spoke about what education should look like “with the core in mind” (Smith 10). Rabinowitz and Bancroft write that his ideas about text-based instruction are “the dominant force in middle- and high-school literature classrooms” (6). White explains that it is Coleman’s philosophy for instructors to ask questions that focus on students’ knowledge of the

text, avoiding “questions that could lead students to connect with anything beyond the words on the page” (17-18), including the text’s background, personal memories, opinions, critiques, or personal reactions—much like Wimsatt and Beardsley’s intentional and affective fallacy, which will be highlighted in Chapter Five. Citing Rabinowitz and Bancroft, who attribute the CCI’s foundation directly to New Criticism, White continues:

Rabinowitz and Bancroft...argue that ‘New Critical dogmas,’ perhaps especially ‘the independence of the text’ from the reader, ‘seem to provide a solid foundation for the [CCI]. Built upon that New Critical foundation, ‘the scaffolding of the Common Core provides clear ground rules about what questions to ask and what answers to credit.’

(White 17)

White further explains, “[Coleman’s] opinion is that asking questions about readers’ lives and experiences distracts them from the difficult work of understanding literature” (18). Coleman has been presented multiple stand-out awards for his education activism, including being named one of *Time* magazines most influential people in 2013 (White 12). Due to his success, CCI opponent and author Michael Smith writes that the public should “worry about the undue influence of [this] single individual” on America’s education system (10). White also importantly notes that Coleman is “the president of the College Board, the organization that develops and oversees influential, standardized examinations such as the SAT and Advanced Placement tests” (12). With this connection in mind, the New Critic’s influence can be seen as reaching beyond the CCI and enveloping the entirety of the public education’s standardized testing culture. Rabinowitz and Bancroft write that “standardized testing seems to drive our educational decisions. The scaffolding of the Common Core provides clear ground rules about what questions to ask and what answers to credit” (7). Rabinowitz and Bancroft suggest that standardized questions

“provide what the testing agencies require,” which is a right and wrong answer (7). This type of questioning, based on a New Critical reading of a text, is at the heart of CCI pedagogy and high-stakes tests.

White points out that non-textually-based questions are difficult to assess, “for the answers given to genuine [life experience-based] questions about literary texts are stubbornly resistant to standardization” (18). The author suggests that “[t]his difficulty may explain, at least in part, Coleman’s insistence upon text-based questions” (White 18). Thomas Newkirk’s “Speaking Back to the Core” also connects the CCI to standardized testing as he writes: “The Common Core State Standards are joined at the hip to standardized tests, not surprising because both the College Board and the ACT had such a big role in their creation” (4). Newkirk also connects the CCI’s main influence back to New Criticism: “The central message in [CCI] guidelines is that the focus should be on “the text itself”—echoing the injunctions of New Criticism during the early and mid-1900s. The text should be understood in ‘its own terms’” (3). When referring to the CCI’s focus on text-based questions, Smith echoes these sentiments: “Not one of the standards, not one, asks students to consider the relationship between the text and lived experience, whether it’s the reader’s or the broader context in which we live, learn, and read” (36). The ideas that influence David Coleman’s work not only connect him back to New Criticism, but they also leave a trail to connect the CCI to standardized testing—a fact that is hidden, from many educators, in a cloud of ambiguity. The specific skills taught in preparation for state-mandated tests also have real direct links to high-stakes tests like the SAT.

When Tennessee implemented Common Core around 2010, workshops were held across the states. The overall purpose of these workshops was to model Common Core methods for the teachers and to expose them to how students would be tested in the near future. One major

question that the workshops did not address was who and where Common Core ideas came from. The Common Core Initiative focused on *why* its reforms were necessary, but they did not frame their workshops in a way that answered *where* the “initiative” started or got its ideas. To help explain the environment of that time, this study will refer to questionnaires completed by Tennessee teachers who led or attended TNCore trainings. Although Tennessee switched from Common Core standards to the Tennessee Academic Standards in 2017, it is critical to study how the Common Core Initiative presented itself because their standards directly shaped Tennessee’s current standards—an argument demonstrated in the Introduction of this study.

Fourteen English teachers from northeast Tennessee, many of whom have led TNCore professional development, voluntarily answered a questionnaire for this study. The study represents six different school systems and schools. The questionnaire asked them to recall how their school system informed them about the transition to Common Core. (Each of these documents is included in the appendices.) Their descriptions are vital because no matter how the Tennessee Department of Education (TDOE) intended for Common Core techniques to look in the classroom, it is teachers’ understanding of the methods that determine how students learn. In the questionnaires, as teachers explain how they learned about Common Core, they also define their interpretation of what Common Core looks like in the classroom.

Teachers answered some questions on the questionnaire similarly, but in other areas, they expressed radically differing perspectives—even teachers within the same schools. A majority of the teachers mention that they had access to multi-day trainings at the district level, led by instructors trained at the state level. Nearly all of the teachers associate a “rigorous” or “close reading” of the text as a defining feature of Common Core. When comparing all their answers, it is apparent that the trainings focused on three major areas: explaining what Common Core should

look like in the classroom, explaining how “successfully” other states had already implemented the standards, and explaining how data backs up the techniques.

When comparing the teachers’ responses, the discovery that stands out the most is the way teachers interpret questions about Common Core’s “history” and “creation.” Justin Calhoun writes, “The ‘history’ behind CC was discussed at length,” as presenters explained, “‘this is where we were, this is where [we] need to go, and this is why’” (Calhoun). He equates students’ testing “data” to history. David Strickland writes that the creators of the ACT test were also responsible for creating the Common Core standards (Strickland). He correctly associates David Coleman as being a developer of both curricula. For both these teachers, Common Core’s creation and history only went back as far as their old expectations. TNcore workshop leaders only presented the Common Core method as a means which would improve the older instruction techniques. Data and other contemporary tests overshadowed how far TNCore’s ideas can be traced back.

In my survey, only Tim Davis was presented information that linked Common Core’s ideals to New Criticism—and his knowledge did not come from state training. His school system, Bristol City Schools, directed him towards a video series entitled *Engage: New York*. By viewing a series of videos, Davis learned what Common Core is linked to historically. Davis writes,

Engage New York links the 1960s NEW CRITICISM movement with what should be happening in the English classroom. Essentially, this approach means that the only thing that matters is the text itself—the words on the page. No ‘outside knowledge’ should be cast onto the text. This approach creates independent readers who need no ‘preteaching.’

(Davis)

Because teachers like Mr. Davis were presented the history of New Criticism and Common Core at the same time—and because Common Core brought more rigorous techniques to the high

school classroom—he describes TNCore as a “dramatic shift” and “radical departure” from previous standards (Davis).

Teachers’ various descriptions about whether Common Core used “new” or “old” ideas provide insight into how teachers’ prior experiences define whether they perceived Common Core to be a radical shift away from old expectations. A few teachers mention that the Common Core standards were old ideas that were repackaged in a more effective way while others admit that the techniques were new to them. Erin Renfro, a librarian at a Tennessee high school, wondered “why we hadn’t been doing things this way” all along (Renfro). Justin Calhoun notes that his trainer repeated that Common Core tactics were “like what we did in college” (Calhoun). Because Calhoun’s trainer gave him a link back to his college experience—which was absolutely linked to New Criticism—Calhoun indirectly associated Common Core with New Criticism, but like Appleman and Thomas believe, he did not have the chance to give it its proper name.

The Common Core Initiative creates their own script which relies on New Critical terms and approaches. Yet by denying the criticism its name, CC creators allow teachers to fall into the same trap of providing students with a narrow way to analyze literature—by making the Core way the only way. Mid-century critic David Daiches writes: “If the student does not learn that such devices are means to achieve a communicative effect [...] then he has learned only to be a pedant [an exact rule follower]” (qtd. in Thomas 55). As dramatic as this idea seems, one can more easily imagine the average high school teacher stating:

This specific way of reading literature was created over 80 years ago because professors believed it better explained why literature is great. It is referred to as *New Criticism* because it was different from how scholars wrote about literature at that time. They believed the author’s life, our lives, or a certain time period doesn’t make a text great; they

believed the words made it great. This technique asks us to read the text and then write about the text, instead of getting off topic.

What we read has a certain history to it, but how we read does also. The history of how we read is clouded in academia and political reform, but it can be accessible to high school students and teachers alike.

CHAPTER 4

HOW THEY TAUGHT IS HOW WE TEACH

In Chapter Three of this study, both P. L. Thomas (2012) and Brian White (2016) cite the Advanced Placement (AP) Program's role in bringing New Criticism to the high school English classroom. Being knowledgeable about the Advanced Placement Program and the College Board, who organizes the program, is important because Advanced Placement classes not only mimic college expectations, but also foreshadow Common Core's expectations within the high school classroom. Without a doubt, it is because of the Advanced Placement Program's success that Common Core is shaped the way it is in terms of rigor and textual engagement. By comparing the main tenants of the New Criticism movement, the Advanced Placement Program, and the Common Core movement, their evident similarities will establish how New Criticism has made its progression from the collegiate level into America's high schools.

According to "A Brief History of the Advanced Placement Program" (2003), a document created by the College Board, the Advanced Placement Program was formed after World War II and was funded by the Ford Foundation. The program was a reaction against what the College Board labels as the widening "gap between secondary and higher education" (College), a finding that is eerily similar to the *A Nation at Risk* findings decades later. The Advanced Placement Program's goal was to "allow motivated students to work at the height of their capabilities" and create "college-level curricula and standards [...for] the high school level" (College). Its pilot program was launched in 1952 by the Committee on Admission with Advanced Standing, and by 1955 the College Board, which had been in existences since 1900 (Greenblatt ii), took over the administration of the program (College). During the 1960s the College Board focused on "teacher training" and has continued to expand the program through the decades (College).

One way that the College Board helps train current AP teachers is by providing workshops which provide guiding materials that are subject specific, much like the TNCore trainings discussed in Chapter Three of this study. The College Board prepares its AP teachers according to its training booklet *AP English Literature and Composition: Teacher's Guide* (2007). It is noteworthy to compare how the College Board presents its materials in comparison to the Common Core Initiative (CCI). While the Common Core Initiative does not present its own origins or historical foundations, the College Board's Advanced Placement Program does. This historical information helps validate not only what AP teachers teach, but how they teach, as their methods have clear connections to their content's origin. The document, which represents the College Board's goals, even has a specific author attached to it: Ellen Greenblatt, who writes a personal introduction to the booklet (xiii). Presenting information through a specific author gives the College Board a personal touch that Tennessee never attempted in its TNCore literature. As the TNCore documents seem to be written by a disembodied organization, the way in which the College Board clearly identifies its authors implicitly helps teachers engage with the material.

Near the beginning of the *Teacher's Guide* (2007), Greenblatt not only provides a brief statement about the College Board's history, but she also provides a section titled "Overview: Past, Present, Future." The overview is written by Heather Murray, an English professor, and it allows the reader to clearly connect the creation of the Advanced Placement Test to some of the same topics that this thesis has spent time connecting to the Common Core Initiative, such as "reader response [...] and debates over 'theory in the classroom'" (Murray 1). Heather Murray presents the Advanced Placement Program alongside the story of how our ancestors have studied English. She shows, for example, how different generations of literary scholars have studied Shakespeare. Yet this insightful information is only available to Advanced Placement English

teachers, which, again, leaves the common high school English teacher without the knowledge of the role they play within the grand scheme of how the subject of English has been taught and studied historically.

Significantly, within the Advanced Placement teacher's guide, Murray explicitly refers to New Criticism on three separate occasions. She first describes New Criticism in relation to other critical approaches as she presents how analytical "approaches [have] evolve[d] and shift[ed] over time" (Murray 1). She defines the New Critical approach by writing, "The seemingly more objective 'new' criticism was reinforced by demands for measurable educational results in the postwar period. ([An example is] *Ironic tensions in the sonnets*)" (1). Still, in her narrow designation, Murray associates New Criticism only to how it was interpreted by educators who used the methods to rank students instead of for its original intent—another example of Allen Tate's "critical idolatry."

The teacher's guide includes different forms of criticism in its preliminary chapter because the College Board suggests that Advanced Placement English teachers introduce students to different methods of reading texts throughout the school year. For example, during the poetry unit, the College Board advises teachers to explain Reader Response method as well as New Criticism. Within the poetry unit, Greenblatt explains that New Criticism highlights "the significance of the text" (49). And later in the poetry unit, the College Board suggests that students read a text through multiple "critical lenses," including New Criticism (50). With even this simple understanding of different literary criticisms—including New Criticism—Advanced Placement English teachers are capable of providing students with various ways of interpreting texts and also providing a rationale for why the different literary criticisms exist. Both teacher and student are able to recognize that popular literary criticisms are products of the time in which they

were formed—each reacting against the one that came before it. This information allows students to recognize why different ways of viewing texts exist at all. Understanding the differences in literary criticism also allows students to comprehend that choosing a method has less to do with a method that is “right” or “wrong” and more to do with a method that is the most applicable. As Appleman suggested in Chapter Three of this study, without the ability to label literary methods, students are not able to differentiate between them in order to use the one that is most beneficial to their writing. Even though Advanced Placement English exams do not explicitly ask students to use New Critical methods to examine a text, it is still helpful for students to recognize that an analysis that forgoes summary to focus on *how* the text contains meaning is indeed literary criticism.

A more recent description of the English Advance Placement course is presented by the College Board in a 2014 document entitled “English Literature and Composition: Course Description” (“English”). Instead of focusing on how an instructor should set up a course, this document primarily explains how the students are tested in order to earn credit for the course. The exam consists of one hour of multiple choice questions—questions that are objective because of their New Critical grounding—and two hours of essay writing. All of the multiple choice, of course, is directly related to the text, and all of the essay questions, too, are directly related to texts that the student has read during the course. One example essay prompt tells students the following: “In a well-written essay, identify the ‘spiritual reassessment or moral reconciliation’ evident in the ending [of a chosen text] and explain its significance in the work as a whole” (The College 34). The prompts focus on “the work as a whole” is clearly influenced by New Criticism’s concern with the unity of a text and the overarching effect it creates. Another example question states, “Write an essay in which you analyze the sources of the conflict and explain how

the conflict contributes to the meaning of the work. / Avoid plot summary” (35). Following their New Critical heritage, the College Board classifies a literary analysis or criticism as going beyond summary and even beyond the effect (conflict in this case) in order to ask the student what the text “means.” The College Board clearly bases the English Advance Placement exam on the New Critical tenants of unity and objectivity.

In the first edition of *Understanding Poetry* (1938), Brooks and Warren explain why they feel their textbook is necessary, and their text’s necessity is remarkably similar to how the College Board justifies its expectations. Brooks and Warren begin *Understanding Poetry* with an introduction titled “Letter to the Teacher.” In this introduction, the authors cite student exercises from other textbooks to show how those exercises do not point the student towards an understanding of the poem’s meaning. The “poor” exercises point to the poems’ effects—like beauty or sadness—yet Brooks and Warren demonstrate how their textbook gives students a way to recognize and explain how a poem achieves these effects. To help students understand the meaning of a poem, and write an analysis of it, the authors include examples of criticism after some of their included poems. One prime example from their text is Keats’ “Ode to a Nightingale” (409-415). Their example analysis mainly focuses on the poem itself, through the use of textual evidence, but it also alludes to Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* and *Measure for Measure* and even references a glossary to define the term “stream of consciousness” (412-13). The authors’ example analysis sums up how they believe literary analysis should be demonstrated: a critic’s attention should primarily (not necessarily exclusively) focus on the text itself.

Brooks and Warren state, in their introduction to *Understanding Poetry*, that a quality analysis should go beyond a didactic interpretation or the use of paraphrase, biographical information, or historical information. They label all these techniques as being “necessary as a

preliminary step [...] to clarify interpretation,” but not the ultimate purpose of an analysis (Brooks and Warren iv). These New Critics suggest that in order for history to be understood, if that is one’s goal, the document must be understood on its own terms, by being studied in isolation. In other words, they argue that a historical document must be fully understood before it can be related or compared.

Along with presenting students with example analyses, the authors also develop their own exercise questions to help guide students towards a poem’s specific meaning. These sets of questions follow a majority of the poems in the textbook. In their “Letter to the Teacher,” Brooks and Warren write that if poetry and literature are worth studying—which they are—then they should be studied as poetry and literature. The authors reveal that the greatness of poetry and literature cannot be explained successfully by looking solely at what the text teaches the reader about ethics, about morality, about its author, or about its time-period (Brooks and Warren iv). Brooks and Warren demonstrate that poetry has unique characteristics (such as imagery, repetition, contrast, etc.) that can be analyzed, and these characteristics can be used to explain how certain effects are achieved (such as sadness or beauty). Asking students to write about how these characteristics help achieve an effect, for the New Critics, allowed the students to more fully understand the overall meaning of the text. The Advanced Placement English Exam uses the same ideology to examine whether or not a student can express how the meaning is created in a text.

A good example of how the New Critics use questions to help guide students toward meaning, without relying on summary or their emotional responses, is presented after Robert Frost’s “The Death of the Hired Man” within the *Understanding Poetry* textbook. The “exercise” asks students to:

Write an analysis of [Frost’s] poem involving the following points:

1. Definition of the characters of the speakers.
2. The use made of realistic detail and effect of ordinary conversation which the poet uses.
3. The way in which the poet presents the pathos [pity]. (Brooks et al [1952] 90)

The questions work to guide students by asking them to perform specific tasks within their analysis. It is important to note how each task is scaffolded to build upon the prior question. In order for students to understand the poem, they must first differentiate between speakers, which is complicated. Frost does not always introduce the speakers involved in the poem's back-and-forth dialogue. In a sense, the questions present the "effect" of the poem and ask students to explain how the effects (realism, ordinary conversation, and pity) are achieved. This type of question clearly influenced the College Board's approach to creating questions for the Advanced Placement English Exam. Both focus on using textual evidence to identify how a specific characteristic is unified throughout the text.

An Approach to Literature (1936), written by Brooks, Purser, and Warren, is arranged similarly to *Understanding Poetry* (1938). *An Approach to Literature* is made up of mostly short texts, both poetry and prose, and the authors provide example analysis for the texts as well as questions and exercises. The third edition of the text expands to include dramas, essays, biographies, poetry, and prose. After each piece of prose, the authors include a "discussion" of the text. This discussion is a short analysis of the work, which again models how they expect students to write. The authors ground each major point in textual evidence. The discussion is followed by the exercises, which asks the students to, again, go beyond the summary of the text to explain how literary effects are achieved (Brooks et al [1952] 240). In the text's preface the authors write that they believed their "approach" to be "simple" and their goal "to try to bring into the

classroom some of the insights that had been provided by criticism [...] and to set these insights [...] in some context of literary and social history” (Brooks et al [1952] v). The authors’ tone suggests that their overall goal is to not only help students understand individual texts, but also help them understand what characteristics poetry or literature may have that allow them to be analyzed in depth.

In the fifth edition of *An Approach to Literature*, the authors even compare “Humpty Dumpty” to a Herman Melville poem (Brooks et al [1975] page 328). Their goal does not seem to be to narrow-down a definition of poetry. These New Critics desire to look at poetry objectively—not to rate or simply judge—but instead to define foundational elements that consistently create exceptional writing. It is the exam creators like the College Board—which also administers the SAT exam—that use New Criticism’s objective methods to test students. This national testing has somewhat unjustly become associated with the New Critics, who did less testing of the students as they did testing of the text. Sadly, New Criticism’s most lasting legacy—for those that know of its existence—is the large part its methods have played in ranking students by how well they can analyze a text. Whether we recognize it or not, the current focus on testing allows texts to remain on pedestals out of the analytical reach of most students. Reformers deny the average student and the average teacher alternative literary methods to analyze texts. Teachers and students only analyze the way in which they are directly tested—such as the TNCore way. TNCore, which is this chapter’s next focus, becomes the “end all be all” method for most teachers and students alike.

The way in which the Tennessee Department of Education (TDOE) packaged TNCore and presented it at workshops does not allow for teachers to compare their newest expectations to how literature has been studied across the centuries. While the College Board helps teachers connect

their students to literary history, TNCore makes no attempt to cite the methodology it asks its teachers to use. TNCore’s New Critical heritage is mostly unknown to workshop leaders. Neither the Common Core Initiative nor TNCore’s official websites reference literary criticism. Even the “how to” literature that TNCore uses to educate ELA teachers mentions nothing about literary criticism. Because the curriculum passes from the Common Core Initiative to individual states—to adapt as Tennessee has—much of *who* creates the documents and *who* influenced them is hidden from the teachers’ and even the administrators’ view. This lack of clarity creates a “do as you’re told” atmosphere, which is an already prevalent feeling among teachers who have taught through a number of education reforms. High school teacher Kelly Kendrick expresses this feeling as she writes, “It’s a shame that we in education cannot stick to anything [for] more than a couple of years” (Kendrick). Because the Tennessee Department of Education does not provide its teachers with a more historical view of *how* they are teaching, teachers are only grounded in the reforms they have experienced. Teachers are not equipped to see that we are asking students to perform the same tasks that New Critics created 80 years ago.

TNCore standards place supreme importance on teachers creating textually based questions to lead their pupils toward textually based answers. Reformers designed this technique to help remove any bias based on the students’ past experiences with that topic. The designers also aim to limit the influence of students’ interests or lack of interests in the text by promoting text-based questions. This type of questioning redirects the students’ thoughts to what the text says instead of their opinion of the text. Although the Tennessee Department of Education has shifted from the “official” Common Core Standards, because of how closely the current Tennessee standards align to Common Core standards, it is still relevant to view Common Core’s explanation of their standard’s goals—since Tennessee’s standards are based on the Common

Core standards. The Common Core Initiative explains: “Frequently, forms of writing in K–12 have drawn heavily from student experience and opinion, which alone will not prepare students for the demands of college, career, and life” (Key Shifts). The purpose of this philosophy allows neither the students’ emotions nor their prior knowledge to overshadow their skill of interpretation. The Common Core Initiative continues: “Rather than asking students questions they can answer solely from their prior knowledge and experience, the standards call for students to answer questions that depend on their having read the texts with care” (Key Shifts). By reading the texts “with care,” the students are asked to step out of their own experience and into the new experience provided by the text. Stepping into this experience requires the student to know the skills stated in the Tennessee state English Language Arts standards.

This narrow, text-centered-only ideology parallels the writings of New Critics William Wimsatt and Monroe Beardsley. In “The Affective Fallacy” these authors observed that a poem could be lost in both “intentional fallacy,” the study of a poem based on the history of its author, and “affective fallacy,” the reader’s emotional response to the poem (Wimsatt and Beardsley). Similarly, New Critic Cleanth Brooks discourages subjective, personal readings in *The Well Wrought Urn*. He writes about connecting pieces of text to the “whole text,” which encourages students to break away from their reliance upon emotion or past experience by using context. Brooks makes an illustration: if students read lines of poetry are read in isolation from their surrounding text, this places a reliance on the reader’s “general reference,” which will create an overall misunderstanding of the poem (Brooks 225). Common Core ideology states that the main goal for English Language Arts is for students to have the ability by the 12th grade to learn independently from complex texts (National). Viewed through this lens, the “affective fallacy” and “intentional fallacy” inhibit students’ chances to truly practice the skill of independently

learning from a text. With this philosophy in mind, it is no wonder that Common Core Initiative, like the New Critics before it, favors text-centered paths for their students to achieve critical thinking skills.

The TNCore document entitled “ELA 11th-12th Grades: Materials Participation Packet #1” (July 2013) provides example questions that show just how closely TNCore’s expectations resemble Warren and Brooks’ expectations in *Understanding Poetry* (1938). This booklet was presented to teachers in a summer workshop and allowed teachers to learn how students would be tested in the future. The TNCore packet, like the New Critic’s textbook, provides example questions for each example text. Each set of questions is scaffolded, similar to the Frost example provided earlier in this chapter, to help the student identify how the overall meaning of the text is created by the author. One example asks the students to read Carrie Catt’s speech “The Crisis” (1916) and answer three sets of questions. The first asks the students to “determine two central ideas,” the second asks the students to find “details...that develop each...central idea,” and the third asks the students “how [the central ideas] interact and build on one another” (TNCore 9). These questions’ similarities to New Critical textbooks, like *Understanding Poetry* (1938) or *An Approach to Literature* (1936), make it easy for any knowledgeable person to also compare TNCore curriculum to the College Board’s Advance Placement English exams. All three sets of questions—whether early 20th-century, AP, or TNCore based—involve rigor that asks the students to decipher what characteristics unify a text.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION: THERE CAN BE AN ELEPHANT IN THE CLASSROOM

I would like this study to provide Tennessee’s secondary English teachers with a new perspective from which to view statewide education reforms—an encouraging perspective. As a teacher, I fully realize that reforms come and go quickly, and from inside of the classroom, they do not appear to relate or build upon one another. More than likely, they may even appear to contradict one another to teachers who have taught long enough to experience multiple educational shifts. But by tracking New Criticism from prestigious colleges, to the AP classroom, and into every classroom, I hope fellow teachers recognize how the ever-changing English reforms unite under the banner of New Criticism. To an extent, the reforms have been New Criticism all along in disguise, and New Criticism would be the elephant in the room, if only Tennessee’s English teachers knew its name.

Within the questionnaire, even experienced AP teachers Tim Davis and Kelly Kendrick did not associate TNCore directly to the AP curriculum that they teach. In their answers, Davis and Kendrick seem to relate the changes only to the previous “regular” high school curriculum (Davis and Kendrick). Teacher Justin Calhoun comes close as he recalls that during TNCore training, trainers repeated the phrase “like what we did in college” (Calhoun). What appears to remain unnoticed—or at least unmentioned—is that the TNCore curriculum asks high school students not to perform “like” college students, but “as” college students. TNCore places an emphasis on rigor within the high school English classroom, and because of this emphasis, high school teachers expect achievement that is comparable to the 1930’s collegiate classroom. The TNCore curriculum looks more similar to Brooks and Warren’s undergraduate expectations or Advanced Placement materials than the older high school standards. The common denominator between what is happening at all levels of high school is the New Critical methodology. While it

would be easy to attribute New Criticism's prevalence to its objectivity (which easily aligns itself with standardized testing), New Criticism also provides teachers and students an entire method by which to decipher a text.

In secondary education, New Criticism is the unnamed reform that has slowly but surely gained momentum. With each Education reform that has taken place since the mid-20th century, the high school classroom has become more similar to the New Critical college classroom. It simply took half a century for the collegiate pedagogy to situate itself in the high school classroom. A majority of high school English reform is New Critically based. This perspective may seem like an oversimplification, but if one focuses on what happens inside of classrooms, and if one takes a teacher's view instead of a politician's view, then the pedagogy that takes place within English classrooms has only gained more of a resemblance to New Criticism over the past half-century.

Common Core pedagogy informs teachers how to "unpack" the state's standards and writing prompts. The aim of this process is for teachers to acknowledge the difference between the "skill" and the "knowledge" that they are expected to teach. The CC method then advised the teacher to teach the "unpacking process" to the students, so that students can use the skill to succeed in breaking apart writing prompts ("Knowledge and Skills"). The term "unpack" was first used by New Critics in a similar fashion—defined as the "interpretation through close reading of the words on the page," according to *How to Interpret Literature* (2015) (Parker 25). If a teacher follows this Common Core expectation, "unpacking" is not only the first step to their teaching, but also a primary skill that they teach. When I taught my students how to "unpack" a state prompt, being young, I remember refusing to use the word "unpack." To me, this jargon represented another fad that would come and go. I had no idea that generations of English

scholars had “unpacked.” I did not trust the reformers because although I was not sure who they were, I was sure they were not teachers anymore. If I had known that New Critics “unpack,” I would have told my class why. But I did not know “why” then. Without the knowledge of how New Criticism has affected our classroom routines, I could not answer the students’ ever-present question: “Why are we doing this?” Now I could give them an answer that not only answers their questions, but also does not repeat “because it is on the test.” English students know that there has to be a real reason for our actions as teachers, and with even a simple understanding of New Criticism, we can know too.

New Criticism is a relatively easy critical method for English teachers to grasp because more than likely most of us are already New Critics. We just do not recognize it. Our guidelines for choosing texts to teach are even based on New Critical ideology. According to the Common Core Initiative, choosing a quality text helps students reach their end goals, which are their understanding of state objectives and standards. An example of a twelfth grade standard for English Language Arts, written as an example of the peak of students’ expected understanding, states: “Analyze what a text says explicitly and draw inferences; support an interpretation of a text by citing and synthesizing relevant textual evidence from multiple sources” (“11th-12th Grade” 2). This standard asks that students master the skill of comprehending an isolated text while also asking them to make inferences about what may be unclear in that text. This thought process parallels the New Critic ideas of Beardsley and Wimsatt in “The Intentional Fallacy” (1954). They write that if “the poem is not adequate evidence, and a critic must go outside the poem,” then “the poet did not succeed” (1375). If a student can perform this Common Core standard, then they can also grasp the idea of a text’s “internal” and “external evidence” as coined by the New Critics (1381). The New Critical term “internal evidence” holds the same meaning as the

Common Core Initiative's term "text dependent question," which is commonly recognized as a foundational piece of CC ideology ("Key Shifts").

The emphasis on "internal" and "external" evidence promotes that teachers should choose "complex texts" that are worthy of instruction (National). The Common Core Initiative bases its pedagogy around high-quality texts "compatible with the learning demands set out in the standards," which require texts to be critiqued without "external evidence" ("Frequently"). Critic P. L. Thomas tracks this idea back to the New Critics of 1943, who "established the criteria for 'literary' fiction—as that contrasts with 'popular' fiction" (53). The New Critics, too, were selective in choosing appropriate texts to develop students' critical-thinking skills. The Common Core Initiative asks that teachers recognize a point that Beardsley and Wimsatt make in their *New Criticism*: a successful poem is a text that can be criticized without the aid of "external evidence" ("The Intentional" 1381). Although Beardsley and Wimsatt are on the extreme end of *New Criticism*, their work is helpful when a teacher is questioning a class to find out whether they have read an assignment.

Viewing education reform as a succession of reforms which undo one another is understandably discouraging, and it is easy to become jaded by the "system." My goal in this research is to provide a New Critical perspective of secondary education reform in order to inform interested English teachers about the role they play within the grand scheme of English reform. High school reform is not isolated, and does not act much differently, than scholarly critical movements. *New Criticism* can be described as the backbone for the literary movements that came after it, for each must begin with a text first and apply a perspective afterward. Since it is high school teachers' goal to prepare our students for college, it makes sense that students have a grasp on the New Critical foundations from which the major -isms stem. Whether students are

writing a feminist or Marxist analysis, they must first read the text they are analyzing. It is a natural progression that in order to prepare students for college, teachers must teach New Critical skills.

One might argue that no matter the label, the skills are being taught—whether the skills are associated with CCI, TNCore, or New Criticism. But I believe that students and teachers will benefit from knowing who truly is telling them what to do. I, for one, may never trust large corporate figureheads like David Coleman. Yet the English major in me is always curious to learn more about the literary critics who helped shape my occupation. By not associating our work with the New Critics we take them for granted, and in doing so we take what we love for granted. The New Critics helped shape the English class as we know it, by fighting for the literature that we love and showing that it is worthy of study. My fear is that if we forget that teaching literature has not always be deemed necessary, we may lose the ability to defend its necessity in the future. By helping each other name New Criticism as the elephant in the classroom, we can keep the subject of English relevant whenever the public questions its relevancy in public education.

Knowledge about the history of the collegiate and high school English classroom is important because it helps teachers and students be aware that our subject has not always been available to study. This historical backing helps aid our arguments for the empowerment of young minds through literature. It is imperative that collegiate Education and English departments as well as teacher-led professional developments use my suggested method when further educating their teachers.

Literature is a safe and fertile ground for students to practice critical thinking skills. As a teacher, it is helpful for me to recognize that the New Critics desired a “better” literary analysis in order to combat emotionally based arguments. Since the Tennessee Academic Standards asks

students to cite evidence and present ideas based on what the text states, students must work to understand and evaluate others' ideas. The ability to (1) understand what a text represents and (2) judge that text based on rational standards allows students to practice forming opinions based on what they know about the text instead of what they feel or have heard about it. If students truly master this skill when viewing a text, then it is likely that this skill may transfer into their lives outside the classroom. This practice indirectly helps students develop a process to discover empathy—a means of understanding instead of quickly and emotionally judging. Highly emotional rhetoric, which is so prevalent in today's media-filled culture, is eerily similar to T. S. Eliot's "impressionism." It is all too easy for student to repeat and present a vague opinions, but the English classroom presents a better way for students to critique how they feel by recognizing the structures that media uses to persuade them. ELA allows students to practice discerning not just how they feel but why they feel—whether in the classroom or outside of it.

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APPENDIX: QUESTIONNAIRES

Blank Questionnaire

Berry, Allison. Personal questionnaire. 1 March 2018.

Burke, Megan. Personal questionnaire. 12 January 2018.

Calhoun, Justin. Personal questionnaire. 25 January 2018.

Davis, Tim. Personal questionnaire. 23 January 2018.

Griffin, Pam. Personal questionnaire. 26 February 2018.

Howell, Cory. Personal questionnaire. 25 January 2018.

Hurley, Anna. Personal questionnaire. 12 March 2018.

Kendrick, Kelly. Personal questionnaire. 25 January 2018.

Martin, Shelley. Personal questionnaire. 23 January 2018.

Payne, Andrea. Personal questionnaire. 8 March 2018.

Renfro, Erin. Personal questionnaire. 26 January 2018.

Story, Mariel. Personal questionnaire. 16 January 2018.

Strickland, David. Personal questionnaire. 6 February 2018.

West, Misty. Personal questionnaire. 2 March 2018.

Questions for Middle School/High School Teachers

1. How did the State of TN primarily inform teachers that it was implementing the Common Core/TN Core standards?
2. What trainings were provided for teachers to learn about the Common Core/TNCore's expectations?
3. How did the trainings inform teachers about how Common Core/TN Core was created?
4. What types of example lessons did the leaders model for those attending trainings?
5. How did the leaders at trainings express how the State trained them to lead the training?
6. How does Common Core/TNCore present its origins/history to teachers?
7. Did the leaders at trainings present a history of the Common Core/TNCore movement? If so, how?
8. How did the presenters explain who created or started the Common Core/TNCore movement?
9. How did leaders at trainings or school administration explain why the shift to Common Core/TNCore was made away from the "old" TN state standards?
10. Did any of the leaders at training connect the Common Core movement to No Child Left Behind or *A Nation at Risk*?
11. Did the leaders at training present the Common Core/TNCore expectations as new ideas?
12. Did any of the leaders at training connect the Common Core values to "old" TN State Standards? If so, which ones?

Allison Berry

Kingsport City Schools

1. How did the State of TN primarily inform teachers that it was implementing the Common Core/TN Core standards?

Through emails and administrator notification.

2. What trainings were provided for teachers to learn about the Common Core/TNCore's expectations?

We did have multiple Common Core trainings; we went through specific trainings as a school and a department. We even had two English teachers who were Common Core coaches and traveled to other districts to train their teachers.

3. How did the trainings inform teachers about how Common Core/TN Core was created?

I think we basically understood that it was David Coleman who the originator.

4. What types of example lessons did the leaders model for those attending trainings?

We did receive the standards and a literal workbook of activities/lessons (roughly around 5)--they came in a bound book.

5. How did the leaders at trainings express how the State trained them to lead the training?

They went through a process four times a year; our common core coaches (the two in my English department) received an extra planning period to supposedly help design lessons. That was a sore spot for many of my colleagues.

6. How does Common Core/TNCore present its origins/history to teachers?

I just read on their website, honestly. We were inundated with so many presentations that I had to research the information on my own.

7. Did the leaders at trainings present a history of the Common Core/TNCore movement? If so, how?

Not necessarily. Like I said, I actually just looked up this information myself. We did watch a series of videos during one training (in the summer), however; David Coleman actually speaks on these videos.

8. How did the presenters explain who created or started the Common Core/TNCore movement? I think I stated this earlier? Is this a repeat question? It feels repetitive.

9. How did leaders at trainings or school administration explain why the shift to Common Core/TNCore was made away from the "old" TN state standards?

This would give our kids a springboard for scholarship opportunities. Since we had so many students who were doing well academically and, since we wanted to help everyone, we needed to focus on national standards and make sure that all students could move and be secure in the material he/she was taught. Tennessee was also integral in the Race to the Top initiative, so...

10. Did any of the leaders at training connect the Common Core movement to No Child Left Behind or *A Nation at Risk*?

No, but I have read many facets of the No Child Left Behind policy; I didn't read A Nation at Risk in full, but it sure did cloud the public's judgment on our education. Gosh. There was nothing good that came out of that report. It clouded the media and everyone else. We weren't in a "race" with others--we were simply padding the pockets of the wealthy and creating international commerce. Sorry--I'm just cynical about this.

11. Did the leaders at training present the Common Core/TNCore expectations as new ideas?

Yes

12. Did any of the leaders at training connect the Common Core values to "old" TN State Standards? If so, which ones?

Not specifically. No. They didn't.

Megan Burke

Sullivan County Schools

1. How did the State of TN primarily inform teachers that it was implementing the Common Core/TN Core standards?

I was in my last year of grad school when Common Core was implemented, so I am unsure how the State informed teachers.

2. What trainings were provided for teachers to learn about the Common Core/TNCore's expectations?

Several teachers that I know went to a training in Kingsport during the summer. Those teachers were given tasks that were "Common Core-ish" and were asked to complete the task. The teachers were able to take home several books with Common Core material in them.

3. How did the trainings inform teachers about how Common Core/TN Core was created?

I am not sure about 'created', but I do know that the trainings allowed teachers to see "tasks" or problems that were Common Core.

4. What types of example lessons did the leaders model for those attending trainings?

I remember teachers saying that the prompts looked a lot different than they had before. Also, I think that this is when we started hearing the phrase "textual evidence" a lot.

5. How did the leaders at trainings express how the State trained them to lead the training?

I am not sure.

6. How does Common Core/TNCore present its origins/history to teachers?

That is a good question. I have always been curious about the origins of Common Core, but no one has ever told me about it and I have never looked it up myself.

7. Did the leaders at trainings present a history of the Common Core/TNCore movement?

If so, how? I didn't attend the training...only heard stories.

8. How did the presenters explain who created or started the Common Core/TNCore movement?

9. How did leaders at trainings or school administration explain why the shift to Common Core/TNCore was made away from the "old" TN state standards?

This would have been my first year teaching, and I always remember administrators being confused about this topic. It was like it was a secret or the simple fact that they just didn't know.

10. Did any of the leaders at training connect the Common Core movement to No Child Left Behind or A Nation at Risk?

Not that I am aware of

11. Did the leaders at training present the Common Core/TNCore expectations as new ideas?
Everyone...I mean everyone was talking about COMMON CORE AND THIS BRAND NEW THEORY! When I had my interview for my teaching position, the HR guy asked me, "What are your thoughts on Common Core?" I was happy that I had "practiced" that answer.

12. Did any of the leaders at training connect the Common Core values to "old" TN State Standards? If so, which ones?

I am not sure.

Justin Calhoun

Sullivan County Schools

1. How did the State of TN primarily inform teachers that it was implementing the Common Core/TN Core standards?

We received information regarding CC from our Secondary Supervisor at Central Office. Sullivan County adopted CC two years ahead of the required start date. PD offerings in the district were held prior to any state trainings.

2. What trainings were provided for teachers to learn about the Common Core/TNCore's expectations?

At the district level: level 5 teachers and our instructional coach provide multiple opportunities to look at the standards and the basics behind CC (i.e., annotating text, fewer standards with deeper attention, etc.). This occurred on both the district and school level. At the state level: we attended a three day PD at Dobyys-Bennet high school with training provided by certified CC teachers.

3. How did the trainings inform teachers about how Common Core/TN Core was created?

We were provided explanation and rationale of the standards. The "history" behind CC was discussed at length.

4. What types of example lessons did the leaders model for those attending trainings?

We viewed both videos of exemplary lessons as well as created our own in addition to reading multiple examples.

5. How did the leaders at trainings express how the State trained them to lead the training?

To my recollection that was never discussed.

6. How does Common Core/TNCore present its origins/history to teachers?

A "this is where we were, this is where need to go, and this is why" approach. Data was a part of those presentations.

7. Did the leaders at trainings present a history of the Common Core/TNCore movement? If so, how?

From a TN perspective, yes. We discussed the old SPI standards compared to CC. A crosswalk was provided. We viewed multiple videos from Kevin Huffman, then Education Commissioner, explaining the "why" of CC.

8. How did the presenters explain who created or started the Common Core/TNCore movement?

No. Just a brief history of what CC was and how it differed from our current standards.

9. How did leaders at trainings or school administration explain why the shift to Common Core/TNCore was made away from the "old" TN state standards?

It was all about the text. Students need experience reading text deeply and interacting with that text more deeply as well. The phrase heard over and over was “an inch wide but a mile deep.”

10. Did any of the leaders at training connect the Common Core movement to No Child Left Behind or *A Nation at Risk*?

I’m sure it was in a manual but I don’t remember anything explicitly stated.

11. Did the leaders at training present the Common Core/TNCore expectations as new ideas?

No, just better ways to provide instruction. It was “like what we did in college”- a phrase often repeated by trainers.

12. Did any of the leaders at training connect the Common Core values to “old” TN State Standards? If so, which ones?

Just in terms of a crosswalk. They showed us how CC embodied the idea of the old standards in a new and better way.

Tim Davis
Bristol City Schools

1. How did the State of TN primarily inform teachers that it was implementing the Common Core/TN Core standards?

I remember being directed to a series of videos called Engage: New York. These videos discussed the art of close reading.

2. What trainings were provided for teachers to learn about the Common Core/TNCore's expectations?

We worked through some sample lessons, specifically a lesson in close reading an excerpt from Annie Dillard (I think it's from A PILGRIM AT TINKER CREEK????)

3. How did the trainings inform teachers about how Common Core/TN Core was created?

"Rigor" was the buzzword during this training. We had to increase the cerebral activity of our students. Also, I remember learning about "lexile" measuring to determine the appropriateness of a text.

4. What types of example lessons did the leaders model for those attending trainings?

The Annie Dillard lesson was memorable. If you need it, please let me know!

5. How did the leaders at trainings express how the State trained them to lead the training?

I do not recall.

6. How does Common Core/TNCore present its origins/history to teachers?

Engage New York links the 1960s NEW CRITICISM movement with what should be happening in the English classroom. Essentially, this approach means that the only thing that matters is the text itself—the words on the page. No "outside knowledge" should be cast onto the text. This approach creates independent readers who need no "preteaching."

7. Did the leaders at trainings present a history of the Common Core/TNCore movement? If so, how?

No.

8. How did the presenters explain who created or started the Common Core/TNCore movement?

My English curriculum specialist expressed how the State did not embrace the CC because of the social studies mentioning the FIVE PILLARS of the Islam. CC was then viewed as a part of a "liberal agenda."

9. How did leaders at trainings or school administration explain why the shift to Common Core/TNCore was made away from the "old" TN state standards?

Rigor. It was explained that the old TN standards were not rigorous enough. Specifically, the old standards did not create an environment that fostered independent readers.

10. Did any of the leaders at training connect the Common Core movement to No Child Left Behind or *A Nation at Risk*?

No.

11. Did the leaders at training present the Common Core/TNCore expectations as new ideas?

Yes. It was cast as a dramatic shift.

12. Did any of the leaders at training connect the Common Core values to “old” TN State Standards? If so, which ones?

No. It seemed like a radical departure.

Pam Griffin

Hawkins County Schools

1. How did the State of TN primarily inform teachers that it was implementing the Common Core/TN Core standards?

We were told at a faculty meeting in the spring. We signed up for a three day Common Core Workshop at Niswonger Center in Greeneville. (State dept.)

2. What trainings were provided for teachers to learn about the Common Core/TNCore's expectations?

See above! District level trainings were provided.

3. How did the trainings inform teachers about how Common Core/TN Core was created?

I just remember the state telling us that it was extremely successful in other states and showed us data to prove it.

4. What types of example lessons did the leaders model for those attending trainings?

We did 2 days of lessons. We did cooperative learning activities with teachers from our school and other counties. We were given a topic and then told to create a lesson using the Common Core standards. Then we presented to the group and were critiqued.

5. How did the leaders at trainings express how the State trained them to lead the training?

They talked about the training they had received in Nashville.

6. How does Common Core/TNCore present its origins/history to teachers?

I don't know.

7. Did the leaders at trainings present a history of the Common Core/TNCore movement? If so, how?

Yes! They talked about how it had been implemented in other states and the how they began the process in the state of Tennessee.

8. How did the presenters explain who created or started the Common Core/TNCore movement?

Seth, You are asking me the same question over and over. See above!

9. How did leaders at trainings or school administration explain why the shift to Common Core/TNCore was made away from the "old" TN state standards?

The Tn. Legislative body felt we needed a more rigorous curriculum for students to be able to compete nationally and globally. There was a huge push to incorporate problem solving in groups and writing using text evidence.

10. Did any of the leaders at training connect the Common Core movement to No Child Left Behind or *A Nation at Risk*?

No Child Left Behind had just be revised. I don't remember ever hearing about A Nation at Risk.

11. Did the leaders at training present the Common Core/TNCore expectations as new ideas?

I assumed they did.

12. Did any of the leaders at training connect the Common Core values to “old” TN State Standards? If so, which ones?

I am sure that most of the standards connect to the old ones. I do not know which ones. Since I am Special Education, my primary focus now is reading intervention using researched based programs. I am basically a reading teacher. I do not teach writing or even English. Just basic reading skills focusing on oral reading fluency and reading comprehension. We use Aimsweb Plus for bi-monthly progress monitoring. Everything is data based for intervention. In my opinion, it works. Students making lots of progress.

Cory Howell

Sullivan County Schools

1. How did the State of TN primarily inform teachers that it was implementing the Common Core/TN Core standards?

State officials in Nashville -> District Teacher Trainers -> School System Trainers (me for Sullivan Co.) -> The Schools we work in.

By the time we get the info, it's been watered down and by the time I give it to the school, it's been watered down and interpreted again. It's a little insane if you break it down. Why would you play a game of telephone with information that needs to be uniform across the state...?

They're currently called the TN Academic Standards. I'm attaching a zipped folder that I was given. These are the documents they gave to us when we did the training. We were trained by others who were trained by others so that WE could train others. The kicker is this: there is a game of "telephone" being played when it comes to giving the teachers these standards.

2. What trainings were provided for teachers to learn about the Common Core/TN Core's expectations?

When Common Core was first being implemented and trained in the school systems of Tennessee, I was in an undergraduate Education program at ETSU. We were trained in Common Core standards in multiple classes. However, the extent of this training was handled in an interesting way.

All of my professors in the program had at some time in their careers been in the public school system. The way many of these professors handled the implementation of the new standards was somewhat reserved. Not because the standards were in any way bad or confusing. It seemed more to be because of the cycles in which standards get changed and revised and thrown out and changed again.

One particular professor claimed that these are the standards of today, and by the time we finish our fifth or sixth year of teaching there will be new standards to replace these, and so on and so on. There seemed to be a jaded attitude when it came to the Common Core standards when being taught to teachers-in-training.

3. How did the trainings inform teachers about how Common Core/TN Core was created?

As far as depth goes with the origin of the Common Core standards, there was little discussion within my education courses. The "why" and/or "how" of the CCSS seemed to be of little importance and irrelevant to our learning of them. Aside from having a "uniform set of standards Nationwide to help students in an ever globalizing world," there was little to no focus on their purpose. Personally, I believe that when you understand where something comes from and its

intended purpose, you are better equipped to use them and incorporate them into your understanding of the world of education. "Why" we do things is arguably the most important factor involved with getting buy-in from a client, student, employee, etc. When the system fails to expound on the "why" of certain aspects of CCSS, it makes it difficult for one to buy-in.

4. What types of example lessons did the leaders model for those attending trainings?

The following questions I can't answer because I was not teaching then. I have based the above questions on my experience from the summer of 2016 and 2017, when I attended TNCore training.

5. How did the leaders at trainings express how the State trained them to lead the training?

6. How does Common Core/TNCore present its origins/history to teachers?

7. Did the leaders at trainings present a history of the Common Core/TNCore movement? If so, how?

8. How did the presenters explain who created or started the Common Core/TNCore movement?

9. How did leaders at trainings or school administration explain why the shift to Common Core/TNCore was made away from the "old" TN state standards?

10. Did any of the leaders at training connect the Common Core movement to No Child Left Behind or *A Nation at Risk*?

11. Did the leaders at training present the Common Core/TNCore expectations as new ideas?

12. Did any of the leaders at training connect the Common Core values to "old" TN State Standards? If so, which ones?

Anna Hurley

Elizabethton City Schools

1. How did the State of TN primarily inform teachers that it was implementing the Common Core/TN Core standards?

From what I recall, we were told through our own administrators and the news media.

2. What trainings were provided for teachers to learn about the Common Core/TNCore's expectations?

Teacher leaders had the opportunity to attend trainings to help with the transition – offering instructional strategies and such.

3. How did the trainings inform teachers about how Common Core/TN Core was created?

I don't recall that they spent a lot of time on that.

4. What types of example lessons did the leaders model for those attending trainings?

The lessons utilized very difficult texts, comparatively speaking, and encouraged teachers not to provide much background information on texts to aid students in comprehension.

5. How did the leaders at trainings express how the State trained them to lead the training?

I don't recall.

6. How does Common Core/TNCore present its origins/history to teachers?

At present, we understand that the origins of the standards don't have a great bearing on the current revised standards, so this isn't discussed.

7. Did the leaders at trainings present a history of the Common Core/TNCore movement? If so, how?

There was a presentation on the new standards as a "grass roots" movement.

8. How did the presenters explain who created or started the Common Core/TNCore movement?

It was presented that it was begun by educators and businessmen.

9. How did leaders at trainings or school administration explain why the shift to Common Core/TNCore was made away from the "old" TN state standards?

The new standards are supposed to require higher levels of thinking than the old ones.

10. Did any of the leaders at training connect the Common Core movement to No Child Left Behind or A Nation at Risk?

I don't recall.

11. Did the leaders at training present the Common Core/TNCore expectations as new ideas?

Yes.

12. Did any of the leaders at training connect the Common Core values to “old” TN State Standards?
If so, which ones?

Any connections were how some of the old standards could be integrated into the instruction of the new ones.

Kelly Kendrick

Sullivan County Schools

1. How did the State of TN primarily inform teachers that it was implementing the Common Core/TN Core standards?

To be honest I don't exactly remember. I do know that we implemented it early in Sullivan County. Jamie Corwin was our ELA person then. There was a team of teachers that presented Common Core to all Middle Schools and High Schools. I was on that team, but I am not sure if I applied or what.

2. What trainings were provided for teachers to learn about the Common Core/TNCore's expectations?

I think this ties into the presentations I mentioned above. It was like a big county roll-out. It seems that anything mentioned made its way back to Common Core.

3. How did the trainings inform teachers about how Common Core/TN Core was created?

I'm not sure about this other than it was being used in other places, specifically New York.

4. What types of example lessons did the leaders model for those attending trainings?

I feel like the most emphasis was placed on close reading. We talked a lot about this aspect of Common Core and that we were to read for deeper meaning, not simply read more literature to cram it in. Also a lot of emphasis on non-fiction selections.

5. How did the leaders at trainings express how the State trained them to lead the training?

I don't have an answer for this. Sorry.

6. How does Common Core/TNCore present its origins/history to teachers?

7. Did the leaders at trainings present a history of the Common Core/TNCore movement? If so, how?

Simply the fact that it was being implemented in many other states. And that eventually it would be a nationwide norm that would create a sameness in teaching from state to state.

8. How did the presenters explain who created or started the Common Core/TNCore movement?

9. How did leaders at trainings or school administration explain why the shift to Common Core/TNCore was made away from the "old" TN state standards?

Always presented as a needed and effectual shift. (Like all changes) And that if Common Core would be implemented for more than just a couple of years, great benefits would be seen.....

10. Did any of the leaders at training connect the Common Core movement to No Child Left Behind or *A Nation at Risk*?

I'm not sure. I've heard "No Child Left Behind" so often, I'm afraid I block it out sometimes.

11. Did the leaders at training present the Common Core/TNCore expectations as new ideas?

Not necessarily. They were presented as the elements we have been teaching, but they had been simplified and stream-lined. More effectual and more readily understandable. Tiered from grade to grade.

12. Did any of the leaders at training connect the Common Core values to "old" TN State Standards? If so, which ones?

More of a blanket comment that the "new" CCs were similar in nature to the check-list of standards but not as daunting...

I will add this: When Common Core was implemented, we were made to believe that this was it. This set of standards should last a while and eventually show awesome results. I think it's a shame that we in education cannot stick to anything more than a couple of years. No set of standards are going to perfectly guide every teacher to teach exactly what he or she should teach nor completely prepare every student. (I just felt that I should add this).

Shelley Martin

Sullivan County Schools

1. How did the State of TN primarily inform teachers that it was implementing the Common Core/TN Core standards?

In Sullivan County, we were informed through our Curriculum Coaches that we (the county) would be switching to Common Core a year before the state would be mandating it. We were ahead of the game, so to speak. I'm fairly certain only the ELA and Math teachers participated in this change.

2. What trainings were provided for teachers to learn about the Common Core/TNCore's expectations?

Several members from our ELA and Math departments attended 3-day trainings in the summer. We then went back to our departments and schools to share what we had learned.

3. How did the trainings inform teachers about how Common Core/TN Core was created?

I literally remember NOTHING about this; either nobody ever told us or I've just forgotten. I just accepted the new standards as they were...and, for the record, I appreciated the changes. The new standards were more reasonable than the old "SPI's".

4. What types of example lessons did the leaders model for those attending trainings?

This was my first introduction to "close reads"...it seems sad that I had never really done anything like that before. The trainers would demonstrate how to read, and re-read, and read again, and how to search for meaning in multiple layers. We then looked at a variety of culminating tasks that weren't always just multiple choice tests and quizzes.

5. How did the leaders at trainings express how the State trained them to lead the training?

Ummmm.....I've got nothing for ya on this one.

6. How does Common Core/TNCore present its origins/history to teachers?
See above

7. Did the leaders at trainings present a history of the Common Core/TNCore movement? If so, how?

Not really. I think I have vague memories of simply discussing how poor Tennessee students were scoring on literacy levels, and how it was no wonder they didn't read well since we were all just reading quickly and moving on to the next thing. Therefore, the state decided it was more important to practice reading more slowly and searching for meaning in different ways. That's all I can think of.

8. How did the presenters explain who created or started the Common Core/TNCore movement? *I do not remember!*

9. How did leaders at trainings or school administration explain why the shift to Common Core/TNCore was made away from the “old” TN state standards?
See #7...I can only really remember discussing poor literacy skills.

10. Did any of the leaders at training connect the Common Core movement to No Child Left Behind or *A Nation at Risk*?

I don't think so.

11. Did the leaders at training present the Common Core/TNCore expectations as new ideas?
Yes, and I definitely saw them as new ideas, at least new to me.

12. Did any of the leaders at training connect the Common Core values to “old” TN State Standards? If so, which ones?
Nope. It was obvious that we were making a serious shift!

Andrea Payne

Elizabethton City Schools

1. How did the State of TN primarily inform teachers that it was implementing the Common Core/TN Core standards?

The standard publicity releases. . .newsletters, email updates, newspapers, etc. as I remember.

2. What trainings were provided for teachers to learn about the Common Core/TNCore's expectations?

There were state standards trainings in the summer (two to four days for a few summers in a row), but it was a situation where a school was asked to send one or two reps who would then train others in their system afterward. I believe attended two sessions two different summers, and another teacher attended one or two. (I never feel that this method of "train the trainers" is very effective.

3. How did the trainings inform teachers about how Common Core/TN Core was created?

It was mentioned; I think maybe a page or two of background in each manual of each training gave some information.

4. What types of example lessons did the leaders model for those attending trainings?

Nothing other than standard good teaching practices which good teachers already used. Most of the time, I feel personally insulted to be treated as if I don't know how to teach. I would think that if I didn't know good teaching practices, then I would not still be teaching.

5. How did the leaders at trainings express how the State trained them to lead the training?

Some had "drunk the kool-aid" and professed that this was amazing change, and some who had a more realistic view admitted that it was still just "good teaching," which doesn't change regardless of technology, popular culture, politics, reform, etc.

6. How does Common Core/TNCore present its origins/history to teachers?

Does it really ever do this?

7. Did the leaders at trainings present a history of the Common Core/TNCore movement? If so, how?

Very limited if at all.

8. How did the presenters explain who created or started the Common Core/TNCore movement? *I do not remember.*

9. How did leaders at trainings or school administration explain why the shift to Common Core/TNCore was made away from the "old" TN state standards?

“To Higher Order Thinking and Critical Skills” (insert “Hallelujah” chorus here) rather than foundational basic skills ---The problem is that some forget that students must master basic, foundational skills before moving upward to critical analysis, application, and evaluation. As a parent and as a teacher, I see this problem.

10. Did any of the leaders at training connect the Common Core movement to No Child Left Behind or *A Nation at Risk*?

Not really, but I am impressed that you referenced it here.

11. Did the leaders at training present the Common Core/TNCore expectations as new ideas?

Of course, every time someone reinvents the wheel with a hefty price tag, it is always presented as “new.”

12. Did any of the leaders at training connect the Common Core values to “old” TN State Standards? If so, which ones?

I do recall a professional development opportunity where we basically did a “sort” activity matching “old” to “new,” and I think that I did this more than once, both at a state training and at a district PD.

Erin Renfro

Sullivan County Schools

1. How did the State of TN primarily inform teachers that it was implementing the Common Core/TN Core standards?

From what I remember, groups of teachers from all districts went to Common Core training.

2. What trainings were provided for teachers to learn about the Common Core/TNCore's expectations?

I went to a training provided by the state during the summer before Common Core was implemented. We were then expected to share with our departments.

3. How did the trainings inform teachers about how Common Core/TN Core was created?

I do not remember them telling us about how Common Core was created. The trainings were more about what Common Core was and what it looked like in the classroom.

4. What types of example lessons did the leaders model for those attending trainings?

The examples that were modeled were about diving deep into text and showed students doing round table discussions. The teacher in these lessons was more of a facilitator. They scaffolded their questions and students led the discussions. They also modeled and had us do close reads.

5. How did the leaders at trainings express how the State trained them to lead the training?

I don't remember them telling us specifically how the state trained them, but I was aware that they went to training at the state level.

6. How does Common Core/TNCore present its origins/history to teachers? *I do not recall them diving into this subject either.*

7. Did the leaders at trainings present a history of the Common Core/TNCore movement? If so, how? *No. Not that I remember.*

8. How did the presenters explain who created or started the Common Core/TNCore movement? *I do not recall this either.*

9. How did leaders at trainings or school administration explain why the shift to Common Core/TNCore was made away from the "old" TN state standards?

They did cover this. There were so many standards in the "old" state standards and Common Core had much less. This allowed teachers to go deeper with each standard instead of cover so many standards so quickly.

10. Did any of the leaders at training connect the Common Core movement to No Child Left Behind or *A Nation at Risk*?

Not that I remember.

11. Did the leaders at training present the Common Core/TNCore expectations as new ideas?

I don't think that the leaders presented it as new ideas, but I remember thinking that they were. I was a fairly new teacher at the time of Common Core implementation. I do remember thinking that this was new and cutting edge and found myself wondering why we hadn't been doing things this way.

12. Did any of the leaders at training connect the Common Core values to "old" TN State Standards? If so, which ones?

I feel like I remember them talking about how in teaching Common Core we would still cover many of the old standards but just in a different way--like it wouldn't just be checked off of a list anymore, but covered while doing the close reading, writing and speaking etc.

Mariel Story

Bristol City Schools

1. How did the State of TN primarily inform teachers that it was implementing the Common Core/TN Core standards?

I primarily remember learning about it from administrators. The first I remember hearing of Common Core, we were also adopting new books, so the rep from the company explained some of the new standards as well.

2. What trainings were provided for teachers to learn about the Common Core/TNCore's expectations?

Some teachers in tested subjects were chosen to attend TNCore trainings. For ELA, we attended 2-day trainings for either 9-10 or 11-12 grade-bands. I think emails went out to teacher before this inviting them to apply to be teachers for this particular training.

3. How did the trainings inform teachers about how Common Core/TN Core was created?

I don't remember learning much about this at all—I remember learning more about what was expected of teachers and how we were going to be assessed. There was, of course, a buzz about the CommonCore, and then the TNCore was I guess a local reaction to eliminating “problem” areas of the Common Core? What this boiled down to was that TN had to construct its own curriculum rather than relying on the already developed PARCC assessment and associated materials.

4. What types of example lessons did the leaders model for those attending trainings?

These seemed pretty-in-depth close-readings and text-dependent questions of quality texts. It seemed to stress the “read about it, talk about it, write about it” progression of learning. The chosen texts were also paired with similarly themed texts. Teachers were provided with a full unit that served as an exemplar and then encouraged to make their own based off these models. But, this put a heavy burden of curriculum-development on the average teacher. Whereas a progression of curriculum used to be found through a textbook, now teachers had to make everything themselves.

5. How did the leaders at trainings express how the State trained them to lead the training?

I don't remember exactly. Just that they had been trained in a way that would perhaps model the kind of teaching we ourselves were expected to go back and use.

6. How does Common Core/TNCore present its origins/history to teachers?

I don't remember any training about this at all.

7. Did the leaders at trainings present a history of the Common Core/TNCore movement? If so, how?

Not that I remember.

8. How did the presenters explain who created or started the Common Core/TNCore movement?

I don't think they did.

9. How did leaders at trainings or school administration explain why the shift to Common Core/TNCore was made away from the “old” TN state standards?

I mainly heard that it was about quality over quantity—more in-depth readings rather than “coverage” of texts. Much fuss was made, as usual, about assessment.

10. Did any of the leaders at training connect the Common Core movement to No Child Left Behind or *A Nation at Risk*?

I thought the Common Core was linked to some large award of money that the state of TN had gained (maybe related to Bill Gates Foundation?) and that our continued ability to gain resources from the state was dependent on our adopting and accepting the new standards.

11. Did the leaders at training present the Common Core/TNCore expectations as new ideas? Probably?

12. Did any of the leaders at training connect the Common Core values to “old” TN State Standards? If so, which ones?

I guess the Common Core was supposed to encapsulate the essence of the “old” standards.

David Strickland
Bristol City Schools

1. How did the State of TN primarily inform teachers that it was implementing the Common Core/TN Core standards?

Via email.

2. What trainings were provided for teachers to learn about the Common Core/TNCore's expectations?

Actually, we had several trainings. If I recall correctly, I think we had at least three full days of training in the summer and several trainings throughout the school year.

3. How did the trainings inform teachers about how Common Core/TN Core was created?
Basically, again if I remember correctly, we were told that the CC standards were national and complied (created?) by ACT.

4. What types of example lessons did the leaders model for those attending trainings?

I cannot recall. That was several years ago.

5. How did the leaders at trainings express how the State trained them to lead the training?
Usually the leaders inform us that they were trained in an intensive multi-day training.

6. How does Common Core/TNCore present its origins/history to teachers?

I honestly don't have an answer to this question.

7. Did the leaders at trainings present a history of the Common Core/TNCore movement? If so, how?

No.

8. How did the presenters explain who created or started the Common Core/TNCore movement? *I do not recall.*

9. How did leaders at trainings or school administration explain why the shift to Common Core/TNCore was made away from the "old" TN state standards? The argument was made that *Tennessee needed to move to a more rigorous set of standards that would help us compete on a national level.*

10. Did any of the leaders at training connect the Common Core movement to No Child Left Behind or *A Nation at Risk*?

Not that I recall.

11. Did the leaders at training present the Common Core/TNCore expectations as new ideas?

If by "new" you mean "original" then the answer is no.

12. Did any of the leaders at training connect the Common Core values to “old” TN State Standards? If so, which ones?

Yes! They actually created a “map” that showed the correlations between the old and new standards. It was quite useful.

Misty West

Grainger County Schools

1. How did the State of TN primarily inform teachers that it was implementing the Common Core/TN Core standards?

From what I recall, my Administration told us, and I learned more about the change from the news. It wasn't until the year of implementation that the state gave us any materials or told us anything.

2. What trainings were provided for teachers to learn about the Common Core/TNCore's expectations?

We had required Common Core training at the local community college. This training was three days in its entirety. The only other training we had was about testing and Common Core.

3. How did the trainings inform teachers about how Common Core/TN Core was created?

I don't recall that being a part of our training. In fact, I had to do my own research in order to find out.

4. What types of example lessons did the leaders model for those attending trainings?

We had a lesson on Sojourner Truth's speech that the instructor modeled.

5. How did the leaders at trainings express how the State trained them to lead the training?

They were hired by a select process and attended their own week-long training.

6. How does Common Core/TNCore present its origins/history to teachers?

I have heard for years that a team of educators came up with the Common Core standards. That seems to be the running explanation.

7. Did the leaders at trainings present a history of the Common Core/TNCore movement? If so, how?

No

8. How did the presenters explain who created or started the Common Core/TNCore movement?

No

9. How did leaders at trainings or school administration explain why the shift to Common Core/TNCore was made away from the "old" TN state standards?

Yes, we were told that the TN standards were not rigorous enough.

10. Did any of the leaders at training connect the Common Core movement to No Child Left Behind or A Nation at Risk?

No

11. Did the leaders at training present the Common Core/TNCore expectations as new ideas?

No, they seemed to present everything as our same TN standards except with added rigor.

12. Did any of the leaders at training connect the Common Core values to “old” TN State Standards? If so, which ones?

Yes, I don't remember the exact ones, but they tried to connect as many as possible.

VITA

SETH GRINDSTAFF

- Education: 2018 MA English ETSU
2012 BA English Milligan College
- Teaching Experience: 2017-2018 ETSU Composition 1010 and 1020
2016-2017 ETSU CPA: Tutoring
2013-2016 Sullivan Central High School: 10th/11th grade English and
Creative Writing
2012-2013 Bulls Gap School: 7th grade ELA
2012 TN High School and Vance Jr High: Student Teaching
- Professional Experience: 2016-2017 ETSU English Department GA
2014-2016 Head Cross Country Coach
2013-2016 Assistant Track Coach
2015-2016 Key Club Sponsor
- Professional Development: 2018 Making Projects Manageable. ETSU
2017 Thesis Workshop. ETSU
2015 School Success Symposium. Greenville, TN
2015 Understanding TVAAS Data. Kingsport, TN
2014 School Success Symposium. Greenville, TN
2014 Demystifying Common Core. Greenville, TN
2013 Common Core Middle School ELA Training. Greenville, TN
- Presentations: 2018 “College Criticism’s Influence on TN ELA Standards” Unicoi,
TN (planned for June)
2017 SAMLA “Harold Bloom and the Anxiety of NASCAR” Atlanta,
GA
2017 TPA “The Nadsat Language” Johnson City, TN