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THE INSTRUCTIONAL DECISIONS OF ENGLISH/LANGUAGE ARTS
TEACHERS AND THEIR REFLECTIONS ON THOSE DECISIONS

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THE INSTRUCTIONAL DECISIONS OF ENGLISH/LANGUAGE ARTS
TEACHERS AND THEIR REFLECTIONS ON THOSE DECISIONS

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DEDICATION

My doctoral work is dedicated to my great-grandmother Ella Whitwell Bowman. She earned a teaching certificate and taught in a one-room schoolhouse in Oklahoma Territory while farming and raising four children. She was the first in our family to provide for her children to go to college. My grandfather was the first to earn a bachelor's degree and raised his daughter to not only earn her bachelor's degree, but to become the first to earn a master's degree. My mother continued the expectation of college for my sister and me. I am proud to be continuing the legacy of my family in the pursuit of higher education. Someone has to be the first.

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ABSTRACT

In the current climate of national and state level educational reform, teachers navigate an endless barrage of new ideas, mandates, reforms, curriculum, standards, evaluations, and expectations. Regardless of reform efforts and mandates, or perhaps because of them, teachers make decisions concerning what students need to know and be able to do, and frame experiences through which students learn. This case study explores the perceptions of three middle school language arts teachers as they reflect upon their curricular and instructional decisions. Through interviews over the course of eight weeks, a teacher belief survey, and application of a growth model protocol, this study explored the instructional decisions teachers made and their reflections on those decisions. Results of this study can inform reflective practice for administrators and teachers.

Chapter 1

Introduction

Background of the Study

I began teaching secondary English in 1986. At that time, my district had an articulation chart identifying skills for each grade level and whether or not that skill was introduced, mastered, or extended. There was no mention of state standards or assessments. Students took the Iowa Test of Basic Skills each year, but teachers never saw those scores. Teachers worked with grade level and departmental colleagues to design curriculum.

In the early 1990s, two sets of state standards were developed: one set for grades 6-8 and another set for grades 9-12. There was no grade level delineation until the state created criterion-referenced tests for grades 6, 7, and 8 and 10. At that time, separate documents were developed for each grade level. After fifteen years of teaching in the classroom, I had the opportunity to become a curriculum director part-time. I still taught half-day for two years. It was during those two years that I came to love working with teachers, creating curriculum, and implementing strategies. I became a full-time curriculum director in 2003.

Over the course of my career, I have watched the standards, assessments, materials, and battle over what should be taught in a language arts classroom change through local, state, and national reforms. National standards, state standards, local objectives, summative and formative assessment, instructional time, programmed instructional materials, whole language, phonics, writing instruction, handwriting instruction, banned books, professional learning communities, holistic grading,

standards based grading – the list of ideas to improve teaching and learning seem endless. Regardless of externally mandated reforms in education, teachers are the ones who ultimately determine what should be taught and what methods to use in their classrooms.

As a curriculum director, I work with more than 500 teachers. Sometimes my objective is to give them information so they can move forward with trying something new; other times I help them try a new strategy so they can expand their methods; often I simply support them to boost their confidence. Many of the teachers I work with are actively engaged in reflection about their curricular decisions and make frequent adjustments based on their perceptions of the effect of the actions on student learning. Shön (1987) found reflection as a key to instruction especially as outwardly imposed reforms in curriculum and assessments intrude into the day-to-day actions in the classroom. Reflective teachers who look at their own practices are able to make changes based on their own sense of what is needed.

Past reform efforts may have involved subtle suggestions, such as the Effective Schools movement, which provided research on common characteristics of schools where students were mastering the curriculum at a high rate (Effective Schools, 2015), giving teachers new instructional approaches to implement in their own school to raise achievement. However, current reforms are not benign in nature; they are mandated by legislative action with accountability for schools to show the mandates are being met.

Throughout the United States, the institution of public education is under intense national, state, and local scrutiny (Valli, 2007). The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965 required states to write standards and to create

assessments to meet those standards to receive federal funds. State adopted legislation requiring additional instructional mandates. However, in many states, standards are increasingly tied to high stakes assessments, which are tied to teacher evaluation. The state of Oklahoma has followed national reform efforts through legislation such as Achieving Classroom Excellence and the Reading Sufficiency Act, which have had immediate, consequential implications for public schools.

The Priority Academic Student Skills (PASS) has been the state curriculum framework since 1995. The assessment of the standards was developed in 1997 to comply with federal standards outlined in the reauthorization of ESEA commonly known as No Child Left Behind (NCLB), which mandated yearly testing in reading and math, grades 3-8.

While PASS standards drive assessments, other standards such as the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) standards, International Reading Association (IRA) standards, ACT College Readiness Benchmarks, and College Board guidelines for success in Advanced Placement (AP) are still in play and have implications for teachers in considering what will be taught in language arts classrooms. In my fourteen years as a curriculum director I have worked with many teachers to help navigate the increasingly complex web of standards. How can a teacher use PASS as a minimum standard while simultaneously adding layers of connection to NCTE, College Board, and AP?

In 2009, the National Association of Governors and the Council of Chief State School Officers teamed to form the Common Core State Standards (CCSS). Forty-six states legislatively adopted the CCSS and the national assessments to follow in 2010,

including Oklahoma. It became my work to help teachers learn the new standards, and to help them decide what would work and what needed to be tweaked; to help teachers make necessary changes in curriculum and instruction to accommodate the CCSS.

For the last several years, the introduction of CCSS has caused teachers throughout the nation to reevaluate the standards and assessments that drive their instruction. Although forty-six states initially adopted the CCSS, in 2013 the Oklahoma State School Board voted to reject the national assessments connected with CCSS and rename the standards the Oklahoma Academic Standards (OAS). These standards were posted on the Oklahoma State Department of Education website as if they were Oklahoma's new standards, yet they were the exact wording of the Common Core State Standards adopted in 2010.

In 2014, four state legislatures, including Oklahoma, repealed the CCSS (Academic Benchmarks, 2015) and called for educators to go back to the drawing board and design new state standards and assessments. Currently, Oklahoma has reverted to the PASS standards of 2010 and assessment instruments have not yet been decided. As a result, no national or state level protocol exists to guide curriculum. Districts in Oklahoma are scrambling to create documents to reflect changes, but the standards and assessment are still in flux.

Problem Statement: Teachers have to decide what to teach whether or not standards and assessments are in turmoil. Teachers cannot wait for the implementation of national and state reforms to direct teaching and learning. In the absence of state and national standards and assessments, teachers have to decide what students learn and are able to do.

Research Purpose and Question

To explore how teachers deal with the changing standards and accountability, I conducted a case study to explore how teachers decide what to teach. I spent time in the classrooms of three middle school language arts teachers to observe how secondary language arts teachers make, carry out, and reflect upon curricular decisions. Thus, the purpose of this case study was to explore the perceptions of three middle school language arts teachers as they reflected upon their curricular decisions and drew conclusions about what to teach.

The research question that guided this study: How do three middle school language arts teachers decide what to teach?

Framework of the Study

Three assumptions guided this research.

1. School reform efforts provide a structure to examine teaching and learning.
2. Teacher efficacy plays a role in the decisions teachers make about curriculum and instruction.
3. Through reflection, teachers can learn from their practice.

The realities of school reform, the perception of a teacher's sense of efficacy, and the use of reflection all inform this study. School reform is a real and inescapable construct in the life of a teacher (Kaestle, 1982). Teachers have parameters regarding the curriculum, including suggestions for pacing, standards, and assessments. A teacher's sense of efficacy plays a role in the day-to-day choices, as well as long range curricular plans (Bray-Clark, 2003). Teachers who continually evaluate the

effectiveness of their curricular and instructional choices are more cognizant of changes, if any, that need to be made (Valli, 1997).

School Reform

To obtain a waiver from the monetary restraints and punitive mandates of NCLB, states had to adhere to several federal mandates included in Race to the Top, a federal reform initiative in 2010. Race to the Top required states to adopt CCSS, to use new assessments through one of two national multi-state testing consortiums, and to devise teacher evaluation processes that included test scores for evaluative purposes. States were willing to adopt these reforms to obtain a waiver from NCLB resulting in fewer stipulations for the use of federal funds and the removal of the threat of the takeover of schools that did not make adequate yearly progress on reading and math assessments.

Creation of the CCSS was a joint effort of the National Governor's Association and the Council of Chief State School Officers. Beginning in 2009, the goal was to create standards and assessments that would facilitate comparing student achievement state to state. Previously, each state had specific standards and assessments. This "lack of standardization led to the development of the CCSS" (National Governors Association, 2010). Before, each state had its own standards and assessments with state specific benchmarks. The CCSS were designed to be in full implementation in 2014-2015, when national assessments would be implemented to reflect the new standards (Common Core, 2010). Some states created implementation initiatives early, creating curriculum frameworks, sample lessons, rubrics, and state benchmarks (Tennessee Core, 2014).

Other states, such as Oklahoma moved more slowly and individual districts outlined curriculum frameworks, instructional maps, and possible benchmarks in anticipation of the assessments that would be implemented in 2015. At the time of this study, Oklahoma had rescinded the CCSS, approved OAS and had pulled out of the multi-state assessment consortium, choosing instead to write Oklahoma specific assessments. New standards in math and English language arts are to be implemented in the 2016-2017 school year. Legislation to adopt the standards and assessments, followed by a renaming of the standards and rejection of national assessments, caused teachers to switch gears in their curriculum planning to figure out how assessments were going to change in transition.

The state of Oklahoma is currently using two sets of standards for assessment purposes. PASS continues to drive reading assessments in grade 3-11. The OAS influence writing assessments in grades 5 and 8. The decision to move to OAS writing in grades 5 and 8 was meant as a transition between the previous writing assessment and the assessments that were to come with CCSS. In the past, students were given a short writing prompt such as a two to three sentence quote about courage. They would then have to write about a personal experience related to courage. The current state writing test requires students to read two pieces of related text and synthesize those texts to prove a point or provide information. This type of text-based synthesis prompt for 5th and 8th graders mimics the writing prompts found in the tests developed for CCSS.

The state has developed a writing rubric fusing the language of PASS and OAS. The 5th and 8th grade language arts teacher is expected to prepare students for the

standardized multiple choice reading test, which assesses isolated skills, while also preparing students for a performance-based test where passages are read and must be synthesized into a written response, thereby assessing integrated skills. At the same time, teachers must be cognizant that skills are taught in such a way that continue to prepare students for future ACT and Advanced Placement performance at the high school level. And finally, teachers are expected to nurture and support the love of reading and writing for the sake of personal growth and fulfillment. Juggling this myriad of expectations is a balancing act among personal beliefs about what students should know and be able to do in language arts, current assessment, future standards, and teacher preparation.

Teacher Efficacy in Decision-Making

Teachers who have self-efficacy are confident in their ability to teach students what they should know and be able to do (Fendler, 2003). They translate standards into classroom practice, choose appropriate instructional materials, and ultimately feel empowered to evaluate student work (Muijs & Harris, 2003).

Teacher efficacy is the belief teachers have that they will be able to bring about student learning (Ross & Gray, 2006). Though the concept appears simple, teacher efficacy plays a part in how teachers perceive of professional development, their ability to make decisions, and the adoption of new instructional strategies. Multiple studies show that teacher efficacy is a key factor of teacher effectiveness (Bray-Clark, & Bates, 2003; Cronin-Jones, 1991; Erdem, 2007; Ward, 2004). Research on teacher efficacy includes how teachers define tasks, employ strategies, view the possibility of success, and solve problems and challenges. Efficacy beliefs can influence the extent of the

acquisition of knowledge and skills and subsequently increase the extent to which teachers are willing to transfer skills learned during professional development to the classroom (Bray-Clark & Bates, 2003; Ross & Gray, 2006). Teachers with high efficacy tend to explore alternative methods of instruction, seek more methods, and experiment with instructional materials; all of which can result in superior student performance.

Teacher Reflection

Thinking, particularly reflective thinking is an important component of the learning and teaching process. Rene Descartes, 17th century French philosopher, described reflection as self-awareness that will provide knowledge and understanding (Fendler, 2003). In other words, teachers learn about their teaching by reflecting upon it. John Dewey (1960) defines reflective thinking as a means for instilling habits of thought and cultivating self- discipline for purposes of social betterment. Donald Schön's (1983) work in teacher reflection theory was intended to raise the professionalism of teachers in the field. He made new sense of accepted practices by looking at reflection as a way to elevate teaching to an art; in fact, he referred to teaching as an "art that is perfected through reflection on practice" with a blending of "art and practice to increase expertise"(Schön, 1983, p. 61).

Through reflection, teachers discover the experimental nature of good teaching based on their own artistry and practice. The blending of Dewey's and Schön's perspectives appear today in references to the "art and science of teaching," the title of a best-selling book by Robert Marzano. Robert Marzano's work in best practices for teachers (Marzano, 2003) has resulted in the Framework for Teaching Model for Professional Growth. Valli (1997) extended Dewey and Schön's work by identifying

five types of teacher reflection: technical, reflection in action and reflection on action, deliberative, personalistic, and critical. Reflective teachers rely on efficacy and their sense knowledge of students to navigate the waters of reform while continuing the everyday phenomena of teaching students.

Summary

In my role as a curriculum director, I work with pre-service teachers, new teachers, teachers in the middle of their careers, and veteran teachers. They all have to make decisions about what they will teach and how they will teach it every day, every week, every month, and every year. They reflect on their experiences and the work of their students and make adjustments accordingly. The onslaught of new and sometimes contradictory legislative reforms has made teacher decision-making more complex. At the same time linking standards and assessments to teacher evaluation and school performance has raised the stakes.

Teachers must navigate externally imposed standards in such a way that satisfies local officials, fulfills state and national mandates, and keeps student welfare and parental exigencies in mind. The purpose of this case study was to explore the perceptions of three middle school language arts teachers as they reflected upon their decisions, examined beliefs about their own efficacy, and attempted to understand the way in which others perceive them. Within the framework of the nature of school reform, teacher efficacy, and teacher reflection, this study examined the phenomenon of teachers actively making decisions and reflecting upon those decisions during a time of changing standards and assessments.

Chapter 2

Review of Literature

It is difficult for a teacher in a public school to escape the realities of school reform: new standards, additional student assessments, and revised teacher evaluation methods. Shavelson and Stern (1981) referred to curriculum planning for days, weeks, and months of the school year as elements of task planning, but curricular decisions are more than that. Making decisions about curriculum is empowerment. Through reflection on practice, teachers can give credence to their experiences and speak their own truth (Richert, 1992). With the empowerment to make curricular decisions, teachers are more equipped to believe they can meet the needs of students, increasing their efficacy in the classroom.

School Reform

Sweeping federal involvement in public education came in 2001 with No Child Left Behind, a reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, calling for greater accountability through standardized testing in reading and math grades 3-8 with results tied to federal dollars ("Legislative Background," 2008). Since 2001, public and private institutions, profit and nonprofit entities, and state and national legislatures all have had a hand in determining what is taught and assessed in public schools. NCLB was followed by the Race to the Top Initiative of 2010, which included additional changes in standards, types of assessment, and teacher evaluation.

Although Race to the Top was not presented as a federal mandate, it required states to adopt CCSS, incorporate assessments from the national consortiums, and create a teacher evaluation system tied to student test scores. In exchange for changes in

standards, assessments, and evaluation, states were given a waiver from the demands of meeting Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) on federally mandated testing (U.S. Department of Education, 2011). Once states had met the requirements, they could apply for the federal waiver and escape sanctions for schools that were not making AYP goals. In place of AYP goals, states had to develop a way to communicate how schools were doing on tests to parents and the community. The Oklahoma State Department of Education created the A-F report card, assigning grades to schools based on test scores, attendance, and growth of the lowest quartile of students (Oklahoma State Department of Education, 2013).

When Oklahoma adopted the CCSS in 2010, districts had to begin incorporating the CCSS and making adjustments in anticipation of assessments of the standards. Districts, departments, and individual teachers began redoing curriculum guides, evaluating materials, and writing benchmarks to prepare for future assessments. The result is that Oklahoma has been in curriculum and assessment chaos since 2010. Teachers simultaneously work within two sets of standards, the previous PASS standards and the CCSS.

Teacher Reflection

An assumption of this study was that it is possible for teachers to learn from their experiences in the classroom through reflection on the teaching and learning process. Educators want students to think reflectively about what they have learned and, in turn, teachers think reflectively about what they have taught. Teacher reflection is a cornerstone of teacher preparation programs, certification boards, and district

improvement plans (Valli, 1992). Rooted in Cartesian philosophy and the theories of John Dewey, teacher reflection continues to be considered a best practice in teaching.

Descartes asserted in the act of reflection, the self plays two roles: the subject who does the reflection and the object who is reflected upon. One who reflects plays both roles simultaneously. “Reflection, in its common Cartesian meaning, rests on the assumption that self-awareness can generate valid knowledge” (Fendler, 2003, pp.17). All reflection, regardless of outcome, is valuable in that it indicates a consciousness of self. Working in the 20th century, John Dewey applied Cartesian ideas to reflective thinking and the role it can play in teacher reflection. For Dewey, reflective thinking was a means for instilling habits of thought and cultivating self- discipline for purposes of social betterment (Dewey, 1960).

Reflective thought, however, is not enough; reflective thinking converts action into intelligent action (Schön 1987). The assumption is that an action has occurred in the classroom: a lesson has been taught, an activity has been carried out, or an assignment has been given. The reflective teacher looks at those actions and converts them into intelligent, deliberate actions. In this respect, the teacher creates meaning out of the reflective process and is able to exert intelligent, deliberate control of future actions. In Dewey’s mind, this is a triumph of science over instinct and impulse as the reflection exercises the imagination toward future possibilities (Fendler, 2003). Dewey furthered this idea by outlining criteria for reflective thought.

Reflective thought does not happen in a vacuum or without boundaries. Dewey believed that thought is reflective if it is logically sequenced and includes a consideration of the consequences of a decision (Fendler, 2003). In this respect,

teachers cannot simply say they have reflected and made a decision if their thought is not logical and considerate of consequences. Dewey's reflection is a "complex, rigorous, intellectual, and emotional enterprise that takes time to do well" (Rodgers, 2002, p. 844).

During the interview process of this study, the participants' reflections became their own problem solving structure in practice. They became less dependent on the thinking of others and constructed a new vision for a particular lesson. Schön (1987) would suggest that this is rigorous in its own right. He took this idea of vision a step further by stating,

As teachers talk about their work and name their experiences, they learn about what they know and what they believe. They also learn what they do not know. Such knowledge empowers the individual by providing a source for action that is generated from within rather than without. (p. 196)

Dewey asserted a fundamental purpose of education is to help people acquire habits of reflection so they can engage in intelligent action. In order to be reflective, Dewey believed people must engage in three different kinds of thought and be able to employ different kinds of thought for different situations. Dewey's three kinds of thought are categorized as routine, rational, and intuitive. Routine thought refers to thought processes guided by tradition, authority, and official definitions of the social reality that governs schools. Using routine thought, teachers would reflect on the rules, district curriculum, chosen texts, and pre-ordained assignments in order to amend these external impositions and make them appropriate for their individual classroom (Dewey, 1960). The second level of thought is rational thought.

Rational thought assumes that information is processed logically and is sequentially based upon research and careful reasoning. Teachers who think rationally are able to reflect upon their actions through the lens of research or simply through their own reasoning separate from what has been handed to them from external authorities. Rational thought is more autonomous than routine thought and also helps teachers build their own theory of teaching and learning (Dewey, 1960). Finally, the third level of thought asserted by Dewey is intuitive thought.

Intuitive thought is the ability to think in action with imagination, creativity, holistic perception, emotion, humor, and non-judgmental associations. “Intuitive thought is associated with the spark of creative ideas, insight, and empathy” (Goodman, 1984, p. 19). Those with intuitive thought can ‘think on their feet’ and make changes in real time as situations warrant changes. John Dewey believed that those who could reflect on their teaching practices using all three levels of thought are able to focus on the science of teaching: what works, what does not work, and how to make it better through scientific practice.

As a counter to Dewey, Clark (2001) suggested that not all reflection has to come from within.

We have been given no reason why theories developed in non-educational contexts by non-teachers cannot be adopted by teachers, in other words, become part of their intentionality, and begin to determine the structure of their educational endeavors along side theories of their own devising, or even exclusively. Neither has any reason been offered why outsiders cannot find out how teachers are conceptualizing their situation, and then offer outsiders’ reflections from within that frame, or even from an alternative frame (p. 91).

Carol Rodgers revisited Dewey in her 2002 work taking another look at how reflective thinking has come to be used in the educational setting both in teacher

preparation programs and professional development programs for practicing teachers. Rodgers asserted that reflection is a particular way of thinking and cannot be equated with mere haphazard “mulling over” something. In fact, Rodgers gleaned four criteria for reflection that must be present.

Criteria for Reflection:

1. Moves a learner from one experience into the next with deeper understanding of its relationship to other experiences.
2. Requires systematic, rigorous, disciplined way of thinking, rooted in scientific inquiry
3. Happens in a community, in interaction with others.
4. Requires attitudes that value the personal and intellectual growth of oneself and of others (p.845)

Because this case study took place over eight weeks, the lessons used for observation and reflection were within the same unit. This helped the participants move from one experience to the other as Rodgers suggests. With each visit, the participants were more systematic in their approach – as if they knew the reflection was coming and were prepared. The interviews and reflections were very much focused on personal growth.

Teachers’ written and spoken narrative accounts have provided a major source of data in research into teacher thinking (Johnson, 2001). Where do those narratives come from and how to best use them? Much research has been done in the area of teacher reflection, beginning with the kinds of reflection that teachers do in practice. Fendler (2003) looked at reflection as a form of technology of the self. Reflective practices reminiscent of technology of the self are journals, autobiographies, and self-studies. The limitation of these reflective practices is that they tend to perpetuate the status quo. It is difficult for journals and autobiographies to truly help the teacher question what has transpired in the classroom. They are often tied to stereotypes and

convention of the structure of journals and autobiographies. In this respect, these reflective practices serve to reinforce existing beliefs rather than challenge assumptions (Fendler, 2003, p. 21). Some reflective practices may simply be exercises in reconfirming, justifying, or rationalizing pre-conceived ideas. When this kind of reflection is understood as a turning back upon the self, the danger is that the reflection will reveal no more than what is already known (Fendler, 2003). For the study, I chose to use reflective dialogue through interviews based on videos of lessons.

The lack of a clear definition of reflection leads to lack of clarity in how systematic reflection is different from other types of thought. Without clear definition, questions arise such as how it is to be assessed. In addition, without a definition it is impossible to construct the common language that facilitates professional discourse (Rodgers, 2002). In this study, questions were open ended to begin the interviews, but precisely due to lack of definition, the conversation was not controlled by outside definitions or themes. Those emerged in data analysis.

Reflective practice is difficult to see and define because the reflective teacher does not merely seek solutions, nor does he/she do things the same way every day without an awareness of both the sources and the impact of his/her actions (Rodgers, 2002). The teacher seeks solutions, pursues connections, and creates a theory to provide structure for the growth of his/her students. As valuable as reflection can be to individual teachers, it also provides its own limitation: without a clear picture of what reflection looks like, it can be hard to observe and may not be valued by others. Clearly, a concrete definition and common language helps legitimize the practice of reflection.

In 1997, Valli attempted to solidify common definitions of reflective thought in education by providing definitions of content and quality for each type.

Table 1 Valli's Types of Reflection in Teaching

Type	Context	Quality
Technical	General instruction and management based on research on teaching	Match one's performance to external guidelines
Reflection –in and –on action	Ones' personal teaching performance	Basing decisions on one's unique situation
Deliberative	Students, curriculum, instructional strategies, management of classroom	Weighing competing external viewpoints and research findings
Personalistic	One's personal growth and relationships with students	Listening to and trusting one's inner voice and the voices of others
Critical	Social, moral, and political dimensions of schooling	Judging goals and purposes of schooling in light of ethical criteria such as social justice and equal opportunity (Valli, 1997, p 75)

By identifying types, content, and quality of reflective thought, Valli offers a framework to help create boundaries for teacher reflection. The framework is a helpful guide in that it mirrors the growth of a teacher within his/her classroom. In the beginning of teachers' careers, they are concerned with the technical aspects of teaching: "time-on-task, wait-time, active learning, student engagement, homework review, and prior knowledge" (Valli, 1997, p. 75). They evaluate their performance based on external measures of supervisory evaluation and assessment measures outside of themselves. As they continue to build years in practice, teachers become concerned with their personal teaching performance: they want to be sure they are doing

everything effectively. They begin to reflect on what they have learned in their first years of teaching and adapt teaching decisions based on the “content of the unique situation in their classroom” (Valli, 1997, p. 76). As teachers mature in practice and experience, they become more deliberate in their teaching and reflection.

Deliberative reflection can cover a range of classroom issues including student concerns, curriculum, and instructional strategies. The teacher has these well in hand after the beginning of the career and is able to make decisions based on research, feedback from colleagues, and personal findings. “They consciously link their personal and professional lives,” providing an opportune time for reflection to have a valuable impact in the classroom (Valli, 1997, p. 77-78). These deliberate teachers are seasoned educators who can move into the next phase of reflection: the personalistic phase. In this phase, teachers are focused on their own personal growth and their relationships with students. They are confident and trust their inner voice and the voices of others without feeling threatened or judged, thus making way for the last and most transformative type of reflection: critical reflection. In this study, participants were confident in their inner voice and moved to personalistic reflection very early in the study.

Critical reflection requires teachers to think about the social, moral, and political dimensions of schooling. Teachers at this phase explore the meaning behind their lessons, assignments, and the act of schooling itself. They teach for social justice and equal opportunity. They believe schooling leads to better democracy and they work toward that end. At the critical stage of reflection teachers strive “not just for understanding, but for improving the quality of life of disadvantaged groups” (Valli,

1997, p. 78). No one type of reflection stands alone; teachers must move through and back as needed for unique situations in their classrooms. Reflective theory often reveals itself in education settings as collaborative processes and practices: partner and small group reflection, peer support groups, peer coaching, shadowing, and teacher institutes. This proved to be true in that the participants were already a community before the study began. They had attended training together, planned together, collaborated weekly, and continued to talk to each other during the course of this study.

The content of teacher reflection is tied directly to the purpose of changing and improving practice. The reflective practice of discourse about one's practice engages teachers in self-disclosure. Self-disclosure through interview and discourse constitutes a new self; teachers develop an opinion and come to a critical realization of themselves (Fendler, 2003, p. 22). The interview notes of this study gave clues to the teacher's practice and behavior. In describing their daily experiences, participants revealed ways in which their personal experiences affected how they perceived of teaching and learning. My approach was to interview teachers about their practice, facilitate their reflection on what they know, how they feel, what they have done in the classroom, and why they did it, an approach inspired by Valli (1997, p.83).

Reflection is not an end in itself, but a vehicle used in the transformation of raw experience into meaning, grounded in experience, informed by theory, and serving the larger purpose of the moral growth of the individual and society (Rodgers, 2002, p. 863). This idea is important to this case study because the work of a teacher never ends; there is constant revision of curriculum and instruction. For my participants, the reflection was a beginning point rather than an end.

Teacher Decision Making Processes

As teachers plan lessons, choose materials, and prepare activities, they are constantly making decisions. Even in situations where they teach a specifically designed lesson, the act of teaching is very personal. Decisions must be made about timing, delivery, organization, and intensity of even the most scripted lessons. In the act of teaching, teachers make decisions and direct their efforts based on perceived student needs and the demands of the classroom, which Shön (1987) referred to as “reflection-in-action” and Marzano (2007) referred to as segments enacted on the spot. Because teaching is such a personal, thoughtful profession, the emphasis on teachers’ thinking, beliefs, planning, and interactions with students can illuminate how decisions are made (Fang, 1996).

According to Clark and Peterson (1986), because teachers’ thought processes occur inside their heads and are unobservable, the research has tended to focus on quantifiable teacher behaviors and attempted to link teacher behavior to student achievement. As a result, some research has formulated checklists of teacher competencies that offer suggestions for student achievement. Shön (1987) asked teachers to plan lessons and units and examined them to discern patterns in planning. Although they found that teacher plans reflected technical knowledge or competencies, Shön (1987) asserted that problems are not solved by technical knowledge or competencies, but through improvisation, inventions, and experimentation. In other words, success is associated with judgments that professionals make on their feet in the moment of action, “paying attention to phenomena and surfacing his intuitive understanding of them...experimenting in practice” (Schön, 1987, p. 72). Borko,

Livingston & Shavelson (1990) refer to judgments in the moment of action as interactive decision-making in real time during interaction with students, as opposed to preplanning, “typically made without the luxury of time to reflect or seek additional information” (Borko, et. al, 1990, p. 43). The underlying assumption is that teachers are professionals who make reasonable judgments and those judgments guide their classroom behavior (Shavelson and Stern, 1981). Any teaching act is the result of a decision, either conscious or unconscious: the basic skill of teaching hinges upon decision-making (Shavelson 1973).

Shulman (1986) categorized teacher knowledge affecting the decision-making process into three dimensions: subject-matter content knowledge, pedagogical content knowledge, and curricular knowledge. Subject-matter knowledge refers to the basic components of the discipline such as reading, writing, language and vocabulary, and speaking and listening as part of the discipline of the language arts. Teachers use their strengths in subject-matter knowledge to make decisions about what is taught, in other words, “subject matter transforms from the knowledge of the teacher into the content of instruction” (Shulman, 2013, p. 3). Pedagogical content knowledge informs how teachers construct lessons and how they present ideas to better students’ understanding. Teachers use pedagogical content knowledge as they select strategies for delivery, design activities for learning, and make classroom management adjustments to lessons. Teachers draw upon their curricular knowledge as they select materials that not only serve their pedagogical purposes, but also are also complementary to the other subjects students study. All of these dimensions come together to address learning styles, needs,

and strengths and difficulties associated with the classroom (Fang, 1996; Shulman, 1986; Shulman, 2013).

Experience in the classroom affects the way teachers make decisions during the act of teaching. According to Carter (1988), experienced teachers attach more data and make more assumptions in teaching situations that allow them to respond faster and with more effectiveness, but are also “more cautious...aware of the many variables which affect classroom life” (Carter, 1988, p. 31). In other words, they are able to observe and assimilate more information during the act of teaching and incorporate more of that data into their decision: reflection-in-action. A teachers’ intuition, (Fang, 1996) based on their experience, serves them well as they change course in the middle of a lesson or make adjustments before they teach the lesson again. Carter (1988) asserts the same is true for novice teachers in terms of relying on impulse and intuition, but they do not have sufficient experience to understand causes and effects and to make as many assumptions in the act of teaching. Drawing on experience to inform future actions may require reflective thought and professional education (Fang, 1996) resulting in more preplanned outcomes.

Inherent in school reform is the idea that something is wrong that needs to be fixed. When so many reforms are focused on teachers- the standards they follow, the instructional strategies they use, the test scores of their students- it is easy for teachers to feel as if they have done something wrong. Shön (1983) was concerned about a crisis of confidence when he wrote about the belief in the competence of professionals. He asserted that teachers are seen as professional experts, but are also seen as part of the problem since teaching is intensely personal. Teachers may find the problem and try to

solve it, but they are still part of the environment, that is part of the problem, creating this crisis of confidence in their abilities.

Cronin-Jones (1991) conducted a case study to examine how teachers who were educated as secondary subject-area teachers and those who were educated as broad-field elementary teachers affected the intended curriculum in middle school science classrooms. It was found that implementation of an intended science curriculum was hindered by individual teacher beliefs about curriculum and instruction.

Eisenhardt and Zbaracki (1992) compiled nineteen quantitative studies and concluded that people make rational decisions within boundaries set by those in power. Phases in decision-making do not always follow a predictable pattern. In the educational field, teachers make decisions but there is not always a clear order or pattern to those decisions.

Parmigiani (2012) examined teacher decision-making processes both in a group setting and as an individual in the classroom. Parmigiani found teachers try to remember how often they used a teaching method with a specific topic, and, if they remember these events, they rely on the memories for future decision-making. However, if “teachers repeat such decisions without reflection and if they do not consider the variables of the new situation...they tend to refuse to analyze new information” (Parmigiani, 2012, p. 182). By failing to reflect on even the most tried-and-true methods in each context of student needs, a teacher can create “instructional stereotypes, which become teaching methods used daily without reflection” (Parmigiani, 2012, p. 182).

Messemer (2006) conducted a quantitative study of 427 correctional education teachers. He found that administrators, correctional officers, inmates, and the classroom itself influenced teachers' decisions. This study categorized five types of teachers in correctional facilities:

- teachers characterized by high administrative influence;
- high classroom influence and low correctional officer and administrative influence;
- high overall influence;
- low correctional officer, inmate, and classroom influence;
- very low overall influence (p. 121).

For Messemer, the results indicate that some teachers can be influenced by everything including administrators, students, and settings, while some teachers can operate independently of those influences.

Rupper, Gaffney, & Dymond (2014) examined four teachers making decisions about literacy materials for special education students. Through interviews, questionnaires, and videos, Rupper, Gaffney, & Dymond (2014) found four core concepts contributing to teachers' decisions about literacy:

- context-who would be using the materials and how would they be implemented;
- beliefs about students, teaching, and learning-how the materials would be received by students;
- expectations-assumptions about students' abilities and how they learn;
- self-efficacy- the level of teacher knowledge and need for outside experts (p. 216).

For Rupper, et. al., teachers exhibit autonomy in selection of materials for specific students and specific needs, suggesting that, the closer and more specific the decision is to the classroom, the less the teacher is susceptible to outside influences.

Teacher Efficacy

One of the assumptions of this study is that teacher efficacy plays a role in the ability to make decisions about curriculum and instruction. Through reflective dialogue about their curricular and instructional decisions, the participants of this study identified their own strengths and explored areas where they wanted to grow. Teacher efficacy is the belief teachers have that they will be able to bring about student learning (Ross & Gray, 2006). Teachers' sense of efficacy affects how they perceive of professional development, their ability to participate in decision-making, and whether or not they implement strategies learned through professional development. Several studies support that teacher efficacy plays a role in decision making.

Studying 3,074 teachers, Ross and Gray (2006) found teachers with a high sense of efficacy “recognize which of their skills contribute to student achievement, and [they choose to] control those skills to take responsibility for the successes and failures of their students (Ross & Gray, 2006, p. 193). Additionally, self-efficacious teachers are able to self-correct without losing their sense of success in teaching. Efficacy beliefs are most powerful when they are grounded in accurate self-assessment and self-correction (Ross & Gray, 2006).

In a 2007 study Ross and Bruce examined the effects of professional development on teacher efficacy using 106 middle school mathematics teachers. Looking at teacher efficacy as a self-perception, rather than a measure of teacher effectiveness, this study had teachers participate in professional development, and then measured teachers' perceptions of their ability to try what was learned. Asserting that teacher efficacy is situational rather than a generalized expectancy, the researchers

suggested that a teacher's perception of past experiences helped them relate to "professional development and increases their sense of efficacy with the ideas learned during the professional development" (Ross & Bruce, 2007, p. 58). Those with higher teacher efficacy are more likely to try new teaching ideas and use classroom management approaches that increase student autonomy (Ross & Bruce, 2007). This supports the assumption that efficacy plays a role in teachers' ability to self-evaluate decisions and self-correct as needed.

Teachers perceive their own capabilities according to actions, such as making a decision about a certain task, exerting effort to accomplish a task, or confronting difficulties (Erdem & Demirel, 2007). A teacher's sense of efficacy affects goal setting and expectations of success or failure, and "provides the foundation of human motivation, well-being and personal accomplishment" (Erdem & Demirel, 2007, p. 576). Teachers with a high sense of efficacy are good at setting goals and working toward achieving those goals and are not discouraged by the need to change to achieve a goal (Ross & Bruce, 2007). Erdem and Demirel (2007) surveyed 2000 student teachers who were serving in elementary schools as part of their pre-service experience and found that, in order to provide higher quality teaching, self-efficacy should not only be taken into account but also encouraged and cultivated through leadership and professional development.

During the course of the study, participants not only became more reflective but they also became more critical of themselves. Participants' reflections acted as their own embedded professional development in setting goals and working towards achieving those goals.

A study by Bray-Clark and Bates (2003) showed that reflection and teacher self-efficacy were keys to teacher effectiveness. Teachers who are able to reflect on personal experience and make decisions about future courses of action maintain a high level of efficacy and are usually successful in affecting student achievement (Bray-Clark & Bates, 2003). Multiple studies assert that teacher self-efficacy may be a key mediating factor between a school's climate and professional culture resulting in overall effectiveness (Bray-Clark & Bates, 2003; Ross & Bruce, 2007; Sinden, Hoy, & Sweetland, 2004). Efficacious teachers reflect on their practice and use that reflection for improvement of their own teaching and the growth of their students.

Summary

Historical and current school reforms have an effect on teachers' decision-making about curriculum and instruction based on realities and complexities of classroom life. Teachers make decisions about their classroom practice intuitively and through reflection as they think about their practice. Reflection is not an end in itself but provides a structure for self-assessment and professional growth. Adults are driven toward competence through self-worth and efficacy (Cooper & Boyd, 1998). Teachers have transformed teaching and learning in their classroom through self-reflection, self-assessment and self-direction. To explore this phenomenon of teacher decision-making in a smaller context, I used case study to explore the decisions and reflections on those decisions of three middle school language arts teachers.

Chapter 3

Research Method

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore how teachers make curricular and instructional decisions and reflect upon those decisions. The context of this study focused on how three middle school English language arts teachers described and reflected upon their decisions about what students should learn and be able to do when the standards and assessments are changing. This case study explored the following research question: How do three middle school language arts teachers decide what to teach?

Qualitative Research: Case Study

The act of making curricular and instructional decisions is a personal experience for teachers, whether those decisions are made in the planning stages or enacted during the lesson itself. For this reason, I chose a qualitative method, seeking to hear a story and understand how a phenomenon works in everyday life (Stake, 1995). I conducted this study to learn, understand, and interpret how individuals experience and interact with their social world and the meaning it has for them (Merriam, 2002). The teachers in this study were asked to be reflective to explore how they made decisions and the manner in which they carried out their decisions in the classroom. I strove to put aside my own presumptions while seeking to learn from each teacher (Stake, 1995; Merriam, 2002). A case study of three individual teachers lent itself to search for understanding of this everyday professional, yet personal, experience. As the researcher, I listened for the perception of what was true for each participant.

Case study is one of the traditional approaches to qualitative research and is used to capture the complexity, nuance, and wholeness of a single case (Stake, 1995). In this study, observation, interviews, and various assessments were used to attempt to capture the complexity among what a teacher thinks, what a teacher does, and how evaluators might perceive teacher actions. Case study with a small sample size allows for in-depth study of complex actions and “adds to the literature by providing rich description” (Parsons, 2012, p.163) of individual cases. As a researcher, I wanted to treat “the uniqueness of the individual case and context as important to understanding” the phenomenon (Stake 1995, p. 39). In that vein, I chose three teachers from the same school to study individually, to gain greater understanding of how I can work with individual teachers to strengthen practice.

As a research strategy, case study allows the researcher to understand, describe, and discover meaning by focusing on a single case or several cases grouped together to describe the phenomenon in depth (Merriam, 1998; 2002). The nature of case study allows the design to be flexible, evolving, and emerging (Merriam, 2002, pg.9). As I reflected on the observations and videos of the teachers, I began to wonder about the self-efficacy of these three teachers. I knew what they had said in response to my guiding questions, but I was also curious how they might score on an external measure, such as the Teacher Beliefs –Teacher Self Efficacy Scale (referred to as Efficacy Survey) by Tschannen-Moran (1991). Additionally, I wanted to know how an evaluator might rate the teachers. Teachers are subjected to an evaluation tied to test scores; the district where the three teachers work uses the Marzano Art and Science of Teaching Framework (referred to as Teaching Framework) by Learning Sciences International

(Learning Sciences, 2013). Since case study can be bounded by time or activity to inform a problem, this time of change in standards and method of evaluation is a problem to explore.

As these questions emerged through exploration, I wondered:

1. How do three middle school language arts teachers decide what to teach?
2. How do these three language arts teachers perceive of their self-efficacy?
3. What connection, if any, exists among what a teacher decides to teach, a teacher's perceived self-efficacy, and the rating yielded by a mandated teaching evaluation instrument?

Studied through semi-structured interviews, observations, and various assessments, this case study encompasses multiple data collection forms and analysis strategies within the context of the participants' classrooms (Birnbaum, 2003; Creswell 2007). The data collection included observations, interviews, teacher perception surveys, and an evaluation of the observation videos, scored by an administrator outside the study. Since the primary purpose of this study was to explore the phenomenon of how individual teachers make curricular and instructional decisions, case study was an appropriate research methodology.

The three teachers formed a bounded system in that they collaboratively planned with the intent to carry out the plan of instruction the same way in their individual classrooms. They functioned as individual parts in how they carried out instruction in their own classrooms, but they functioned as a system, delivering instruction to one grade level at a school through collaborative planning. I did not view the three teachers as a bounded system when I began the research; I was thinking of three different cases

that happened to be at the same school. Through observation and subsequent interviews, I began to see them as a bounded system as each described their collaborative planning. The advantage of the bounded system was that I was able to explore how individual teachers interpreted a collaborative plan in their own classrooms. The limitation is that collaborative planning may have reduced variability.

By using case study methodology, I was able to explore how each teacher described instruction, how each teacher made decisions about how to carry out instruction in their own classroom, and how each teacher reflected on decisions after instruction. I observed and interviewed these three teachers over eight weeks of instruction. My goal was to develop an in-depth understanding of each particular teacher.

Context of the Study

The setting of this study was a middle school in a midwestern state with approximately 1400 students in a suburban school district of 15,000 students. The school was made up of mostly middle class students comprised of a mainly Caucasian population with some African-American and Hispanic students. The community routinely passes bond issues for capital improvements and this school had recently undergone renovation to convert it from an open concept school to a school with individual classrooms. The English language arts department was divided into grade level teams of 6th, 7th, and 8th grade with three regular education teachers and one special education teacher at each grade level. There was opportunity for collaborative planning once per week in the formal structure of the school and opportunities for informal daily collaboration. This school was selected because it is a typical school

without features that place it in any kind of special context, lending itself to a nonrandom, purposeful, and small selection of participants (Merriam, 1998). Other studies confirm the use of a purposeful small selection of participants. Johnston (1994) suggests a small sample size “cannot be generalized, but rather examines complexity in individual variation” (p. 9). The use of small case study allows researchers to examine a phenomenon that can “perhaps be replicated and expanded [so that] broader generalizations can be made” (Angelotti, 1972, p. 88).

At this school, each grade level team was expected to plan together and deliver comparable curriculum and instruction as much as possible. The principal provided stipends for teachers to meet during the summer to set instructional calendars, write curriculum, and plan units and lessons. There was an expectation that they would deliver curriculum in a similar manner to all students. The 8th grade team at this school was in its second year as a group with a veteran teacher and two teachers with less than three years experience on the team.

The context of the study also gave parameters to the selection of participants. Due to the adoption of the Common Core State Standards by most state legislatures, the standards and assessments for the English language arts are in reform, not just in Oklahoma, but also across the United States. Many states have chosen to rename those standards, as did the state in this study, but they just renamed them and the standards were still the same as the Common Core State Standards. I wanted to study teachers who were actively involved in the transition to these new standards.

Additionally, this state made the decision to create an assessment based on these standards two years before the nationwide assessments became operational. These

assessments were created for grades 5 and 8 only and were administered to students in the spring of the 2012-2013 school year. I was specifically interested in teachers who not only had exposure to the new standards, but also were expected to teach under the new assessments. The 8th grade teachers in the selected school were unique to other grade level teachers because, even though they were representative of common practice, and the practice had not happened in this way before (Creswell, 2007), their experience was bounded by a time of reform in standards and in assessments (Creswell, 2007). I deliberately wanted to cover these contextual conditions.

When I began analyzing the data, I realized the need for a differentiated look at the phenomena of these three teachers. Having watched the videos and interviews, I came to understand aspects of their thinking, and I wanted to learn about their perceptions of their efficacy in teaching. That is when I decided to add the Teacher Sense of Efficacy Scale Long Form developed by Megan Tschannen-Moran (Teacher Sense, 2015). I wanted to see if a connection existed between how they rated their beliefs about teaching and what they actually did in the classroom. In accordance with the evolving nature of qualitative research, this led to another question: How would an evaluator rate the teacher without knowledge of the teacher or her intentions?

So, I added an outside evaluator to view the videos and post observation transcripts, and rate the teacher according to the accepted instrument the Learning Sciences International Art and Science of Teaching Framework Learning Map (Learning Sciences 2013), based on the research of Robert Marzano. The Teaching Framework Learning Map is the evaluation tool used in the district where the participants teach. It seemed appropriate to see how a principal, with experience using

this evaluation tool with middle school teachers, would score these teachers based on videos of lessons and transcriptions of interviews serving as post observation conversations.

Case study allows for a lengthy look into a complex phenomenon as illustrated in work by Cate, Vaughn, and O’Hair (2006). In their study, the researcher collected “field note journals from 1998-2003 to examine the full evolution from a traditional school to a democratic school” (Cate, 2006, p. 88). The time for research design, data collection and data analysis is reflected below in the timeline of the study.

Timeline of the Study

Table 2 Timeline of the Study

Research Task	Time
Design and Research of Study	January-June 2013
Methodology Design	April-June 2013
Obtain Internal Review Board approval and internal approval of participating school district.	July 2013
Selection of Participants	August 2013
Initial Interviews	August 2013
Classroom Observations/Video with Corresponding Follow Up Interviews	September 2013
Interviews	October 2013
Transcription of Interviews	Ongoing
Analysis of Interviews	October 2013-March 2014
Efficacy Survey and Teacher Learning Map	August 2014-September 2014
Administration of Teacher Belief Survey	November 2014
Analysis of Survey	December 2014
Administration of Marzano Teacher Learning Map	February 2015
Analysis of Learning Map	February 2015

Role of the Researcher

In this case study my primary role as researcher was to understand the phenomenon of teachers making decisions about curriculum and instruction. I was the only data collector, gathering data through interviews, a teacher belief instrument, and an evaluation tool to inductively build concepts and theories based on the participant's perspective (Merriam, 2002).

I observed in the classroom while videoing the lessons. I then watched the lessons on my own, preparing questions to ask of the teachers. During the interviews, the teachers and I watched the video together and the reflective dialogue emerged from the initial questions I proposed. The teachers filled out the teacher belief survey on their own through a secure Google form. Finally, an outside evaluator used the evaluation tool after watching the videos and reading the transcripts of the post observation interviews.

I was an interpreter, recognizing and substantiating new meaning to build understanding (Stake, 1995) and the meaning for those involved (Merriam, 1998). I wanted to explore how each of these teachers made their decisions, both in planning and during lessons. As a researcher, I did not want to intervene and cross into the role of researcher as teacher (Stake, 1995), but rather stay in the role of interpreter. I entered the classrooms of these teachers with the "sincere interest in learning how they function in their ordinary pursuits and milieus" with the main goal of maximizing what I could learn (Stake 1995, p. 1). For this reason, I wrote the semi-structured interview questions broadly so issues could emerge and lead to new inquiries, explanations, and refinements

of understanding (Stake, 1995). I chose to video record the lessons and use them in the interviews based on the work of Fang (1996) who suggested that interviewing after observation through the stimulus of video allows the teacher to recall and verbalize reflections as she watches herself teach. This is referred to as reflection in action and reflection on action, which not only applies to what teachers think as they teach, but also as to teaching after the fact (Shön, 1983).

Inherent in the reflective interview process is the constructivist perspective that a teacher builds new meaning from his or her own knowledge (Shallert 2003). The context of decision making by teachers is complex, so “the researcher must remain flexible and go where the information leads” (Stake, 1995, p. 29). In this regard, many of my interview questions were not only broad in nature, but also designed to get the conversation started. Questions such as, “What was successful about this lesson?” and “What would you do differently if you could teach it again?” left the interview open to taking whatever turn the teacher chose to take.

Data Collection Protocol

My goal in this case study was to explore how three teachers described and reflected upon their decisions in the hopes that their experience could help me in my work with other teachers to strengthen practice. At the time of this study, these teachers had to make curricular and instructional decisions within the context of changing standards and assessments. I observed classes, reviewed video of the observations, and conducted interviews. I also administered the Efficacy Survey to measure general perceptions, and had an outside evaluator view the videos and apply the Teaching Framework.

Observations

Over the course of an eight-week period, I observed two to three lessons in each teacher's classroom. This eight week period was at the beginning of the school year and all three teachers were focusing on grammar rules, introducing students to the idea of reading a book of their choice for a few minutes everyday, and writing about their reading in a journal. I took notes during these observations and videotaped at the same time. My notes served as initial reactions to help formulate questions later, but I could also watch the video as many times as I needed to prepare for the interviews.

Videos

During each class observation, I videotaped the entire lesson with no editing. My objective was to focus on the teacher as she delivered lessons and interacted with students. After each observation, I watched the videos and consulted my notes multiple times to plan segments in which to focus during the interviews and to create interview questions specifically reflecting the video segments. I viewed the videos multiple times to determine which segments I wanted to view with the teacher to inform our conversation and what questions I wanted to ask during the semi-structured interviews. I used the videos and observational notes again as I was transcribing the interviews to be sure that all three elements supported the transcription.

Interviews

I conducted an initial semi-structured interview to obtain a snapshot of "what is" to inform and shape the post observation interviews. Then, after each observation, I conducted semi-structured interviews to collect "direct quotations from [subjects] about their experiences, opinions, feelings, about their activities and behaviors in the

classroom” (Merriam, 1998, p. 69). The interview questions were unstructured, flexible and exploratory in nature (Merriam, 1998; Fang, 2006). The questions were open-ended, providing the opportunity for the teacher to talk about any aspect of the lesson.

I videotaped the teachers in the act of teaching and watched those videos to prepare questions. During the post observation interview, we watched the selected video segments, stopping to consider questions, and to give the teachers time to reflect. These interviews were audiotaped and transcribed using voice recognition software called Express Scribe.

I transcribed the audio files of the interviews verbatim without consideration of what is worthy of attention or be held to any obligation for viability of drawing conclusions (Stake, 1995; Birnbaum, 2003). I reviewed the transcriptions while listening to the audio file to bold face anything I had said to distinguish my words from the teachers’ words. At this point, I had a pool of hundreds of minutes of video and hundreds of pages of transcribed interviews. With all of that data, I went back to my original research question: how do three middle school language arts teachers decide what to teach?

With the original research question in mind, I purposefully separated routine decisions in classroom management and decisions related to discipline and primarily focused on the decisions the teachers described that seemed most significant in each classroom: the decisions we spent more time talking about in the interviews, the decisions they were passionate about in their interviews, and the decisions that they described as having an effect on student learning. In other words, I created a smaller

sample for in-depth study from the total sample of collected data, forcing a narrowing of the study (Merriam, 1998).

From the narrowed data set, I then coded the transcriptions using highlighting functions in Microsoft Word, categorizing and searching for patterns (Stake, 1995). To categorize, I highlighted the beginning words and phrases of the teachers' initial answers to look for repetitions and/or patterns in how they responded. From the repetition of phrases such as, "I don't know why I did that", "earlier in the day" and "I didn't even know I did that" the theme of *Decisions from Within* emerged. Phrases such as, "In our planning meeting", "my principals asked us to", and "In our training" reflected the use of outside influence. *Inside Influence* and *Outside Influence* became the first two large themes.

My next step was to look for themes within the two large groups. I divided the first group into teacher responses that showed a difference between what was intuitive and what was based on personal experience. Intuitive decisions were characterized by the use of "I think" and "I don't know" followed by an explanation. These differed from responses that were characterized by "last year I" or "earlier in the day I". These were more personal experienced-based than just intuition. The two themes that emerged from the first large group were (1) intuition applying to decisions made in the act of teaching, usually in response to a student; and (2) personal experience applying to decisions based on the past or with other students.

There was also a difference between outside influence and a collegial planning session within the second large group. I grouped phrases such as, "In our planning" and "as we planned" into the theme of *Collegial Planning*, applying to decisions made

during collaborative planning. I grouped phrases such as, “in our district training” and “my principal asked us” into the theme of *Outside Influence*, applying to decisions from outside personal intuition, experience, and collegial planning. In the final analysis, four themes emerged as factors in the decision-making style of the teachers: decisions made intuitively, decisions made from personal experience, decisions made with influence from colleagues, and decisions made from external influence. These themes were within the individual teachers and across the group (Birnbaum 2003).

Efficacy Survey

I transcribed the Teacher Sense of Efficacy Long Form by Tschannen-Moran into a secure Google form so the teachers could complete the instrument on their own, in privacy. Participants read the statements and indicated their opinion by selecting one of nine responses, ranging along a continuum of 1-9. (1) None at All (3) Very Little (5) Some Degree (7) Quite a Bit (9) A Great Deal. The higher the score, the higher the teacher is identifying his/her sense of efficacy with a score range of 24-216. The scores were collected into a spreadsheet. See Appendix A for the full survey.

Using an Excel spreadsheet, I tabulated sum scores and mean scores for each participant and for the sample as a whole. The Efficacy Survey broke the overall efficacy score into sub scores for Student Engagement, Instructional Practices, and Classroom Management (Tschannen & Woolfolk, 2001). Tabulated sub scores resulted in scores ranging from 8-72. I also tabulated sum scores and mean scores for each sub score area for individual participants and for the sample as a whole.

Teaching Framework

I had an outside evaluator who has experience with the Learning Sciences International Teaching Framework at the middle school level score the three participants. She watched the videos and had access to the transcripts of the interviews to simulate an observation and post observation conference. She scored all three participants on nine of the sixty elements of the framework.

I collected the Teaching Framework data from the outside evaluator who viewed the videos as a classroom observation and read the interview transcripts as a post observation conference. Each of the nine elements was scored using the rubric in table 3 below. Each element is scored from “Not Using” to “Innovating.” The teacher evidence for “Not Using” and “Innovating” are the same among all the elements, but the rubric changes for “Beginning”, “Developing”, and “Applying” to outline specific teacher evidence for each element. See Appendix B for the specific rubric for each of the nine elements scored.

Table 3 Teaching Framework Scale

Scale	Not Using	Beginning	Developing	Applying	Innovating
Teacher Evidence	The teacher makes no attempt to perform this activity.	The teacher attempts to perform this activity...	The teacher...	The teacher...	The teacher is recognized as a leader in helping others with this activity.

Using the Learning Sciences International scoring method, I assigned numeric values to the rubric of 1-5, assigning a value of 1 to “Not Using” and 5 to “Innovating” to derive the total score and mean score for each teacher and for the sample as a whole.

After individual tabulation of the Efficacy Survey and Teaching Framework, I wanted to see if a correlation existed between the teacher's perception of their efficacy and the outside evaluator's perception. I ran Pearson correlations in Excel to determine the correlation between the Efficacy Survey mean scores and the Teaching Framework mean scores.

Data Management

The records of this study have been kept private and no one had access to subjects' responses. In published reports, no information was included that will make it possible to identify subjects as research participants. Research records were stored securely. Audio files, video files, transcriptions of the interviews, and data spreadsheet of the Efficacy Survey and Teaching Framework were kept on an external hard drive unconnected from any other device or purpose. The audio files, video files, transcriptions, and spreadsheets will be destroyed after five years.

I attempted to meet the four criteria for quality-credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability- as defined by Lincoln and Guba (1981). The Teacher Belief Survey and Teaching Framework used in the study have their own reliability studies (Tschannen & Woolfolk, 2001; Learning Sciences, 2013) and I felt confident in administering and scoring those instruments. The outside evaluator I chose to score using the Teaching Framework has three years of experience using the model in a middle school setting with more than 60 teachers.

To add to the credibility and confirmability of the interviews, I chose to use member checks with the participants. I took the transcripts of the interviews with the themes color coded and asked each participant to check to see that I had interpreted

their decisions in the same way they would have. Each participant wrote a reflective statement after seeing the themes I had coded from interviews. The transferability and dependability of this study is perhaps more problematic. The quality of the interviews depended upon the willingness of participants to be reflective of their teaching practices and open in sharing those reflections.

Summary

This case study explored the research question: How do three middle school teachers decide what to teach? Over the course of the study, two other questions emerged: (1) How does a teacher perceive their own sense of efficacy? (2) How does an evaluator perceive teacher's actions in the classroom? I coded data collected from the interviews for emergent themes. The four themes that emerged from the data concerning how decisions are made were based on

1. Intuition
2. Personal Experience
3. Influence from Colleagues
4. Influence from Outside Sources

The participants completed a Teacher Efficacy Survey to measure their perceptions of their own efficacy. Finally, an outside evaluator used a Teaching Framework tool to assess the teachers per district guidelines.

Chapter 4

Data Analysis and Interpretation

This chapter provides the results of observations and interviews, an Efficacy Survey and a Teaching Framework model of three middle school language arts teachers. The research question guiding this study was: How do three middle school language arts teachers decide what to teach? After gathering data for a few months, two additional questions were added.

1. How do these three language arts teachers perceive of their self-efficacy?
2. What connection, if any, exists among what a teacher decides to teach, a teacher's perceived self-efficacy, and the rating yielded by a mandated teaching evaluation instrument?

This chapter will describe individual decisions and a collaborative decision among the three teachers.

Setting

I visited each of the three teachers' classrooms to walk the room, making note and taking pictures of everything in the classroom as my first data set. I considered the setup and decorations of their classrooms to be evidence of first decisions about teaching and learning for the school year. Because it was so early in the school year, I wanted to ask about everything pertaining to the classroom that had been decided ahead of time, before students arrived. These visits also gave me an opportunity to be in the classroom so the students would get used to the stranger in the room and the teacher could continue teaching without the added stress of an observer. I worked off of

questions concerning the room and potential teaching components to structure the first interview.

After initial visits I returned to each classroom multiple times to observe and video lessons and to interview teachers as they watched videos of themselves teaching. All of the observations and interviews took place within an eight-week time period during the first unit taught. These three teachers, Ms. Bowman, Ms. Whitwell, and Ms. Richard (all names are pseudonyms) planned collaboratively with the intent to deliver approximately similar lessons in their individual classrooms; however, they each exercised control over delivery and some discretion with regard to content. The following table shows the time spent with each teacher.

Table 4 Time Spent in Observation and Interviews with Three Teachers

Teacher	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Total
Ms. Bowman	0:30	0:55	1:09	0:55	1:06	0:55	1:05	6 hr. 35 min.
Ms. Whitwell	0:30	0:55	1:03	0:55	1:01	0:55	0:48	6 hr. 7 min.
Ms. Richard	0:30	0:55	0:56	0:55	1:04			4 hr. 40 min.

From data captured in observations, videos, and interviews, teachers made decisions every second. Danielson (2007) asserts teachers make 1500-3000 decisions per day in four domains: (1) Planning and Preparation, (2) Classroom Environment, (3) Instruction, and (4) Professional Responsibilities (p. 1). Each domain contains multiple components. Decision-making in the classroom is a complex issue. Certainly, a study could look at every move a teacher makes, from reacting to a disruption to carrying out routine events such as taking roll, but I wanted to focus on decisions that were pertinent to what to teach, decisions that, as a curriculum director, seemed important, decisions of

which they were passionate and talkative in interviews, decisions appearing to have an effect on student learning. The themes that emerged from those decisions were: (1) use of intuition, (2) reliance on personal experience, (3) adherence to collegial planning, and (4) incorporation of outside influence. These decisions and themes will be further discussed in the individual cases and are defined in Table 2: Emergent Themes.

Table 5 Emergent Themes

Definitions of Emergent Themes	Sample Participant Responses During Reflection Used to Categorize the Theme	Percentage of Decisions Discussed in This Section
Use of Intuition: applies to decisions made in the act of teaching, usually in response to a student action.	“I don’t know why I did that” “I didn’t even know I did that”	24%
Reliance on Personal Experience: applies to decisions based on the past or with another student.	“Last year...” “Earlier in the day...”	33%
Adherence to Collegial Planning: applies to decisions related to collaborative summer meeting and monthly meetings.	“In our planning meeting...” “As we planned this summer...” “I want to do it differently next year.”	20%
Outside Influences: Social Media, Parent Community, Continued Education, Research, Principal, State Standards and Assessment, Professional Development, Marzano Evaluation Model	“In our district training...” “In a book I read...” “In my graduate class...” “My principal asked us to...”	21%

Individual Decisions

Individual Case: Ms. Bowman

Setting

Ms. Bowman was in her second year of teaching during the time of the first observation. She was pursuing a master's degree in English Education and was an accomplished writer with a publication from her graduate work. In addition to teaching language arts, she was also the yearbook sponsor.

Ms. Bowman was nervous when talking about her practice and really disliked watching herself on video the first time, but eventually learned to relax. She was very deliberate in her answers. I would ask a question and she would be silent for a time, then answer in complete thoughts, as if she had been teaching and talking about her practice for ten years rather than two. During our conversations together, discussing her practice, she seemed wise beyond her years of experience and thoughtfully deliberate in her actions in the classroom.

Ms. Bowman's classroom was in the older part of a newly remodeled building, painted white with fluorescent lighting. There were no windows. Two walls had dry erase boards and bulletin boards where information could be written or posted. One of these walls was lined with computers since she was the yearbook sponsor and one of her class periods was devoted to students working on the yearbook. She had an extra cabinet of storage on this wall to hold yearbook supplies. The front wall had an interactive white board with computer screen, document camera, and projector in a presentation station. Ms. Bowman taught near the computer, utilizing the presentation station and adjacent table. Nearby she also had a corner shelf full of books purchased at

garage sales and various book sales. Her desk was on the opposite wall in a recessed area where she also had storage. She had a small table beside her desk with a stapler and a basket for students to turn in their work.

From the eight weeks of observations and interviews there were many decisions concerning routine events in planning and teaching; however, two particular kinds of decisions emerged as I spent time with Ms. Bowman: the classroom aesthetic she had created and the implementation of a student driven independent reading initiative. The following table provides a visual of the sets of decisions involving her classroom aesthetics and the student-driven independent reading initiative.

Table 6 Decisions Made by Ms. Bowman

Ms. Bowman's Targeted Decisions	Influence	Description
Classroom Aesthetic		
Emerson Quote	Personal Experience	"I remember when I was in 8 th grade...." "My mom told me..."
	Intuition	"8 th graders need to feel.."
Use of Student Created Book Trailers	Intuition	"I wanted a way for students to share..."
	Social Media	"I saw this on Pintrest"
Shelf of Books	Personal Experience	"I buy books I would have wanted to read in 8 th grade."
	Parental Community	" If there is something that makes you uncomfortable or would make your parents uncomfortable..."
Student Driven Independent Reading Initiative		
1 st Year of Initiative		
<i>Designed 15 minutes of daily independent reading for each class</i>	Continued Education and Research	"I had read Donalyn Miller's <i>The Book Whisperer</i> and wanted to incorporate that approach." "I wanted to do a study for my thesis"

<i>Did not implement</i>	Principal	“My principal would not approve the change in schedule...”
2 nd Year of Initiative		
<i>Designed 10 minutes of Daily independent reading for each class</i>	Collaborative Planning	“We met in the summer to map out dates and...”
<i>Implementation</i>	Principal	“We knew we had a new principal and just planned it...”
<i>Management</i>	Research	“I have to model...”
<i>Monitoring</i>	Intuition	“I have to fake read so I can glance and see who is going through the motions of reading...”
<i>Individual Students</i>	Intuition	Individual student references
<i>Book Talks</i>	Research	“In the Book Whisperer”
	Personal Experience	“Students need to see me as a reader...”
	Intuition	“I try to connect it to content...”

Decision-Making Process: Classroom Aesthetic

Emerson Quote

There were many motivational posters and inspiring words of advice scattered around the room, but prominent among them was a poster quoting Ralph Waldo

Emerson:

Finish each day and be done with it. You have done what you could. Some blunders and absurdities have crept in. Forget them as soon as you can. Tomorrow is a new day. You shall begin it serenely and with too high a spirit to be encumbered with your old nonsense.

I asked why she had the Emerson quote in a prominent place. Her answer was an in-depth analysis on the importance of resilience.

Ms. Bowman: I saw this and remembered what it was like to be in 8th grade. I’m still like this. If I’m upset about something, it

will take over my entire mind and my entire day and I can't get over it... My mom would always say, "There's tomorrow, a new day; the day before doesn't matter, you move on." So I like that quote because it is a good sentiment for you've done and what you could do. Tomorrow can be a great day. You'll be great tomorrow. It's fine. And I thought it was good academically and behaviorally. Some of the kids mess up and internalize, 'I'm a bad kid now.' For 8th graders, it is important to get that you can move on. Be another person the next day.

Ms. Bowman's response showed her willingness to rely on personal experience to decide how to help her students mature as they grow and the importance of creating a supportive climate in her classroom. She used language such as "I remember in 8th grade" and "my mom would say." She used her own memories of how she felt in middle school to make choices about things some teachers might feel is mundane: putting posters on the walls as decoration to cover the drabness of a colorless room. But, to Ms. Bowman, it was part of her perception of her role as a teacher to help students see that they can be in control of themselves, and that, when they mess up, they can try again the next day. Her reflection also revealed her genuine love for students. It seemed a simple poster, but her reflection showed a deep concern for her students' maturation and development.

Again, the idea of using a motivational poster as evidence of decision-making may seem simple and even unrelated to the learning process of students. While encouraging resilience is surely difficult to find on a checklist of teaching competencies, that doesn't make it less important in Ms. Bowman's classroom. She had a clear, reasoned decision behind its use.

Student Created Book Trailers

One bulletin board in the room, **I Just Met You**, was a reference to a widely popular song. The lyrics are “Hey, I just met you and this is crazy. But here’s my number, so call me maybe.” Because of that, I assumed the bulletin board was a “get to know you” type of cute bulletin board, but when I looked at the notecards posted on it, students had written the title of a book, the author, and a brief synopsis of what the book was about. This was clearly more than a cute bulletin board, not focused on students getting to know each other, but getting to know books. I asked her where she got the idea and how she used it.

Ms. Bowman was embarrassed to say that she got the idea from Pinterest, a social media site where many teachers post ideas and get ideas from other teachers. A brief search on Pinterest for ‘reading motivation’ yielded more than 300 results. Regarding how she uses the **I Just Met You** board she explained, “It is interactive. When they finish a book, they write the info for it and put it up there. They write a summary, a favorite quote, and [give it] a rating. They go beyond [that] and make a cover [for the book like] a movie trailer. I have some students who read all the time and they want to talk about what they’ve read. I wanted a way for them to share that. I was surprised they like it, but they do.”

To a casual observer, or perhaps an evaluator walking through her room, the **I Just Met You** bulletin board might seem like decoration, but Ms. Bowman had created an authentic vehicle for promoting reading and the sharing of books from social media. She knew that students who love to read also love to talk about what they have read and need an outlet for sharing. The bulletin board was another part of her classroom aesthetic about which she was deeply invested.

Shelf of Books

The aforementioned bookshelf was not merely symbolic, it contained at least 100 books including a wide range of novels and nonfiction geared toward young adult readers. They weren't labeled as part of the school's collection or library books. I asked her about the books because I was curious as to where they came from and how she utilizes them. She shared, "I spend a lot of money on books. I like buying books. My books disappear [the students take them], I ask not to have them [the books] leave, but it's ok. They get read somewhere when they walk away. I have to replace *Monster*. I put my name all over them and they end up around the school so they make their way back and I like having books that I know exactly what they are about." Again, her reflection revealed her reliance on personal experience to make her decisions about what to emphasize in her classroom.

Me: What do you mean, "I know exactly what they are about."

Ms. Bowman: I don't know the books in the school library. But I know those books. I am familiar with them.

Me: So you have read all the books in the bookshelf?

Ms. Bowman: Yes, I can recommend them and do book talks. I buy books I know I would have wanted to read in 8th grade, things I wouldn't have wanted to talk to my parents about, like sex or dating. But I wanted to read about it. I tell students that if there is anything you are reading that you think your parents would want you to put down, then put it down. I wouldn't tell them to put a book down, but I stock it with things that I would have wanted to read. The Ellen Hopkins books, some who read them, feel like their parents wouldn't want them to read them, but I like having them.

Based on her personal experience, Ms. Bowman was committed to having a bookshelf full of books that students could take and return freely. She wanted students

to have access to books that help them read about issues they might not want to talk about and those are the very books that are often questioned by parents and challenged in schools. *Monster* by Walter Dean Myers (2010) is such a book, yet her students wanted to read it, so she bought multiple copies to have it available. Even though *Monster* frequently “walks away”, she viewed the pilfering as a good thing. She simply told students to stop reading if they were uncomfortable or felt it was something their parents would not want them to read. She knew the parents and the community and clearly honored their involvement in what their middle school children were reading, but she also wanted to provide a place for students to broaden what they read for their own purposes, a balancing act between authentic reading materials and parental norms and wishes.

Community norms further influenced her decision about including books by Ellen Hopkins in her classroom collection. The author Ellen Hopkins had been scheduled to visit Ms. Bowman’s school when questions from a parent escalated, creating a storm of controversy over the use of her books in schools. Ultimately, the author’s visit was cancelled and a flurry of media followed. Although Ms. Bowman was not at this school during that controversy, the furor over controversial books is well known in the community. Bringing up Hopkins, in particular, indicates the influence of censorship in the minds of teachers at this school, but the influence does not go so far as to stop her from providing reading options for students, regardless of controversy.

Summary of Classroom Aesthetic

Most teachers decorate their classroom in some way, particularly middle school language arts teachers, creating a pleasant learning environment for students. The

aesthetic of a classroom, in and of itself, may not seem worthy of study and discussion, but in this case, the aesthetic is intentional and reflective of Ms. Bowman's beliefs about students and learning and the environment as a learning tool. Through her classroom aesthetic, Ms. Bowman intentionally promotes her core beliefs about students: they must feel welcome and supported, they must be provided access to books that speak to them, and they must be provided a way to share their reading with others. Her classroom addresses her beliefs, in part, through the physical environs she constructs and utilizes in her teaching.

Decision Making Process: Student Driven Independent Reading

Year One: Design Without Implementation

In addition to the "I Just Met You" bulletin board, there was a large display called "Books Read", that had 50-60 yellow sticky notes on it with titles of books and students names. As Ms. Bowman reflected in it, she said, "Before I started teaching I read the *Book Whisperer* where Donalyn Miller talks about the merits of free choice reading and I wanted to do my thesis on it. I asked for [students to read in class] 15 minutes [everyday]. But I didn't get approval from my principal at the time. That stopped me when the principal said no... Then I got buried in being a first year teacher. So I let that go." The "Books Read" board actually represented a much larger instructional idea that we discussed in three different interviews.

Choosing not to use the strategy of providing protected time for student-driven independent reading showed incorporation of outside influences in two different ways. She was certainly influenced by her own research to decide to add fifteen minutes of free choice reading into her classroom routine, but she also felt like the influence of the

principal's denial of her request to be too strong to fight as a first year teacher. The outside influence of the principal was much stronger for Ms. Bowman than the outside influence of Donalyn Miller's techniques. She believed that providing students a structured time to independently read would not only improve their reading ability, but also help them find books to connect with for personal, voluntary reading. She had prepared and planned, but the "no" from her principal negated the effort. She simply "let that go". A change in principal leadership and a planning meeting with her colleagues gave her the confidence to bring up the idea again the following year.

Year Two: Redesign, Implementation, Management, and Individual Students

In her second year, Ms. Bowman decided to try to incorporate 10 minutes of daily time for free choice reading into her classroom routine based on her teammates' willingness to join her and the change in leadership at the school. I asked her about the process of revisiting the decision in her second year. She replied, "We met in summer as 8th grade English to map out the year and the new librarian met us and she was already setting up dates [for us to have students check out books for students to read in class]. We knew we had a new principal and really didn't ask. We just planned it and got the new librarian to help us with checking out books for students and getting it started right away."

For Ms. Bowman, a dedicated daily time for free choice reading is more than just something to do in her classroom, it is part of how she runs the classroom and how she shares her love of reading with students. I videoed her and her students engaged in reading several times and had her describe her thinking behind her actions.

In the video, she was sitting on a high stool at the front of the classroom. She could clearly see all the students in the room. She was holding a book and, at times, looking down at it, but most of the time she was scanning the room.

“Sometimes I’m modeling, but sometimes I’m pretending to read to monitor.” She described this class as “full of really bright kids who are very immature and can’t stop making eye contact [with each other] so on this day, I was monitoring how the seating chart was working.”

Me: In this particular class?

Ms. Bowman: Yes, this is the squirreliest class. They get distracted and things take twice as long as any other hour, and I also have a pod of 5 boys, it’s impossible for them to make eye contact. So I was still feeling out how the seating was going because I tried to separate them and they still look back at each other. So I know the exact two boys I was looking at, the same ones. I looked up and stared for a long time to see if I could see what they do instead of waiting to be distracted. I don’t know what they were doing.

Me: What about the boy in the back on the right?

Ms. Bowman: He has a different book every day or two. I’ve given him a couple that I thought would hook him. They haven’t, so a lot of times he has a book but pretends to be reading. He kicks and taps. He is probably not reading, just opens it up to the middle. I’ve talked to his mom and there are things going on at home which helped me [understand him better].

Me: Do you feel like he can read? Are we talking about a non-reader?

Ms. Bowman: He’s bright, really bright. It’s not defiance. He’s just a goofy, friendly, super energetic kid. Sitting still in silence is not what he’s about. I think he can [read], but he loves an audience and all his friends are in this class and they can get on board and know when its time to buckle down but there are enough of them that a seating arrangement where they can’t see each other, there is really no where in the rows where I can keep them apart.

At this point in the interview, Ms. Bowman seemed discouraged, watching her students engage in an important part of class, the independent reading time, and she didn't see it as particularly successful. She said, "I see that a lot of them are reading, but some are not, and I think they should be able to do that by now." I said that, to me, a visitor in her classroom, she had established a high level of expectation. The boy who was pretending to read might want an audience, but he didn't have one. Most of the students in class were engaged in silent reading. I did notice a student on the other side of the room who seemed to be reading, but the book was very low level for 8th grade.

Me: Tell me about the student on the back right side of the room.

Ms. Bowman: He started the year with *Diary of a Wimpy Kid*. They are funny, but we are beyond these now, and I said, "I want you to read what you want" but he had been reading that book since 6th grade. He didn't pass his reading test last year, so we talked about that. He has been reading more challenging books, and he is so proud of himself that he can't even believe it. He will say, "I'm finishing this book, it has longer chapters, look how small the words are." He is really proud of himself and he takes this [reading] time really seriously. It takes him a while to get into it.

Because it was early in the year, Ms. Bowman was still discovering the personal learning styles and behaviors of her students, so for now, she has to "fake" her own reading to monitor the students' reading. She shared, "This [video] was two days after this class had gotten into trouble [for misbehavior when a substitute had been assigned] and they had a new seating arrangement. So I was still feeling out how the arrangement was working." She noted that she felt she had to watch to see if students were engaged with their reading or faking it. No one in the room was talking or laughing, books were open and students were quiet. However, intuitively, she knew to not take the compliance for granted.

Book Talks

Ms. Bowman spent 20 minutes one class period giving book talks for three different books that she had purchased and read from her bookshelf. She sat at the front of the room on a table with her legs crossed, looking very comfortable. This was still early in the year, but she had already done several book talks with them and the students seemed attentive and interested. She showed each book, telling the students what it was about and why she liked or did not like reading it. With one book about crows, she said to the class, “I really liked this book because I like birds.”

A student looked at her and said, “really, you like birds?”

Then other students in the room turned on him as if he was being rude to Ms. Bowman. One girl even said, “She is sharing about a book!” The exchange among students showed the learning community Ms. Bowman had created through talking about books was so strong that students were maintaining that community of respect without her having to intervene.

I asked her how often she does book talks. She replied, “A couple of times a week at the beginning of the hour, as *The Book Whisperer* suggests. I try to connect it to the content we are working on in class.” This was surprising to me since the students are all reading different books, so I asked her to describe how she connected the book talks to content.

Me: How do you connect a book talk to content?

Ms. Bowman: This week, we read two stories and talked about plot [so at the beginning of class] they had to tell me where in your book [they] are now. Are you in the exposition or rising action? What do you consider the climax? The resolution? If we do things like that, then I say,
“

Raise your hand if you are at the exposition.” Then for those whose hands are raised, I have them share tell us about the book, which becomes little book talks from them. I always update them where I am in the book I’m reading. It is a break from the content.

Me: Yes, it is a break from the content, but if you had to attach a standard to that, the daily learning goal, overall goal, what would that be?

Ms. Bowman: Theme, character, engaging students in interactive discussions, encouraging them to ask questions and ask why, because they ask about the books. I think I could attach standards. Is that what you mean?

Me: Yes, because I think the hardest standards for us to do, because they seem to take a lot of time, are the speaking and listening standards.

Ms. Bowman: I hadn’t even thought of that.

At that point in our conversation, I recognized a connection to standards that she was not making and I wanted her to, so I talked to her about the speaking and listening standards.

Me: You are incorporating the idea of listening comprehension when they ask you questions about the books you are reading or the books others in the class are reading. Those questions show comprehension or understanding of theme through listening, and, if you are strategic about how often you have them share, and how you expect that sharing of their own book talks to increase over time so that by mid-year maybe they are sharing in a more formal way, then I think you can absolutely be talking about how your instruction is geared toward speaking and listening in an authentic, personal manner. The impromptu book talks from students is much more authentic because you are building community through speaking and listening with them. You do so much more than you know you do.

In her decision-making about having students informally share book talks throughout the school year, she was relying on her intuition that students should talk about what they read in front of their peers and had never thought to connect to three PASS standards:

1. *The student will demonstrate thinking skills in listening and speaking.*

2. *The student will listen for information and for pleasure.*
3. *The student will express ideas and opinions in groups or individual situations* (Oklahoma State Department of Education, 2013).

Many teachers ignore speaking and listening altogether or approach it by assigning a “unit” with a “presentation” for each student, designed to give everyone a chance to make a speech. Typically, such an assignment would result in students speaking in front of the class with prepared and practiced material, perhaps one or two times a year. In Ms. Bowman’s classroom, students have the opportunity to listen to each other and to speak about the current book they are reading of their choice.

Summary of Student Driven Independent Reading

I observed the independent reading initiative in Ms. Bowman’s classroom three different times, seeing different aspects each time. From the evidence of monitored silent reading time, teacher-led book talks, and student-driven connections, it is apparent that Ms. Bowman’s classroom is one where reading is valued—not just reading assigned texts as part of mandated curriculum, but valuing student choice and providing protected time for students to independently read. Ms. Bowman’s decisions to surround students with books, to share books she has read, and to continually recommend books makes students comfortable in talking about their own reading.

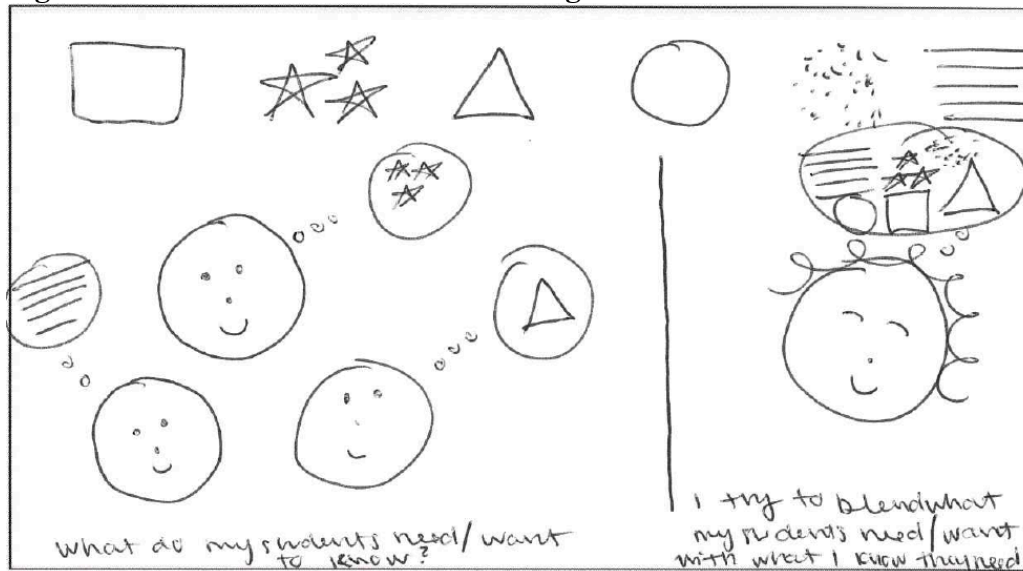
Self-Efficacy and Decision Making

I collected six hours of video and audio in Ms. Bowman’s class, some in direct observation and some in conversation. We communicated by email as I had further questions after our interviews. Figure 1, Ms. Bowman’s Decision-Making Model, shows the visual she drew for me in response to the question: How do you decide what

to teach? She drew the model for me and gave the following explanation of her drawing:

“The various designs are meant to stand for various topics in curriculum and society- things that are intended to be incorporated in my curriculum, as well as elements that my students bring to the classroom and want to learn about, as well as things that I want to teach them about. For example, the lines may represent argumentative writing and the dots may represent the tensions in Ferguson as read about in the paper/ seen on news.”

Figure 1: Ms. Bowman's Decision-Making Model



Ms. Bowman writes on the model, “What do my students need/want to know?” and “I try to blend what my students need/want with what I know they need,” which appears to be two entities influencing her decisions. In her description, she identifies three distinct entities in her decisions: (1) the intended curriculum, (2) what students want to learn about, and (3) what she wants them to learn.

The following table shows a compilation of Ms. Bowman’s decisions based on observations, reflection, and the results of her self-efficacy survey.

Table 7 Compilation of Decisions and Efficacy Scores

Ms. Bowman Decisions and Efficacy Scores		
Inner Influences	Categories of Targeted Decisions	Percentage of Targeted Decisions
	Use of Intuition (25%)	61%
	Use of Personal Experience (36%)	
Outside Influences	Adherence to Collegial Planning (25%)	38%
	Outside Influences: (13%) Research, Continued Education, Principal, Parental Community, Social Media	
Self-Efficacy		
Self-Efficacy Category	Total Score	Mean Score
Student Engagement	62/72	7.75/9.0
Instructional Strategies	69/72	8.62/9.0

Ms. Bowman scored herself high on the Efficacy Survey with an overall score of 195 out of 216 with a mean score of 8.12 out of a possible mean score of 9.0. Her sense of efficacy in her ability to affect student achievement is mirrored in her use of intuition and personal experience to make 61% of her decisions.

A teacher with a high sense of efficacy in her abilities to teach typically relies heavily on internal knowledge and strength to make decisions. She scored herself 8 out of 9 on the statement: “How much can you do to get through to difficult students?” She scored herself a 9 out of 9 on “How much can you do to get students to believe they can do well in schoolwork?” She believes she affects her students’ lives through creating a supportive climate for learning, not just by her words and actions, but also by what she

chooses to put on the walls to surround the students. She makes even the simplest decision about a poster with that in mind. Ms. Bowman's complete scores can be found in Appendix A.

Ms. Bowman believes in her ability to affect student learning and she makes decisions based upon that belief. Accordingly, Ms. Bowman scored highest in the area of Instructional Strategies. By scoring herself an 8 out of 9 in her ability to implement alternative strategies such as providing protected time for independent reading, Ms. Bowman showed a high level of efficacy, which is mirrored in her persistence in implementing the strategy in year two. Teachers who have a high sense of efficacy are more likely to try new ideas and implement new strategies (Ross & Bruce, 2007). By scoring herself 9 out of 9 in her ability to provide challenges for students and adjusting instruction for individual students, specifically in challenging struggling students to read challenging books, she again demonstrated a high level of efficacy in her ability to affect student learning. Incorporating the student-driven independent reading in her classroom, a strategy that had previously been rejected by her administrator, is an example of an alternative strategy, one that she felt was important enough to bring up with new administration and make a center point of her classroom.

Outside Evaluator:

What connection, if any, exists among what a teacher decides to teach, a teacher's perceived self-efficacy, and the rating yielded by a mandated teaching evaluation instrument?

As discussed in earlier chapters, the third research question that emerged during this study was, "What correlation, if any, exists among what a teacher decides to teach, a teacher's perceived self-efficacy, and the rating yielded by a mandated teaching evaluation instrument?" The outside evaluator, a veteran principal who had worked in

the district for ten years, scored videos and read unedited transcripts of the interviews using the Marzano Teaching Framework.

The Marzano Teaching Framework contains four domains with sixty specific teaching elements across the domains: (1) Classroom Strategies and Behaviors-41 elements; (2) Planning and Preparing-8 elements; (3) Reflecting on Teaching-5 elements; and (4) Collegiality and Professionalism-6 elements. In the model, a principal observes several times a year in brief “walk-throughs”. Additionally, a formal, lengthy (at least a class period) observation accompanied by a pre- and post-observation conference is done once per year. In the pre-observation conference, the teacher and principal decide the elements to observe and then debrief those elements in the post-observation conference. Typically, the elements scored are not only chosen because of the nature of the lesson to be observed, but also by the elements the teacher has indicated as areas for growth. In this case, the principal used the videos as the observation and the unedited transcripts of the interviews to simulate a post-observation conference choosing to score nine of the sixty elements in the model.

The evaluator scored all nine elements listed in the table below, but two elements directly related to the lesson evaluated and the Ms. Bowman’s decision-making process: *Managing Response Rates* and *Evaluating the Effectiveness of Specific Pedagogical Strategies and Behaviors*.

Table 8 Tabulation of Ms. Bowman's Teaching Framework Scores 1-5

Element	Range 1-5
Identifying Critical Information	3
Organizing Students to Interact with New Knowledge	NA
Organizing Students to Practice and Deepen Knowledge	NA

Noticing When Students are Not Engaged	3
Managing Response Rates	2
Demonstrating Intensity and Enthusiasm	3
Identifying Areas of Pedagogical Strength and Weakness	3
Evaluating the Effectiveness of Individual Lessons and Units	3
Evaluating the Effectiveness of Specific Pedagogical Strategies and Behaviors	1
Total Score/Mean Score	18/2.57

Description and Discussion of Evaluator’s Assessment

The evaluator watched the video of the lesson described earlier in this section of Ms. Bowman monitoring the students during independent reading time and then sharing three book talks from her own reading that she was adding to the shelf of books for them to use if they choose. The evaluator used the rubric below from the Marzano Teaching Framework to score the first element.

Element: Evaluating the Effectiveness of Individual Lessons and Units

1 Not Using	2 Beginning	3 Developing	4 Applying	5 Innovating
The teacher makes no attempt to perform the activity.	The teacher attempts to perform this activity but does not actually complete or follow through with these attempts.	The teacher determines how effective a lesson or unit was in terms of enhancing student achievement but does not accurately identify causes of success or difficulty.	The teacher determines how effective a lesson or unit was in terms of enhancing student achievement and identifies specific causes of success or difficulty and uses this analysis when making instructional decisions.	The teacher is recognized as a leader in helping others with this activity.

The evaluator didn't see the monitoring of independent reading in the same way as I did. I would have rated Ms. Bowman a 4 for *Evaluating the Effectiveness of Individual Lessons and Units* because she did **identify specific causes of success or difficulty** with her students who were struggling with staying focused during independent reading. She articulated why a particular student was struggling with staying focused during independent reading, identifying his problem as mainly one of maturity and attention and had moved him to another place in the classroom to actively monitor his progress. Additionally, she **used analysis when making instructional decisions** by encouraging the student who had been struggling to read grade level material to slowly but surely move to more challenging chapter books.

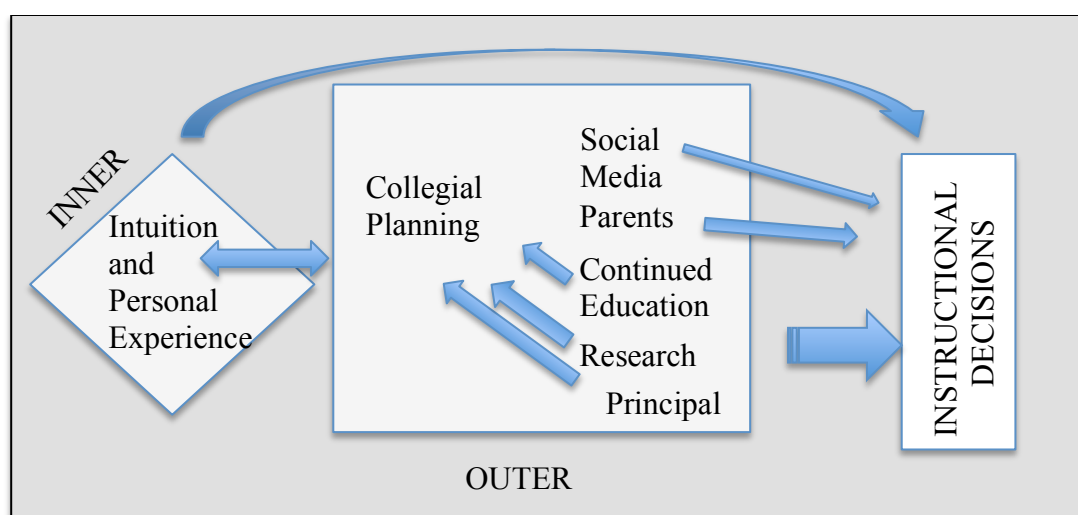
The other framework score of interest to this discussion is the element *Noticing When Students are Not Engaged*. In the same video segment, the evaluator used the following rubric to assign the score of 3.

Element: Noticing When Students Are Not Engaged

Not Using	Beginning	Developing	Applying	Innovating
Strategy was called for but not exhibited.	Uses strategy incorrectly or with parts missing.	Scans the room, making note of when students are not engaged and takes action, but the majority of students are not monitored for the desired effect of the strategy.	Scans the room, making note of when students are not engaged and takes action and monitors for evidence of the extent to which the majority of students re-engage.	Adapts to and creates new strategies for unique student needs and situations in order for the desired effect to be evident in all students

I would have given Ms. Bowman a 4 for this element. Perhaps because I am familiar with independent reading and how to monitor silent reading in a classroom, I could recognize Ms. Bowman scanning the room to monitor that the **majority of students were engaged** so that she could focus her attention on the few off-task students discussed earlier. The evaluator may have taken her attention to the few to mean that she was not **monitoring the majority**. However, Ms. Bowman stated that she was in the process of “fake reading” herself, so that she could **scan the room to make note of when students were not engaged**.

Figure 2 Summary Model of Ms. Bowman's Decision-Making



The model above provides a summary of Ms. Bowman’s decision-making process. She relied on both inner and outer influences when making decisions. At times, she relied completely on her intuition and personal experience to make an instructional decision. Other times, she moved back and forth between her personal experience and collegial planning; however, some decisions were made directly from community such as parent concern or ideas found on social media. Continued education through

coursework, professional development, research, and concerns of the principal played a part in decision-making within collegial planning. Her self-scored sense of efficacy was mirrored in her ability to make decisions incorporating several influences at once.

Individual Case: Ms. Whitwell

Setting

During the time of this study, Ms. Whitwell was in her tenth year of teaching and her sixth year at the school, making her the veteran teacher of the group. She had a master's degree in education and was pursuing her National Board Certification at the time of the study. Ms. Whitwell was eager to participate in this study, responding to every request almost immediately and was very positive throughout the entire process of setting up the study, the observations, and the interviews. I was looking forward to our conversations since she had been through the National Board process, which includes a great amount of reflection on practice. However, Ms. Whitwell was hesitant in her responses to questions concerning her practice. Many times, there were long moments of silence and I would rephrase the question to see if she could think about it a little differently. It was quite surprising for a teacher of her experience level to be unable to articulate reflection on her practice without a lot of prodding and rephrasing.

Ms. Whitwell's classroom was in the older part of a newly remodeled building. It was a long and narrow room, larger, in fact, than most of the other rooms in the building. Because of the size, she was able to have the desks in a configuration of five rows of students facing each other, no more than three desks deep. Ms. Whitwell could walk down the middle of the classroom and teach from the middle or either end. The front wall had an interactive white board with computer screen, document camera, and

projector in a presentation station. Ms. Whitwell taught primarily from the presentation station, but also moved all around the room while she taught. Her desk was in the corner of the room, set aside like it was an office rather than part of the classroom. She also had a small desk area for a student intern.

I observed, videoed, and interviewed in Ms. Whitwell’s classroom at the beginning of the school year. From this eight week sample of observations and interviews, three sets of decisions about what to teach emerged: her consideration of standards and objectives, the creation and implementation of a set of lessons reviewing complete sentences, and her approach to helping students gather evidence from non-fiction passages to write paragraphs. Table 9, Decisions Made by Ms. Whitwell, provides a visual overview of the sets of decisions involving her consideration of standards and objectives, the development of a particular set of lessons, and her teaching approach on using evidence in non-fiction.

Table 9 Overview of Decisions Discussed in This Section

Ms. Whitwell’s Targeted Decisions	Influence	Description
Standards and Objectives		
Nine Week Approach	Intuition	“I have trouble with writing a good daily objective...”
Rewrite State Standards	Personal Experience	“I don’t like being too wordy...”
Complete Sentence Lessons		
Independent and Dependent Clause Notes	Adherence to Collegial Planning and State Assessment	“We wanted to review some aspects of the state writing rubric...”
	Intuition	“It just seems a natural place to start a review of sentences...”
Mr. Morton Video	Intuition	“To engage them.”
Paragraphs with Evidence		

Nonfiction Reading with Annotation	Adherence to Collegial Planning and State Assessment	“We talked collaboratively about how to teach nonfiction...state writing test has two nonfiction passages...”
	State Assessment	“state writing test has two articles...”
Creating Groups	Professional Development	“I got the idea from Pat Pavelka...”
Group Assignment	Personal Experience	“I thought they would move through faster in a group...”
Redirection	Personal	“The kids were telling me they were confused...”
	Experience	

Decision Making Process: Standards and Objectives

Nine Weeks Approach and Rewrite of State Standards

As it was the beginning of the school year, I purposefully made notes and took pictures of everything in the classroom as evidence of the decisions Ms. Whitwell had made before the students arrived. An entire chalkboard was dedicated to written objectives, with the title “Goals This Quarter” across the top. The goals were:

- Demonstrate command of the conventions of Standard English capitalization, punctuation, and spelling.
- Show appropriate use of sentence structure in writing.
- Know and apply literary terminology.
- Write a well-constructed paragraph using a claim supported by evidence.
- Read for pleasure and understanding.

If she had copied them directly from the PASS document they would have read:

- Mechanics and Spelling - Demonstrate appropriate language mechanics in writing.
- Sentence Structure - Demonstrate appropriate sentence structure in writing.
- Demonstrate knowledge of literary elements and techniques and how they affect the development of a literary work.
- Compose persuasive/argumentative compositions that present detailed evidence, examples, and reasoning to support effective arguments
- Read silently for increased periods of time (Oklahoma Department of Education, 2013).

As a curriculum director, it was significant to me that three of the standards were not just reworded, but also actually changed in meaning. She significantly changed the meaning of the third bullet by deleting how literary elements affect the development of a work and had changed it to knowing and applying literary elements. She had also changed “persuasive compositions” to “a well-constructed paragraph.” Finally, she had increased the expectation of “reading for increased periods of time” to include “reading for pleasure and understanding.” I wanted to explore why she had made the changes and how the changes affected her daily lessons.

Me: Tell me about the “Goals This Quarter”. Are they truly nine-week goals? How did you choose those particular goals?

Ms. Whitwell: It just made sense to me to begin each one with a verb: demonstrate, show, know, and apply. I want it to be something the students and parents understand. I don’t want it to be jargon. I didn’t want it to be from the state department or the Common Core or whatever. It just made sense to me.

Me: The lesson I saw today was to identify sentence structure. Where does that lesson go in the goals for the quarter? Or is that a daily objective?

Ms. Whitwell: I have trouble with writing a good daily objective.

At this point, Ms. Whitwell paused for a long time, so I asked, “Do you think your students are making the connection between what they are doing today and the goals for the quarter?” She replied, “In my 5th and 7th hour, I bothered to say that-that I really want to see them starting to vary their sentence structure, making sentences longer and more adult like.”

In the decision to reword broad state standards into nine-week goals, Ms. Whitwell’s intuition of what students need to know and what would work with students was stronger than the influence of the state standards. From personal experience with

students and parents, she chose to not simply copy the state standards on the board, but rather to revise them to shorter, more direct statements for students and parents to understand more clearly what they need to learn in that nine-week period.

Summary of Standards and Objectives

Ms. Whitwell's decision to revise the state standards into nine week goals statements was influenced by her experience with state standards: she wanted the language to be less wordy and more accessible to students and parents. However, she was not able to articulate why she had made the changes to the content of the standards other than making them more accessible to students. In subsequent conversations, I tried to get to the core of how she made those decisions in lessons specific to the standards discussed in the next two sections.

Decision-Making Process: Complete Sentence Lessons

Independent and Dependent Clauses

One of our long conversations focused on the objective: Show appropriate use of sentence structure in writing. Ms. Whitwell began the lesson by giving notes on the difference between an independent and dependent clause. The notes were on the screen at the front of the room. As she went over the examples on the screen, she instructed the students to write down everything that was highlighted in pink.

It seemed like a cognitively low level lesson since her objective was to show appropriate sentence structure in writing and all they were doing was taking notes and identifying the difference between independent and dependent clauses. I asked her if the lesson was a review for the students. She responded, "it was review from the day before, but the entire topic of sentence structure is a review for them from years' past

because my son in a lower grade has learned the same thing.” She had the personal experience of knowing the students had already been introduced to sentence structure, yet she didn’t take that experience into account and was introducing the concept of sentence structure as if the students had never been exposed to it before.

Me: Is this how you give notes every day. The slide and everything in pink is what you write down? Is that a norm?

Ms. Whitwell: That is not a norm. That’s this day.

Me: So why did you do it that way this day?

Ms. Whitwell: I’ve done it before with a review too, so it is kind of...um...

At this point her voice trailed off as if unable to explain why she had them take notes. So I asked her how she decided what went in pink or red, because she had clearly highlighted the notes for them. She explained, “Because they will write everything down and get overwhelmed and not realize [what to write down]. I feel like they need help picking out the important things. I asked, “Were the students copying those notes down so they could use them later or are they using the notes for learning while they copy them down? Where do those notes come in to support their learning?” She said, “I intend for them to refer back to the notes later”, but she didn’t know how or when they would need these particular notes again.

From this conversation, it seemed she had designed an introductory lesson on sentence structure, even though her personal experience was that students had already had an introductory lesson on the topic. So I continued to question her about the rest of the lesson trying to get to her decision-making process and what had informed her decisions.

Mr. Morton Video

The next portion of her lesson on sentence structure was to show a Schoolhouse Rock video called *Mr. Morton*. The video gives many examples of different types of sentences without ever explaining the sentence types or distinguishing what makes each type unique. The video didn't give any introductory information. As I watched with the students, it seemed that students would already have to understand sentence structure to understand the video, making it good for a review. But Ms. Whitwell had just given an introductory set of notes, so I was curious about why she decided to show the video.

Me: What is your reason behind using that video at this time in the lesson?

Ms. Whitwell: Just to explain it a different way. To engage them. I don't know if they really get that because most of the sentences in the video are not written out, he just says them. What I want them to get out of it is that a full sentence will have something going on in it. Something going on in terms of...something happening. So the verb.

Me: So do you feel like you had students going in to this day that don't have subjects and verbs in their sentences? Does their writing warrant this lesson? Is that what brought you to the subject/verb lesson?

Ms. Whitwell: Um...I had only read one piece of writing to this point so I don't know if I really saw the need at this point. It didn't stick out to me. It just seems a natural place to start a review of sentences with here is what a whole sentence is.

At this point in the conversation, I still felt like I didn't know why she did a sentence structure lesson at all. We discussed other way to teach sentence structure other than giving notes for students to copy and identifying types of sentences. The students were reading excerpts from Elie Wiesel's *Night* at the time working through applying literary elements, another of her nine-week objectives. I suggested she use the passage from *Night* and have the students search for the differences in those sentences,

noticing that some have a subject and verb, some don't, and that real writers use all types of sentences, including fragments. We talked about the rigor of that kind of lesson where the grammar review is embedded in authentic text. After that discussion, she finally described her decision.

Me: Even though *Night* is hard reading, they could have done it in this way. Think about that.

Ms. Whitwell: I will. I will be the first to admit that I'm not as comfortable with that.

Me: You are more comfortable in giving notes and practicing as opposed to discovery and write the rules.

Ms. Whitwell: Yes.

Ms. Whitwell teaches what she knows and is comfortable. *Night* is a difficult text for 8th graders, yet she is using it to teach applying literary terms. However, she is not comfortable using it to teach the most basic of sentence structure. Personal experience and intuition seem to be driving how she teaches. I still didn't know how she decided what to teach. Why did she teach sentence structure when she wasn't comfortable with it? Why did she design low-level activities for the students to do? She had not really articulated that until I asked:

Me: Is there anything else you want to tell me about the lesson that I didn't ask you? Anything about your process in getting ready for that day or how everything came off that day that I didn't ask you about?

Ms. Whitwell: Just that it's not a lesson I'm very comfortable teaching, it's not my forte, it's not very developed.

Me: So let me ask, if you are not comfortable and it's not developed, why did you feel like you had to do it?

Ms. Whitwell: Because we had all agreed we had seen some things in student writing last year that we wished we had introduced earlier last year that we ended up having to address as we went.

Me: So is there anything you wish you had done differently?

Ms. Whitwell: Not had so many days of notes. [I need] to figure out what they really know.

Meeting the standard: “Students will show appropriate use of sentence structure in their writing”, was an agreed upon standard for the first nine weeks. Her decision to include that goal in her nine-week plan was completely based on collegial planning. Yet, she didn’t also incorporate what she knew about students’ prior experiences or even how her own students had performed the previous year. She spent two days on the concept that complete sentences have a verb, yet had not seen that her students weren’t writing complete sentences. She also missed the opportunity to show the use of fragments in authentic text and the power fragments can have in a text. So, to adhere to the collegial plan, she created a lesson at her comfort level based on her intuition and experience, but not one that considered students’ instructional needs.

Summary of Complete Sentence Lesson

The lesson on identifying complete sentences showed Ms. Whitwell’s attempts to make decisions based on collegial planning, preparation for state assessment, and her own intuition. However, as our conversation showed, she had reduced the standard to a level she was comfortable teaching. Even though she knew what the standard was, she taught the lowest level of that standard, fully aware (through her reflection) that she did not know how to develop a lesson to fully address the standard. Ms. Whitwell’s decision-making process is a very personal one, based on what she can do in her classroom.

Decision-Making Process: Paragraphs with Evidence

Nonfiction Reading with Annotation

Another conversation that showed Ms. Whitwell’s decision-making process in action was her lessons addressing the objective *write a well-constructed paragraph using claims and evidence*. Ms. Whitwell had the students seated in groups of four and introduced an activity in reading nonfiction by saying, “Reading fiction is a choice later in life. Reading nonfiction is not a choice. You will have to do it to work and live.” The activity was for students to annotate an article for details they would use to write a summary and record their reactions to the article on the side of the page.

Me: Why do you have students annotate nonfiction articles?

Ms. Whitwell: For several years, we have done Article of the Week to increase the amount of nonfiction reading. That was one way to prepare for the Common Core standards. Then our state writing test became passage-based with two articles. So we do more of that now and I wanted to start with annotating details for the first rounds of nonfiction.

Ms. Whitwell was influenced by the Common Core standards and impending state assessments. As discussed in chapter 1, Oklahoma had repealed the Common Core standards, but had kept the writing assessment. Her decision to add more non-fiction “several years ago” was in response to the new standards. The addition of non-fiction to their general routine was in response to the state writing test based on two non-fiction passages. She was trying new ways to incorporate non-fiction into her classroom. The following section describes her attempt to implement the new strategy.

Creating Groups, Group Assignment, and Redirection

Students were sitting in groups of four. In one part of the observed lesson, she asked students to come up with a name for their group using candy bar names. She walked around the room writing down the names the groups came up with. Selecting names and recording the names with her took about 10 minutes. I asked her to describe her criteria for creating the groups.

Ms. Whitwell: [My criteria] was very basic. I took their scores from the state test last year and took my highest and scattered them among six groups and kept going through the scores, considering gender and the personality of the kids.

Me: So you wanted a heterogeneous ability group and used last year's scores to form those?

Ms. Whitwell: Yes, it worked in all but one hour, I had to keep regrouping and organizing because they just could not work together. But I began intentionally grouping them by gender and skill.

Me: And why give themselves a candy bar name?

Ms. Whitwell: I got that idea from Pat Pavelka [a small group instruction workshop]. You have a candy bar group, which is heterogeneous, and a soda pop group that is homogeneous. That way you can quickly group by asking them to get into their candy bar groups or soda bar groups, depending on how you want them grouped. I hope to use it all year.

After her explanation of grouping, we returned to the video of students working. As the students began to work on the assignment, the room went silent. She had seated them in groups and instructed them to work as a group, annotating the article and writing their reactions to the annotations on the side of the page. However, the students had not yet read the article, so they all read silently rather than doing anything as a group. As individual students finished reading, they began to annotate and highlight their articles. As students reached this point, many raised their hands with questions for

Ms. Whitwell. She spent some time moving around the room answering individual questions and then went to the front of the room, got the attention of the whole class (it was still silent due to many students still reading the article), and explained the directions again. When she finished, the students began working and the room was silent again. I had many questions after observing the lesson and then viewing it several times. She clearly intended for this to be a group assignment and had spent time putting them into groups, yet all students were working independently. After viewing the entire section, we had the following exchange:

Me: So how did this task, annotating an article, lend itself to group work?

Ms. Whitwell: I was thinking they could move through it faster if they discussed their reactions, or it would give them more ideas for reactions if they heard what someone else thought about the article, they could hear and think, “Oh, I thought that too.” What was interesting is that a lot of them ended up working on their own.

Me: You were circulating the room and answering individual questions. What made you stop and go to the front of the room?

Ms. Whitwell: Kids were telling me they were confused. I needed to explain some formatting features in the article such as the url link. It is confusing for even an experienced reader when there is noise on the page.

We viewed several minutes of the groups working. It was completely silent. I asked her, “Did you expect that silence?” She replied, “no.” I then asked, “What was successful about this group work?”

Ms. Whitwell: A lot of the groups didn’t have time to finish. It was funny because I meant to give them the other article to do in groups because it is more difficult. It has more difficult words and you are forced to look them up and that it hinders their understanding. I ended up giving them that for homework. It should have been the opposite way.

Me: What was unsuccessful about the group work?

Ms. Whitwell: Um...not everything they did in the group they did on their homework. I passed them back yesterday so they could see all the comments they did during group work and the comments they did at home to make them match up.

Me: What could you have done differently to make that work better?

Ms. Whitwell: Maybe be more directive. I think it was later in the day, like get to this point and then stop and talk about it. Give them more parameters. Everyone in the group should agree on what the summaries will look like for these few paragraphs. What will our reactions, what do we think about this? I want them to see that they don't have to have the same reactions, but their summaries can be the same.

Ms. Whitwell spent a great amount of time putting students into group by state testing performance from the year before. She attributed this to a technique she had learned in a workshop on small group instruction where it was suggested dividing students into small groups by skill level. Perhaps because it was the beginning of the year, and by her own admission, they had not done much writing, she felt she had to use state performance data from the year before. It appears she used the outside influence of a workshop presenter to make her decision to group students, but rather than group them for instruction, she grouped them for a task. By her own admission, she didn't design the task to be group-oriented, so students worked on their own, while sitting beside each other. Her decision-making process seemed to be relying on outside influences in terms of trying to match a standard and incorporate a best practice from a workshop, but she didn't incorporate her intuition of the difficulty of the passages or her experience with students that the task needed to have.

Summary of Paragraphs with Evidence

Ms. Whitwell's decision-making processes lacked intentionality. She decided to have students annotate an article, but didn't have a clear reason why they needed to

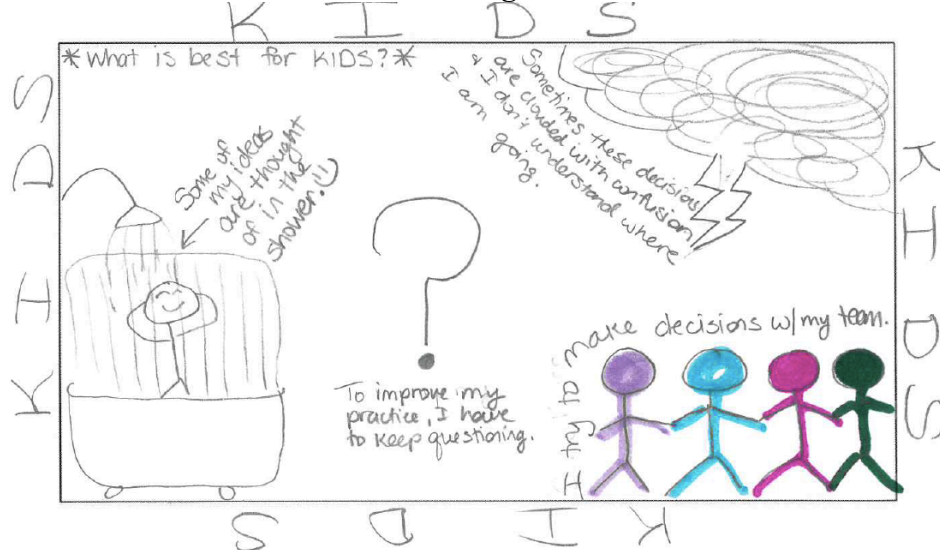
annotate it, particularly in groups. She designed a lesson on writing complete sentences without really finding out if her students could write complete sentences or not. Her reflections on two lessons designed to teach two different standards showed her use of intuition, personal experience, collegial planning, and outside influence, but it all seemed to be by accident, without intentionality, leading to students working on low level sentence structure activities without identifying a need. Students were working in groups simply to be working in groups without the benefit of a planned group lesson that would require interaction to complete.

Self-Efficacy and Decision-Making:

I collected over six hours of video and audio in Ms. Whitwell's class, some in observation and some in interviews and conversation. When I had further questions, we communicated by email and visited face-to-face at other meetings. Figure 2, Ms. Whitwell's Decision-Making Model, was her visual response when I asked to her to draw her response to the question: How do you decide what to teach? She has several visuals and the entire model is framed with the word KIDS on all four sides. In addition to the visual representations, she explains her process using these statements:

- What is best for kids.
- Sometimes these decisions are clouded with confusion and I don't understand where I am going.
- Some of my ideas are thought of in the shower.
- I try to make decisions with my team
- To improve my practice I have to keep questioning.

Figure 3 Ms. Whitwell's Decision-Making Model



To explore her perception of her self-efficacy as a teacher, Ms. Whitwell answered the Self- Efficacy Survey. The full results of her survey can be found in Appendix A. The Table 10, Compilation of Decisions and Efficacy shows a compilation of Ms. Whitwell’s decisions and the results of her self-efficacy survey.

Table 10 Compilation of Decisions and Efficacy

Ms. Whitwell’s Decisions and Efficacy Scores		
Inner Influences	Categories of Targeted Decisions	Percentage of Targeted Decisions
	Use of Intuition (28%) Use of Personal Experience (31%)	59%
Outside Influences	Adherence to Collegial Planning (14%) Outside Influences: (25%) Research, State Assessment, Professional Development	40%
	Self-Efficacy	
Self-Efficacy Category	Total Score	Mean Score
Student Engagement	54/72	6.75/9.0
Instructional Strategies	50/72	6.25/9.0

Ms. Whitwell gave herself the lowest efficacy score of all three teachers, perhaps suggesting her own confidence level of what she can really control in her classroom when it comes to student engagement, instructional strategies and classroom management. She rated herself lower than her colleagues on the efficacy scale in every area, particularly in Instructional Strategies. Whereas her goals for instruction were very clear and she had revised them for her individual classroom, her lowest efficacy score was for adjusting lessons to the proper level for individual students. She struggled with connecting the standard to her lesson, providing grade level rigor, and creating a context for students to interact with each other about their new knowledge. However, she recognized that the reason her lesson in sentence structure was not strong was due to her own lack of skill in developing a lesson in that area. She identified that as an area of growth she wants to explore (Ross & Gray, 2006). Her actual instruction appears to match her model for decision-making where she writes, “Some of these thoughts are clouded with confusion and I don’t understand where I am going.”

Ms. Whitwell gave herself an overall score of 163 out of 216 with a mean score of 6.79 out of a possible 9.0. Her personal sense of efficacy is lower than her colleagues who have fewer years of experience. Her level of efficacy in Instructional Strategies is a 50 out of a possible 72 points. Ms. Whitwell scored herself a 6 out of 9 on the statement *How well can you implement alternative strategies in your classroom*, reflecting her lack of confidence, which became apparent in the group annotation activity. She implemented the group strategy without any real decision as to how to initiate learning in the group setting. Additionally, she rated herself a 7 out of 9 on the statement *How*

well can you provide challenges for students. She reduced her 8th grade lesson on sentence structure to identifying complete and incomplete sentences without finding out if the students were struggling in that skill. Yet, 59% of her decisions are based on intuition and personal experience. It seems incongruent for someone who relies on personal experience and intuition 59% of the time to not feel a high sense of efficacy in an instructional situation. Ms. Whitwell's low level of confidence was reflected in her inability to articulate why she does what she does in her classroom and how her actions affect student learning.

Outside Evaluator:

What connection, if any, exists among what a teacher decides to teach, a teacher's perceived self-efficacy, and the rating yielded by a mandated teaching evaluation instrument?

The same outside evaluator and the same scoring process was used for all three cases in this study, applying the Marzano Framework to the videos and transcripts. The outside evaluator gave Ms. Whitwell the lowest score possible in one element and the highest score possible in another, which warrants discussion of those two evaluation elements. The table below shows Ms. Whitwell's scores followed by an explanation of how the outside evaluator arrived at those scores and how they compare to the self-scored efficacy of Ms. Whitwell.

Table 11 Tabulation of Ms. Whitwell's Teaching Framework Scores 1-5

Element	Ms. Whitwell
Identifying Critical Information	3
Organizing Students to Interact with New Knowledge	2
Organizing Students to Practice and Deepen Knowledge	2
Noticing When Students are Not Engaged	4
Managing Response Rates	NA
Demonstrating Intensity and Enthusiasm	3
Identifying Areas of Pedagogical Strength and Weakness	2
Evaluating the Effectiveness of Individual Lessons and Units	3
Evaluating the Effectiveness of Specific Pedagogical Strategies and Behaviors	1
Total Score/Mean Score	20/2.5

Description and Discussion of Evaluator's Assessment

The outside evaluator watched the video of Ms. Whitwell assigning groups, explaining a group naming process, describing the annotation group assignment, and then monitoring students as they worked in groups. This was the same lesson described earlier in this section. In addition to viewing the video, the evaluator read the unedited transcript of interviews with Ms. Whitwell concerning that portion of the video. Two elements stand out as significant to the discussion of Ms. Whitwell: *Evaluating the Effectiveness of Specific Pedagogical Strategies and Behaviors* and *Noticing When Students are Not Engaged*. The evaluator used the rubric below to score the first element.

Element: Evaluating the Effectiveness of Specific Pedagogical Strategies and Behaviors.

1 Not Using	2 Beginning	3 Developing	4 Applying	5 Innovating
The teacher makes no attempt to perform the activity.	The teacher attempts to perform this activity but does not actually complete or follow through with these attempts.	The teacher determines the effectiveness of specific strategies and behaviors regarding the achievement of subgroups of students but does not accurately identify the reasons for discrepancies.	The teacher determines the effectiveness of specific strategies and behaviors regarding the achievement of subgroups of students and identifies the reasons for discrepancies.	The teacher is recognized as a leader in helping others with this activity.

Ms. Whitwell’s low sense of efficacy correlates to the evaluator’s score of 1 or Not Using in the area of *Evaluating the Effectiveness of Specific Pedagogical Strategies and Behaviors*. Ms. Whitwell does not feel a high sense of efficacy in this area and the evaluator did not score it high either. Her reflection showed no attempt to **evaluate the effectiveness** of her group work. She expressed that she “thought it would be easier for them” and “they could help each other”, but she never articulated what she could have done differently to make effective use of group time.

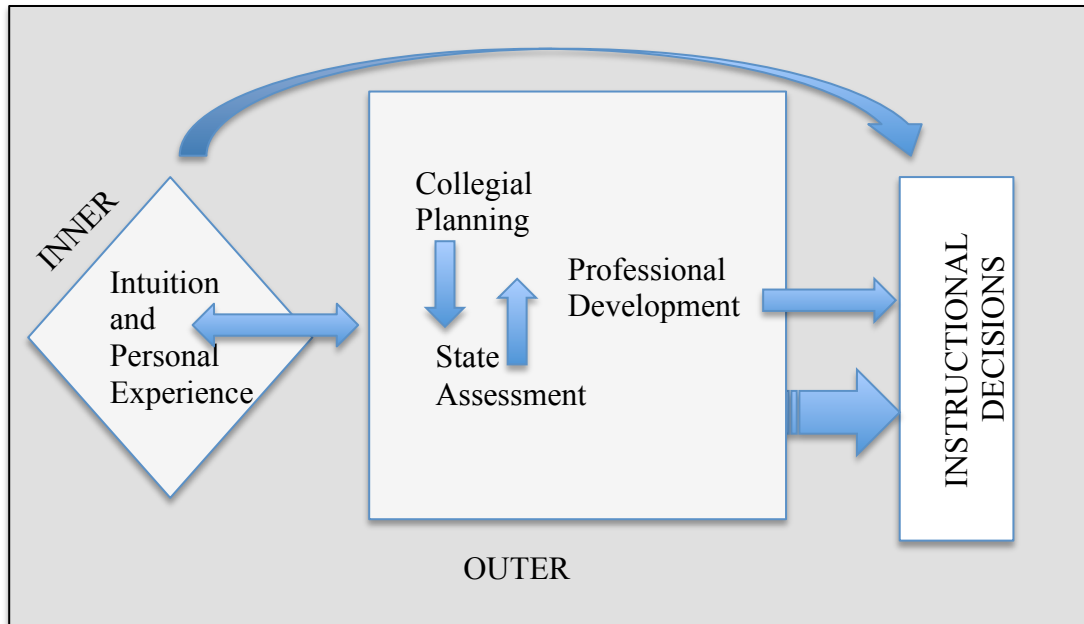
The other element of interest to this discussion is the evaluator’s score on the element *Noting When Students are Not Engaged*. The rubric used for that element is below.

Element: Noticing When Students Are Not Engaged

1 Not Using	2 Beginning	3 Developing	4 Applying	5 Innovating
Strategy was called for but not exhibited.	Uses strategy incorrectly or with parts missing.	Scans the room, making note of when students are not engaged and takes action, but the majority of students are not monitored for the desired effect of the strategy.	Scans the room, making note of when students are not engaged and takes action and monitors for evidence of the extent to which the majority of students re-engage.	Adapts to and creates new strategies for unique student needs and situations in order for the desired effect to be evident in all students

On this element, the evaluator rated Ms. Whitwell 4 out of 5. Ms. Whitwell noticed when students were not engaged when they were asking clarifying questions, but she did not **create a new strategy for this unique need** so that all students would **display the desired effect**. She wanted students to work together and share responses, yet they sat in silence, working individually. To me, this would be a score of 2 because she noticed they were not engaged, but she didn't re-engage them to desired ends. Ms. Whitwell's low efficacy sense of efficacy was similar to my assessment, but the evaluator's assessment rated her much higher.

Figure 4 Summary Model of Ms. Whitwell's Decision-Making



The model above illustrates a summary of Ms. Whitwell's decision-making process. She often relied on personal experience and intuition to make instructional decisions without considering outside influence. However, when making decision with her colleagues in collegial planning, she went back and forth among her personal experience, what they planned as colleagues, and the state assessment. Finally, a professional development session on small groups led to a set of decisions about grouping students without considering the task. Ms. Whitwell used fewer outer influences in her decision-making than Ms. Bowman did and relied much more on her personal experience and intuition.

Individual Case: Ms. Richard

Setting

Ms. Richard was in her second year of teaching during the time of this study. In addition to teaching language arts, she was also the Cheerleading coach. She was very much in control of her classroom and everything in it. She is relaxed with her students, but her classroom is void of outbursts and/or drama. I observed students waiting when the bell rang to be dismissed by rows. Ms. Richard has a very controlled classroom: it is neat, it is orderly, and her students are very compliant.

She was open to being part of the study, but was very nervous the first time I was in her room when students were there. She told me she had not been observed very much and it was nerve-wracking for her. After the first two visits she laughingly admitted that she was much calmer and didn't know why she had been so nervous at first. Ms. Richard is a very reflective person and has a quick answer for everything I asked about her classroom.

Ms. Richard's classroom was part of the new construction in the building. It was decorated with bright colors and new furniture. I could tell from their demeanor that the students liked their classroom and part of their daily routine was to clean up in the last minute of class as the bell was ringing to signal passing period. She had plenty of room in the back of the classroom for students to spread out during group work and she took advantage of that. The front wall had an interactive white board with computer screen, document camera, and projector in a presentation station. Ms. Richard taught from the presentation station, utilizing the computer throughout the lesson. Her desk was in the back corner of the room.

As with the other two teachers, I collected data in Ms. Richard's room at the beginning of the school year through observations, videos, and interviews. From this

eight week sample of observations and interviews, two sets of decisions concerning what to teach emerged: her use of the Marzano Status Check, and her development of a creative unit review of mechanics. Table 12, Decisions Made by Ms. Richard, provides a visual overview of the decisions involving use of a Marzano strategy and the review of mechanics unit.

Table 12 Overview of Decisions Discussed in This Section

Ms. Richard's Decisions	Influence	Description
Marzano Status Check		
School Wide Strategy	Marzano Evaluation Model and Adherence to Collegial Planning	"...having a scale is a big part of Marzano, which I want to do..."
Discipline Specific	Marzano Evaluation Model	"We use the state writing rubric instead..."
Creative Unit Review		
Application of Mechanics	Adherence to Collegial Planning	"We did an extensive review for the [department] test..."
Group Creative Project	Student Needs	"They are math minded...it is good to have them stretch their creative legs..."
Initial Plan	Personal Experience	"I don't think it was academically rigorous..."
Redirection	Student Need and Personal Experience	"I had to read aloud for this class..." "I did that differently in every other hour..."
Later Use	Intuition and Personal Experience	"I want to display them, but we haven't had time to revisit them..."
Intervention	Intuition and Personal Experience	"I can reteach and then pull students into intervention..."

Decision-Making Process: Marzano Status Check

School Wide Strategy and Discipline Specific Strategy

At the front of the room, Ms. Richard had a laminated poster called Status Check. I recognized this as a Marzano teaching strategy that feeds into the Teaching Framework model. One of the evaluation model elements is for teachers to provide a way for students to monitor their understanding through a learning scale, so that at any time during a lesson, the teacher can have the students assign themselves a rating from the scale that reflects their understanding at that point in the lesson. Some teachers in the district design their own scales, others collaborate to create scales, and in some cases, an entire school might use the same scale in every classroom. The scale in Ms. Richard's room looked like this:

Figure 5 Status Check

STATUS CHECK	
0	I don't know
1	I've heard of it, but can't define it
2	I can define it
3	I can define and apply it
4	I can write about it

I asked her to tell me about the Status Check and how she uses it.

Ms. Richard: [names the instructional coach for the school] made them last year because having a scale is a big part of Marzano [strategies], which I want to do. I have it up there because I'm supposed to be using it, but it's not where my mind immediately goes.

Me: So where does your mind want to go?

Ms. Richard: I tend to just ask them if they understand and they nod. Sometimes I ask them to give a thumbs up or thumbs down. They usually respond pretty well. They really don't like to draw attention to

themselves by holding up fingers. I can tell from blank stares if I need to explain it again. We use parts of the writing rubric instead.

Me: Can you tell me about that?

Ms. Richard: The state writing rubric is on a 1-4 scale, but the language is specific. It has more description than just “I don’t understand.” It actually defines what they should know. That is much more helpful for students.

The state writing rubric is based on five traits of writing-ideas and development, organization and coherence, sentences and paragraphs, word choice, and conventions. Each trait has a performance scale of 1-4 with detailed descriptions of what students have to do to receive that score.

Me: Which part of the writing rubric did you use in this unit?

Ms. Richard: I gave them the conventions section only and I had them read it before we began the unit on mechanics. They rated themselves and then they pasted in in their notes so they could refer to it throughout the unit. They rated themselves again at the end of the unit. Most of them rated themselves higher [at the end].

Me: So you agree with the theory of students using scales to rate themselves?

Ms. Richard: Yes. I just made it discipline specific.

Ms. Richard made several decisions concerning how to monitor student understanding and providing a way for them to monitor their understanding. She agrees with the use of a learning scale in theory, but the Status Check provided by the instructional coach did not fit her needs. In fact, her personal experience with students shows her that they are uncomfortable sharing out a rating or even being able to rate themselves in such a vague way. Her decision to use a scale related to state testing shows the influence of the state writing assessment driving not only teaching conventions, but also how she relies more on her experience of how to implement a strategy than she does on what her colleagues have provided her.

Summary of Marzano Status Check

Ms. Richard's decisions about using the Status Check poster illustrated a larger issue. This district and many districts across the state are using the Marzano Teaching Framework as an evaluation model and teachers are trained to implement the elements of the model in their classroom. In an attempt to provide uniformity across the school, the instructional coach created and made copies of a school wide learning scale for all classrooms. Instead of helping Ms. Richard implement the strategy, it actually hindered her because she did not feel it gave her or her students enough information. Choosing her own scale has proved to be more useful for her students, but she still has to post the "official" scale to follow the norm in her school.

Decision-Making Process: Creative Unit Review

Application of Mechanics

The first unit Ms. Richard taught in this eight-week period was a review of capitalization and punctuation rules addressing the mechanics of writing. I knew she had already given the test over the unit because I had been present for the review before the test. On this particular observation, she was again doing a quick review of very basic punctuation rules. Students copied five sentences from the board into their notebooks, applying punctuation as they worked. Then, Ms. Richard asked students to share how the sentences should be punctuated. The students were compliant, but I was confused about why she was going over rules again, when I knew the results of her mechanics test had been good, so I asked about that in our next conversation. She explained, "We did a pretty extensive review for their test on their own and we discussed. I wanted both: remind them of the rules and also get ready for this activity."

The activity she referred to was a creative group project concerning the application of punctuation rules.

Group Project Initial Plan and Redirection

Ms. Richard had taken poorly punctuated sentences from *Eat, Sleeps, and Leaves* by Lynne Truss to give her students a fun way to apply punctuation rules. She divided the class into groups and gave each of them a paired sentence—one with appropriate punctuation and one without. As a group, they were to draw the pictures the sentences depicted such as a picture illustrating the difference between “Let’s eat, Grandma” and “Let’s eat Grandma.” The groups had to decide together how to illustrate their set of punctuated sentences where the punctuation changes the meaning.

We reflected on that lesson as we watched the video of the students working in their groups, specifically about the level of rigor in the activity. She explained, “I don’t think it was academically rigorous, but I wanted them to stretch themselves creatively because we don’t have as much time for that and for a lot of them, they are really math minded, so it is good for them to stretch their creative legs and it was rigorous that way.”

Her decision to do a creative project really didn’t have to do with standards or student learning, it was more influenced by her knowledge of her students’ “math mindedness” and wanting to give them an opportunity to be creative. She decided to tap into the creativity through illustrating sentences where the punctuation changes the meaning. She was not expecting it to be hard and was frustrated as she had so many questions from groups when they should have been working. We watched that portion of the video together.

Me: Even though you don't think it was academically rigorous, they had so many questions and did not seem to understand what they were supposed to be doing. As you went around the room, what were the kids not understanding about the task? Why did they need you so much during this group activity?

Ms. Richard: They did not understand the difference between the sentences. When I read them aloud, they understood. I had to do that all day long.

Me: Did you change that up and add to the instruction the rest of the day?

Ms. Richard: Yes. I told them to read them aloud and talk about if they are the same or not. Some of them I still had to go around and micromanage.

Even though her initial intent of the group activity was as a creative outlet for review, the students struggled and she had to redirect and help them with the assignment. That experience helped her reshape how she explained the activity to the rest of her classes, but this class was frustrating for her to watch as they struggled with what should have been a simple activity. The next part of our conversation focused on the illustrations the groups produced.

Later Use

Me: What do you plan to do with all the drawings?

Ms. Richard: I'm still thinking about that. I want to laminate the best ones and put them on the wall. Some of them are really funny. We haven't had a ton of class time to revisit them. They did well on their test, so I haven't felt like we needed to revisit at this point. Some are really good drawing and I want to display them.

Me: So are you displaying for the drawing factor or as reminders?

Ms. Richard: Both. I like to display any type of student work. I want the reminder and the display.

Ms. Richard sighed heavily at this point and was frustrated, acknowledging that the illustrations were huge and it would be difficult to display them for any real use, and she wondered if they needed them at this point as a reminder of punctuation rules. Her intentions were good in deciding to do a creative activity, but the lack of rigor and difficulty in doing anything with the group illustrations made the activity problematic. I was still concerned about the level of rigor and I did not have a clear understanding of why she had made her instructional decisions. Further conversation revealed how she used student performance to inform intervention.

Intervention

In our last conversation, we talked about how the lessons in the unit, the test, and the group activity all worked together and what she would do with students who still were unable to punctuate correctly.

Me: Why study mechanics? Why do this unit in the 8th grade?

Ms. Richard: Well, we didn't do one [a mechanics unit] last year and when we started doing serious writing, we saw the results of that. You feel like 8th graders should remember how to use apostrophes, but sometimes they don't and we had a lot of trouble with that [last year]. We were so focused on ideas in their writing and we had not been demanding about mechanics and sentence structure, so we wanted to set the mechanics expectation right away. If your errors make it harder to read, you get a lower score and we don't want that to happen. I hope this pays off.

Me: So how will you monitor that? What happens when you get a paper that looks like you have had no review of capitalization and punctuation?

Ms. Richard: That depends. If I have several in one class period, I would pull them in to intervention time and reteach. If many students are struggling, then we have to re-evaluate our unit for next year and figure out how we can reteach it.

Ms. Richard's reflections shows a decision-making process that many teachers face: how to balance writing instruction so that students spend time on crafting their ideas, but also work to have a basic command of structure and rules so their writing can be understood by others, such as anonymous graders of a state test. Her reference to a "lower score" was in response to the state writing test. Ms. Richard is influenced by state assessment and the performance of students the previous year.

Summary of Creative Unit Review

Ms. Richard's decisions about the creative unit review reveal a balancing act among the outside influences of a collegially planned unit on mechanics, the need to meet expectations of state assessment, and her personal experience of what her students need and are able to do. Ms. Richard is intuitive in her approach to designing activities for students. From the evidence of her decision process in incorporating a creative review, she focuses on engaging students' creativity to connect to the state standards.

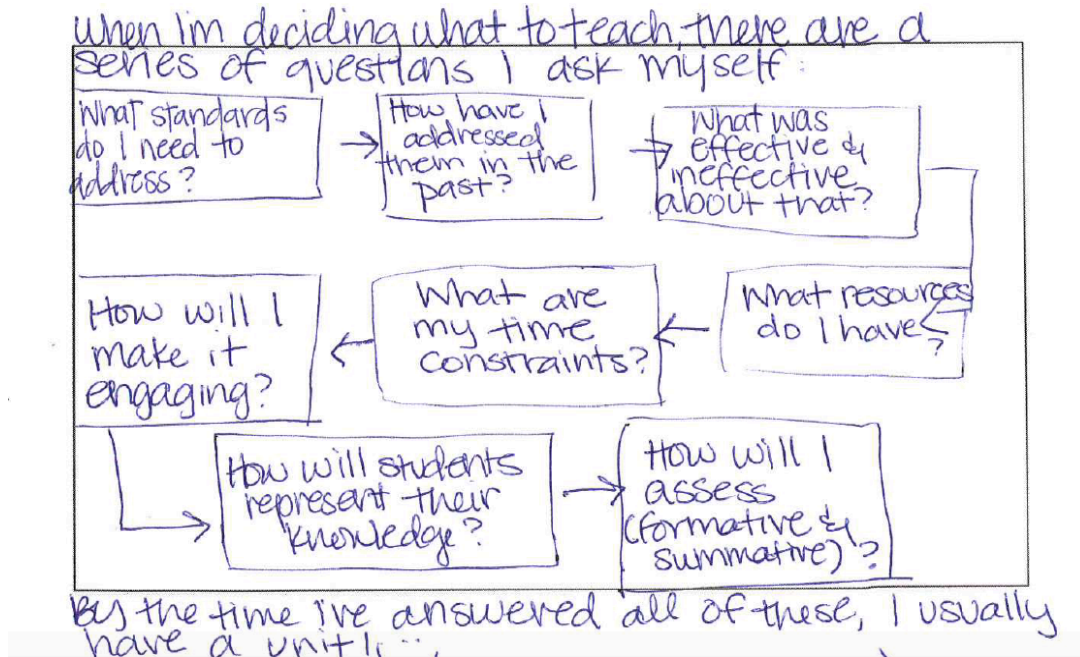
Self-Efficacy and Decision-Making

I collected almost five hours of video and audio in Ms. Richard's class, some in direct observation and some in conversation together reflecting on the videos. We communicated by email as well. Figure 4, Ms. Richard's Decision-Making Model, shows the visual she prepared in response to the question: "How do you decide what to teach?" I had encouraged her to use pictures, symbols, words, or any visual she wanted to convey how she decides what to teach. Her model below is mainly words showing a clear method to how she makes decisions about her teaching. She created a flow chart of a linear process, following a set of questions she asks herself as she plans:

- What standards do I need to address?
- How have I addressed them in the past?

- What was effective and ineffective about that?
- What resources do I have?
- What are my time constraints?
- How will I make it engaging?
- How will students represent their knowledge?
- How will I assess formative and summative?

Figure 6 Ms. Richard's Decision-Making Model



As the model shows, when she has answered all of those questions, she feels she usually has a “unit” or a plan for what she will teach.

Like the other two teachers, Ms. Richard took the full Efficacy Survey (Appendix A). The following table shows a compilation of Ms. Richard’s decisions and the results of her self-efficacy survey, followed by a discussion of her efficacy scores in relation to her decisions.

Table 13 Compilation of Decisions and Efficacy

Ms. Richard’s Decisions and Efficacy Scores		
Inner Influences	Categories of Targeted Decisions	Percentage of Targeted Decisions
		Use of Intuition (19%)

	Use of Personal Experience (30%)	
Outside Influences	Adherence to Collegial Planning (23%)	50%
	Outside Influences: (26%) Marzano Evaluation Model, State Assessment, Student Needs	
Self-Efficacy		
Self-Efficacy Category	Total Score	Mean Score
Student Engagement	71/72	8.88/9.0
Instructional Strategies	70/72	8.75/9.0

Ms. Richard gave herself high on the Efficacy Survey with an overall score of 208 out of 216 with a mean of 8.6 of out the highest possible mean score of 9.0. Her confidence in her ability to use personal experience is mirrored in her Instructional Strategy sub score of 70 out of 72 and her Student Engagement sub score of 71 out of 72.

Ms. Richard scored her highest sense of efficacy in the area of Student Engagement. She feels confident in her ability to help students think critically and foster student creativity. By scoring herself 9 out of 9 on *How much can you do to help your students think critically* she shows ultimate confidence in designing tasks that will engage her students in critical thinking. This is evidenced by her decision to abandon the low level school wide Status Check in favor of a more academically detailed rubric tied to the discipline of language arts. She recognizes the changes she needed to make in expectations to take her students to a new level of critical thinking, beyond what her instructional coach had provided for her.

She also scored herself 8 out of 9 on the efficacy scale in response to *How much can you do to foster student creativity*. She certainly adhered to collegial planning in

teaching a review of punctuation, but she recognized she had to take it to another level of engagement and designed the creative project. Even though the use of the products of the project became problematic, as discussed earlier, she relied on her knowledge of what her “math minded” students needed in terms of creative expression and tried to make that an authentic piece of her instruction. She has the ability to self-correct without losing her sense of success in teaching (Ross & Gray, 2006). Ms. Richard’s high efficacy scores show she feels confident in her ability to rely on herself to make decisions and she does so 50% of the time. However, she also considers outside influences in her decision-making whether that be state assessments, collegial planning, or school and district expectations.

Outside Evaluator:

What connection, if any, exists among what a teacher decides to teach, a teacher’s perceived self-efficacy, and the rating yielded by a mandated teaching evaluation instrument?

As with the previous two teachers, an outside evaluator scored nine elements of the Marzano Teaching Framework. As shown in the table below, the outside evaluator scored Ms. Richard the highest on items related to *Identifying Areas of Pedagogical Strength and Weaknesses* and *Evaluating the Effectiveness of Individual Lessons and Units*.

Table 14 Tabulation of Ms. Richard's Teaching Framework Scores

Element	Ms. Richard
Identifying Critical Information	3
Organizing Students to Interact with New Knowledge	NA
Organizing Students to Practice and Deepen Knowledge	3
Noticing When Students are Not Engaged	3
Managing Response Rates	1
Demonstrating Intensity and Enthusiasm	3
Identifying Areas of Pedagogical Strength and Weakness	4
Evaluating the Effectiveness of Individual Lessons and Units	4
Evaluating the Effectiveness of Specific Pedagogical Strategies and Behaviors	2
Total Score/Mean Score	23/2.83

Description and Discussion of Evaluator's Assessment

The evaluator watched the video of a lesson described earlier in this section where Ms. Richard gave instruction for a creative group review of punctuation by using sentences from *Eat, Shoots, and Leaves*. The evaluator saw the entire video from instruction through the students working in groups and Ms. Richard monitoring the group work. The evaluator also read the unedited transcript of the section of my interview with Ms. Richard to mimic a post-observation conference. All nine elements were scored, but two were of significance to this discussion: *Identifying Areas of Pedagogical Strength and Weakness* and *Organizing Students to Practice and Deepen Knowledge*. The evaluator used the rubric below to score the first element.

Element: Identifying Areas of Pedagogical Strength and Weakness

Not Using	Beginning	Developing	Applying	Innovating
The teacher makes no attempt to perform the activity.	The teacher attempts to perform this activity but does not actually complete or follow through with these attempts.	The teacher identifies specific strategies and behaviors on which to improve but does not select the strategies and behaviors that are most useful for his or her development.	The teacher identifies specific strategies and behaviors on which to improve from routine lesson segments, content lesson segments and segments that are enacted on the spot.	The teacher is recognized as a leader in helping others with this activity.

The evaluator scored Ms. Richard 4 out of 5 on Identifying Areas of Pedagogical Strength and Weakness. This rating is congruent with Ms. Richard's decision to design a creative group review of punctuation. Using the language of the rubric, the evaluator saw that Ms. Richards used **specific strategies and behaviors to improve the routine content segment.**

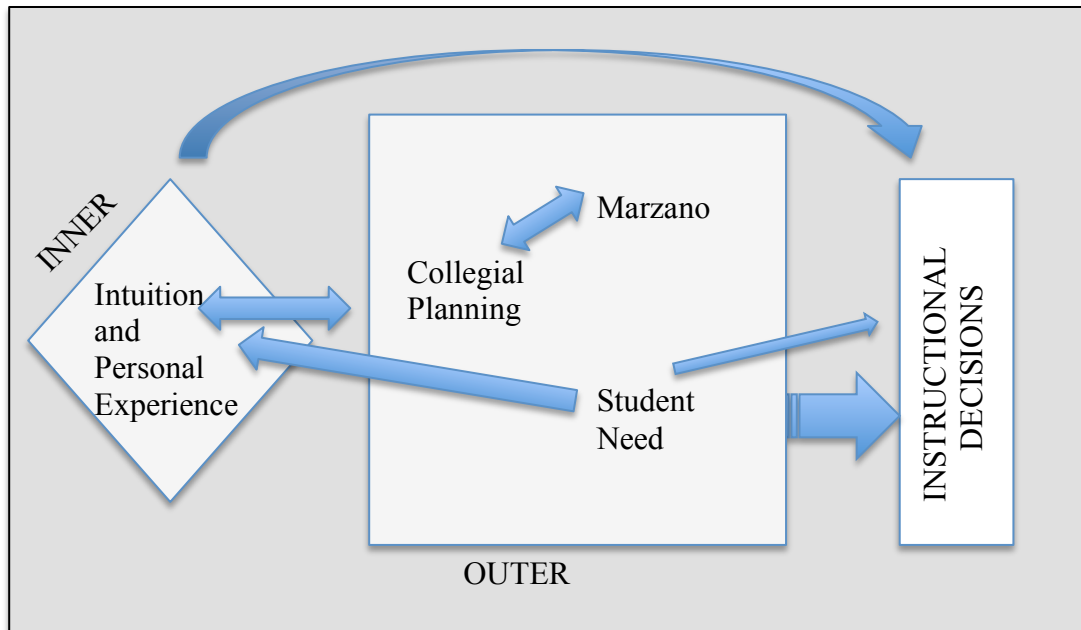
The element Organizing Students to Practice and Deepen Knowledge is important to this lesson since Ms. Richard chose to organize the students into groups for a creative review project. The evaluator used the following rubric to score this element.

Element: Organizing Students to Practice and Deepen Knowledge

Not Using	Beginning	Developing	Applying	Innovating
Strategy was called for but not exhibited.	Uses strategy incorrectly or with parts missing.	Organizes students into groups to practice and deepen their knowledge, but the majority of students are not monitored for the desired effect of the strategy.	Organizes students into groups to practice and deepen their knowledge and monitor evidence of the extent to which the group work extends the majority of students' learning.	Adapts to and creates new strategies for unique student needs and situations in order for the desired effect to be evident in all students

By viewing the video of the same lesson and referring to the unedited transcript of the interview, the evaluator rated Ms. Richard a 3 out of 5 for *Organizing Students to Practice and Deepen Knowledge*. Indeed, Ms. Richard was able to **organize her students to practice** punctuation rules in a creative way. Her own recognition that the project was not as rigorous as it could be is mirrored in the evaluator's score: the students were practicing their knowledge, but it was not of any deeper meaning than the application of rules to different kinds of sentences, a skill they had already practiced and in which, they had already been assessed.

Figure 7 Summary Model of Ms. Richard's Decision Making Model



The model above provides a summary of Ms. Richard’s decision-making process. She relied on inner influences and outer influences equally. Her decision-making processes were balanced between Inner Influences and Outer Influences, but intuition and personal experience were intertwined with her outer influences in her decision-making. She moved back and forth among collegial planning and intuition and personal experience, combining those perspectives to make instructional decisions. The influence of the Marzano evaluation figured in her decisions along with collegial planning, as represented by the desire to substitute the Status Check with a discipline-specific scale. Finally, student needs, sometimes combined with intuition and personal experience, informed her decisions.

Collaborative Decision: A Combined Model for Decision-Making

Over the course of eight-weeks, it was easy to see that this team of three teachers worked closely together and depended on one another to create and share lessons and ideas for their classroom. In the individual case studies, I highlighted aspects about them that were different. However, this section will highlight a set of decisions they made collaboratively, which represents 20% of their overall decision-making shown in the table below.

Table 15 Adherence to Collegial Planning: All Three Teachers

Definitions of Emergent Themes	Sample Participant Responses During Reflection Used to Categorize the Theme	Percentage of Decisions Discussed in This Section
Adherence to Collegial Planning: applies to decisions in their collaborative summer meeting and monthly meetings.	“In our planning meeting...” “As we planned this summer...” “We wanted to do it differently this year.”	20%

Decision-Making Process: Review of Grammar

The three teachers gathered in the summer to plan their calendar of units: the big ideas they needed to teach and when they would teach them. The collaborative decision that impacted their decisions regarding what to teach was beginning the year with a review of grammar and mechanics. I interviewed each teacher separately, asking about why they began with a review of grammar and mechanics, and their responses were reflective of collaborative planning, their agreement in that planning, and their adherence to the plan. Their responses to my question about why they began the year with the mechanics unit were similar, even though they all answered the question on different days.

Ms. Bowman: Well, last year we did a personal narrative, which was an easy writing for the kids, but they really weren't ready to open up and share through their writing.

Ms. Whitwell: We usually do an origami house the [names a teaching colleague's] lesson that introduces the students to us and to each other. But it's "too fluffy" and too much of an art project to take two weeks at the beginning of the school year.

Ms. Richard: "We didn't do one last year and when we started doing serious writing, we saw the results of that. We started with loopy goopy tell me about yourself stuff, creative stuff, which has its place.

They were all in agreement that the personal narrative they had done the year before just was not right for the students at the beginning of the year. It was too early in the year for the students to share openly in a personal narrative and they did not feel it had enough language arts content to begin the school year. They also responded in similar fashion when asked about the content of the unit. I had asked each of them why it was important to begin with a review of mechanics, aside from not liking the personal writing they had done the year before.

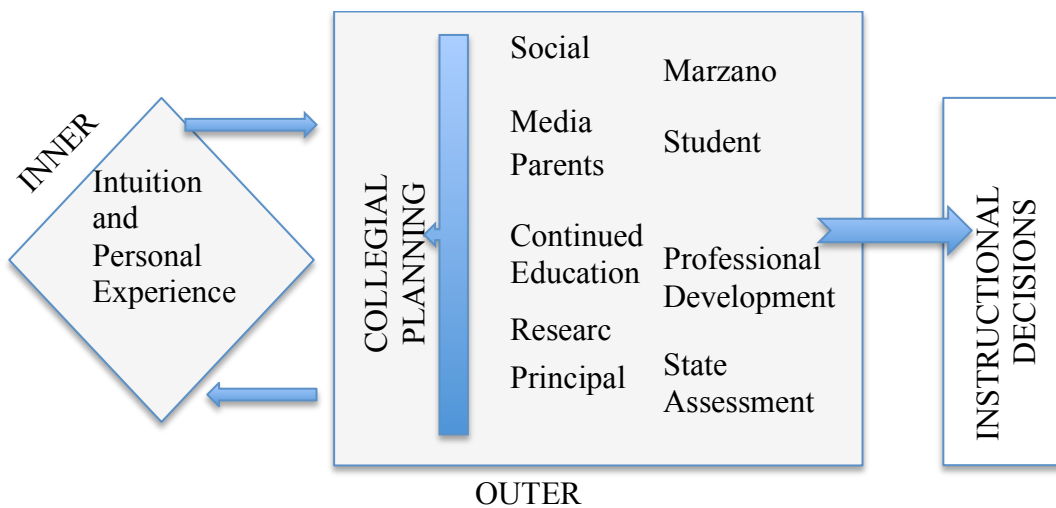
Ms. Bowman: We needed to tweak what was in place the year before. We saw that the kids needed it [review of mechanics] as we reflected on their struggling areas from last year. We were just marking it on the papers last year without having full instruction at the beginning. Now they understand what the state rubric means by "errors are minor" and how that is different from "errors impede readability."

Ms. Whitwell: Every year we talk about needing to review capitalization and commonly misused words and sentence structure because we see some of those errors in their work and we feel like a lot of the kids don't really know the correct way and we wanted to make it more apparent at the beginning of the year. We all agreed we had seen some things in student writing last year that we wished we had introduced earlier last year that we ended up having to address as we went. We have them look at the [state writing] rubric. These are the expectations the whole year.

Ms. Richard: We didn't begin with this last year and we paid for it all year in their writing. We wanted to set the expectation right away and clear up any misunderstandings. We use the state writing rubric to grade mechanics every time they write.

Their collaborative planning meeting in the summer and subsequent weekly meetings reinforced their decision to begin the year with a grammar unit to prepare for a writing unit based on the state writing assessment. Based on the writing of their students the year before, they felt they needed to do a grammar review early in the year and then hold students accountable to those skills in their writing. Even though their reflections were done individually and in separate interviews, the essence of the messages is almost identical describing how state testing and student needs influenced them to make their collaborative curricular decision. The following provides a model combining all three decision-making processes.

Figure 8 Collaborative Decision-Making Model



**Summary of Efficacy Survey for Three Teachers:
How do these three language arts teachers decide what to teach?**

Each teacher completed the Teacher Beliefs-Teacher Efficacy Scale Long Form. I tabulated their raw scores into summative scores and mean scores for the full 24-question survey and for each of the sub score categories. The full survey and tabulation of the survey for each teacher can be found in Appendix A.

**Summary of Outside Evaluator:
What connection, if any, exists among what a teacher decides to teach, a teacher’s perceived self-efficacy, and the rating yielded by a mandated teaching evaluation instrument?**

An outside evaluator viewed the videos as an observation and read the transcribed interviews as a post observation conference to score each teacher on nine elements of the Teaching Framework based on the work of Robert Marzano (Teaching Sciences 2013). Using the scoring rubrics (see Appendix B) the evaluator scored each teacher on a value of 1-5; (1) Not Using (2) Beginning (3) Developing (4) Applying (5) Innovating. Not Applicable (NA) means the observer did not see that action, nor was it warranted in the lesson. Not Applicable differs from Not Using. Not Using implies the strategy was needed, but not used. I used a spreadsheet to calculate the sum score and mean score for each teacher as seen in the table below.

Table 16 Tabulation of Teaching Framework Evaluation Tool

Element	Ms. Bowman	Ms. Whitwell	Ms. Richard
Identifying Critical Information	3	3	3
Organizing Students to Interact with New Knowledge	NA	2	NA
Organizing Students to Practice and Deepen Knowledge	NA	2	3
Noticing When Students are Not Engaged	3	4	3
Managing Response Rates	2	NA	1

Demonstrating Intensity and Enthusiasm	3	3	3
Identifying Areas of Pedagogical Strength and Weakness	3	2	4
Evaluating the Effectiveness of Individual Lessons and Units	3	3	4
Evaluating the Effectiveness of Specific Pedagogical Strategies and Behaviors	1	1	2
Total Score/Mean Score	18/2.57	20/2.5	23/2.83

Correlation

The final step in analysis and organization of the collected data was to see if there was a correlation between the teacher’s perception of their efficacy and the evaluator’s judgment of their actions through the Efficacy Survey and Teaching Framework I ran a Pearson correlation to check for statistical significance. Even though the sample was small, I wanted to see the correlation between the two measures and the means of the sub scores. The correlation was used to reveal relationships among the survey, the evaluation tool, and emergent themes in decision-making.

A high correlation of .84 was found for the overall efficacy score and the overall evaluation score. The following table shows the Pearson correlations of the overall scores and sub scores for the sample.

Table 17 Pearson Correlation of Teaching Framework Mean Score to Efficacy Scale Mean Scores for All Three Participants

Participant	Full Survey	Student Engagement	Instructional Strategies
Teaching Framework Mean Score: Full Sample	0.847170664	0.959104777	0.697911618

Summary of Findings

Ms. Bowman, Ms. Whitwell, and Ms. Richard were all working in the same unit of study, a grammar review leading into a writing unit to prepare for the state writing

test. Their decision-making styles, sense of efficacy, and the role of the evaluator were comparable. The teachers were all willing to reflect on their decisions and their lessons to refresh their memory. Even though they had planned the unit together, the approach looked slightly different with each teacher. Their personal sense of efficacy in instructional strategies, student engagement, and classroom management emerged in the survey. The outside evaluator's perceptions both validated and raised questions about efficacy and decisions in the classroom.

Chapter 5

Discussion and Implications

John Steinbeck (1966) wrote, “I have come to believe that a great teacher is a great artist and that there are as few as there are any other great artists. Teaching might even be the greatest of the arts since the medium is the human mind and spirit” (p. 142). At first glance, it may appear as if becoming a great teacher is a futile exercise and greatness is attainable only for the few. Yet, working in the “medium of the human mind and spirit” is a privilege and having influence on the human mind and spirit is formidable in and of itself. This brief snapshot of three teachers in a moment in time showcases decisions that engage in the medium of the human mind and spirit.

The purpose of this case study was to explore how three middle school language arts teachers decided what to teach. When the study began, public education in Oklahoma was in turmoil. After working for two years to implement the Common Core State Standards, the state legislature repealed them and put PASS back into place, mandating that new standards be written and implemented by the 2016-2017 school year. Currently, teachers must plan to teach under the PASS standards for one more school year while they learn the new standards that won't be finalized until late spring, and implement new standards the following school year. “What to teach” in Oklahoma is in flux.

By nature, a qualitative study is more open to interpretation and harder to replicate due to the context of the particular case, but the findings of this study align with the idea that teachers make decisions based on a variety of influences and then carry out those decisions in their personal style (Fang 1996). The three teachers all

considered personal experience, intuition, collegial planning, and outside influences as they individually and collaboratively planned lessons. Even though every teacher is different, these three teachers collectively decided what to teach in each lesson and in each unit.

In a way, conducting this study was a deeper analysis of what I do as a curriculum director. I work with teachers, watch them teach, talk about what worked well, what did not work, and what students did or did not learn. In that regard, this study was intensely personal. As the researcher, I was the colleague in the classroom, trying to capture the “practitioner’s perspective to describe classroom activities” (Lampert, 1985, p. 179). What I had been doing informally became formal during this study, influencing how I will work with teachers as Oklahoma continues to work to align expectations for curriculum, instruction, and assessment. As teaching is an intensely personal act, every teacher is a case study worthy of examination.

Discussion of Findings

I selected the three participants for this case study because of their commonalities. Together, they are a collaborative team of three, teaching all the students in the same grade in one school. They were all facing similar concerns at the time of this research: they were in their second year of a new writing assessment, they were working toward implementation of a new set of standards for language arts, and they had worked together for a year and were moving into their second year as a team. Two of the teachers were less experienced than the third, but they all experienced the new assessment and new standards. They collaboratively planned so that students in each of their classes would receive a comparable curriculum. They spoke about the

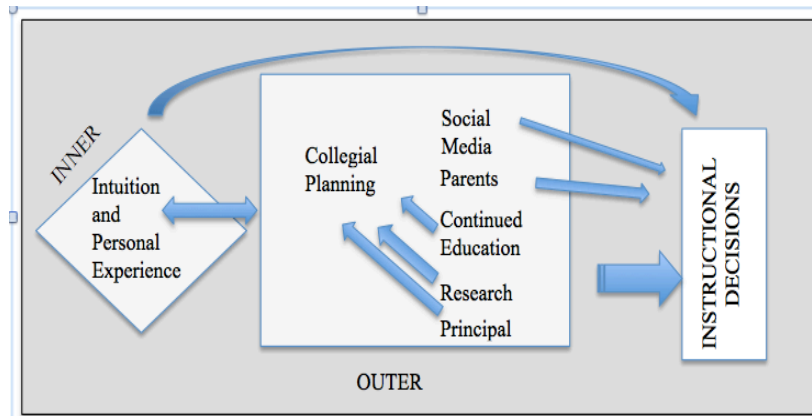
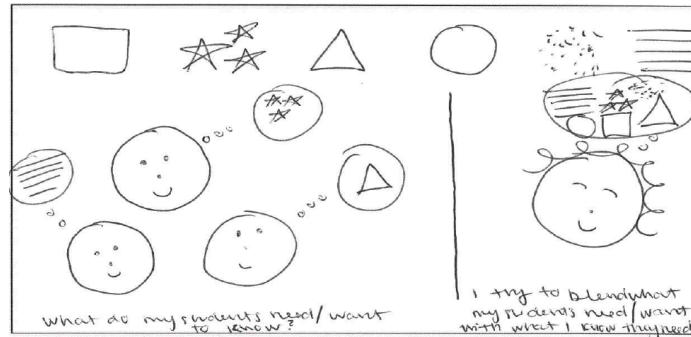
collaborative plan in similar ways: they had struggled with grammatical mistakes in student writing the year before and wanted to address that concern by beginning the year with a review of punctuation.

Over the course of the study, all three teachers were able to watch videos of their teaching and respond to questions during the interview process. The teachers reported our conversations helped them talk about their decision-making processes and enabled them to become more intentional in future lessons. But, even with so much in common, they emerged as three distinct personalities who approached “what to teach” in idiosyncratic ways.

Ms. Bowman

In describing her decision-making model (reprinted below from pg. 63) Ms. Bowman asked herself, “What do my students need/want to know?” and asserted, “I try to blend what my students need/want with what I know they need.” Ms. Bowman’s summary model derived from the study (reprinted below from pg. 70) showed multiple influences including students, parents, her intuition and personal experience, colleagues, education, and research all working together to affect her instructional decisions. Ms. Bowman made decisions about what to teach as a *thinker*; one who is reflective during and after the planning process, taking in all influences and arriving at an intentional decision as to what to teach. Ms. Bowman was hard on herself as a teacher, employing a cerebral, self-scrutinizing approach to every move, even plans for a substitute.

Figure 9 The Thinker Models

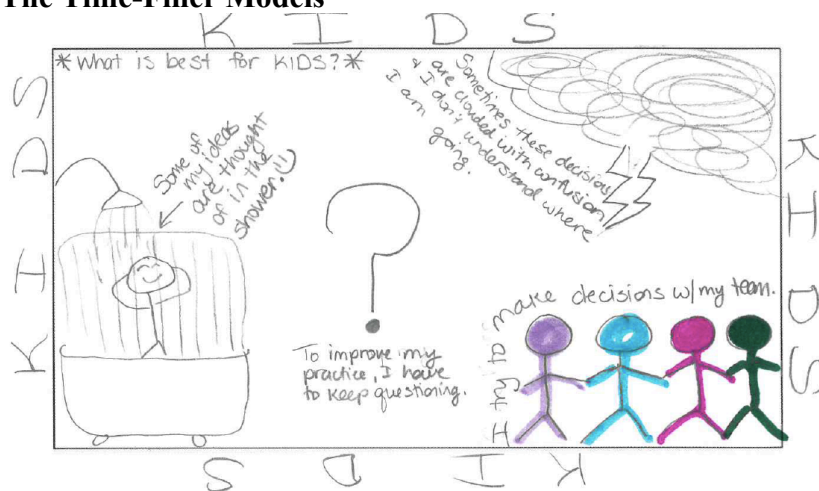


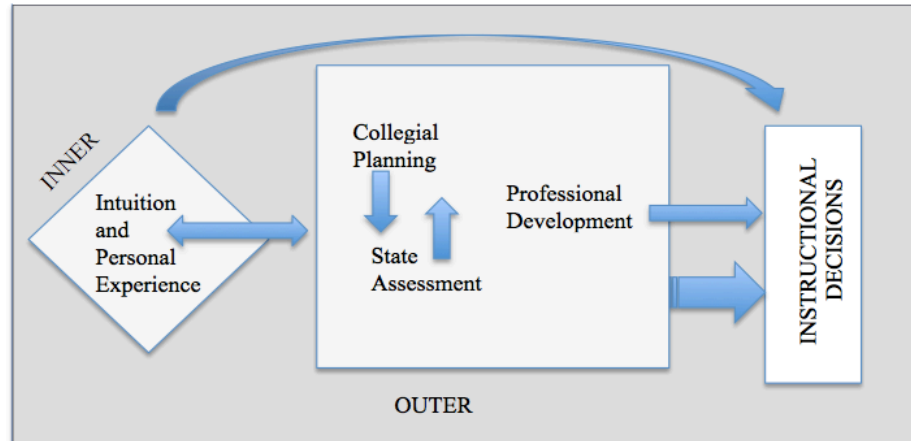
Ms. Whitwell

Ms. Whitwell’s decision-making model (reprinted below from pg. 85) is framed by the word “Kids.” One of her five descriptive statements is, “What is best for kids.” However, her reflections showed that she didn’t consider other information on her current students to plan her grammar lesson. She explained, “Sometimes these decisions are clouded with confusion and I don’t understand where I am going.” Her confusion was also apparent in her inability to articulate her thoughts about a lesson during reflection. Ms. Whitwell’s summary model (reprinted below from pg. 86), showed most of her decisions were made through intuition and personal experience and were strongly influenced by collegial planning and the state assessment, but with no real consideration of students. She did no pre-assessment to identify students who were making errors in

their writing and she tended to ignore her personal knowledge from her own son's experience in a previous grade that her students had already had instruction in types of sentences. Ms. Whitwell made decisions about what to teach in terms of a *time-filler*; one who plans activities to fill each day without intentionally considering her students' needs. Once, she showed a Schoolhouse Rock video covering sentence types that was not detailed enough to be instructive, but, by her own admission, was just to engage them in "something" at that time in class. She never articulated that she knew precisely what her students needed to learn; she rewrote standards to fit her knowledge base without really understanding that she had lowered the expectation of what students were to learn; and she moved through each unit and lesson without any real over-arching goal for student learning. A typical comment was, "the plan is get through *The Outsiders* before Christmas break."

Figure 10 The Time-Filler Models

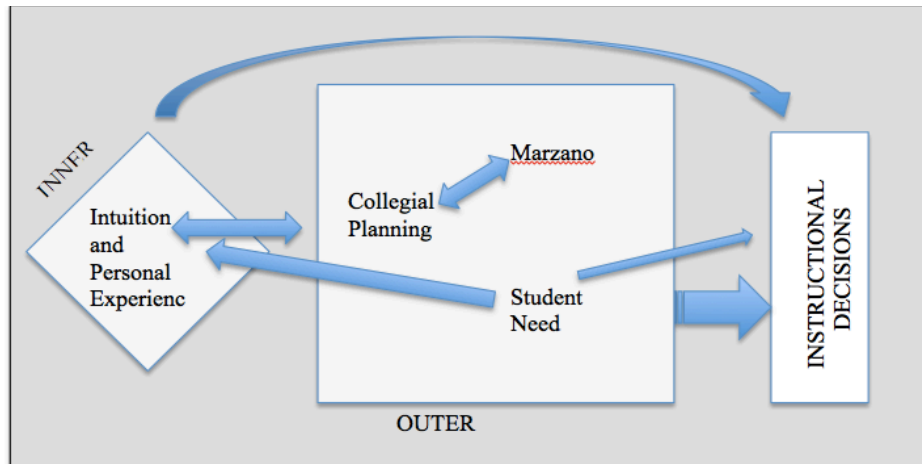
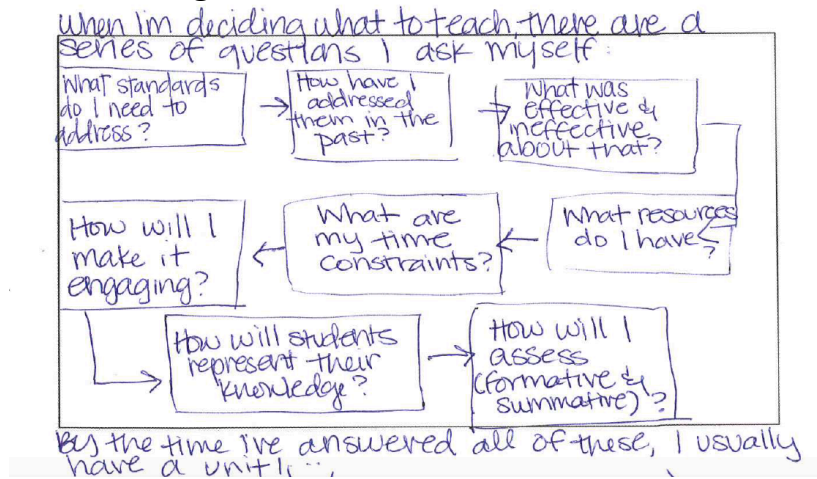




Ms. Richard

Ms. Richard's decision-making model (reprinted below from pg. 100) shows a linear approach to deciding what to teach. She asked herself a series of questions beginning with, "What standards do I need to address?" through a methodical, systematic approach to lesson planning, ending with, "How will I assess"? One of her questions in the middle of the model was, "How will I make it engaging?" In her grammar lesson, for example, she designed a creative project to be engaging for her students to "stretch their creative legs" (as she described in her reflection). However, she also acknowledged that the creative project did not enhance what they already knew and served no real purpose during or after the unit. The lesson was engagement for engagement's sake as opposed to engagement to deepen understanding. Ms. Richard's summary model derived from the study (reprinted below from pg. 108) shows a detailed concern with lesson planning: student need, collegial planning, and adherence to school's norm (Marzano), all mixed with intuition. Ms. Richard makes decisions about what to teach as a *manager*: one who conscientiously includes "best practice" approaches, but does not reflect how each piece fits together, as in how an engaging activity actually moves students forward in their thinking.

Figure 11 The Manager Models



These models reflect a moment in time and are not mutually exclusive. It is feasible to consider that teachers would use all three approaches to decision-making at one time or another. Yet, each teacher showed distinctive characteristics and tendencies towards thinking, time filling, or managing as a dominant impulse.

Using models with multiple elements makes it difficult to get to what Dewey (1960) calls *intuitive thought* where teachers reflect upon their actions and build their own theories of learning, and Valli (1997) calls *personalistic reflection*, where a

teacher's reflection focuses on personal growth and trusting an inner voice. In this study, I spent many hours engaged in observation and discussion to facilitate reflection for three teachers. Ms. Bowman seemed to be in the process of building her theory for learning, and she refined her approach to independent reading through multiple reflections. Her model for independent reading has spread across her department. I asked her to draw a model of her decision-making process, requiring additional reflection on her practice, and Ms. Bowman's model shows that she combines thinking about research and intuition with student needs and the inflections of the moment to make decisions about what to teach. She has begun to create her own theory of learning when she described her decision-making process as "blending what my students need to know, what they want to know, and what I want them to know." Ms. Bowman is moving toward developing her own theory of learning, yet the administrator scored her the lowest of the three teachers.

By the end of the study, Ms. Whitwell had begun to explore what Valli (1997) referred to as the inner voice. With her colleagues, she planned a unit on review of mechanics, even though she confessed later that it was not her strong suit. Through her reflection and explanation of her decision-making model, she recognized that her "decisions are clouded with confusion, but to improve her practice she must keep questioning." Ms. Whitwell had created a lesson to fill time that was unrelated to student learning, yet she received a slightly higher score than Ms. Bowman. Ms. Whitwell received a score of 20 because she fulfilled several expectations of the Marzano model, such as organizing students for learning and posting learning goals.

However, she did not have a grasp on practice or knowledge of her students to the extent that Ms. Bowman did.

Ms. Richard's model, Teacher as Manager, is perhaps the most amenable to using an evaluation/growth model with multiple elements. There are times when teachers are managers: their students respond to lessons exactly as the teacher planned and there are no surprises. They can methodically plan for and exhibit multiple elements simultaneously in an orderly environment that allows an administrator to observe all the elements in a single observation. Ms. Richard's textbook approach to planning matches the model and was easier for the administrator to score. Ms. Richard's received the highest score of the three teachers, but by her own admission, she had designed an interactive activity to fill a moment and give students an opportunity to be creative, but she had no real objective beyond that.

The teacher models of Teacher as Thinker, Teacher as Time-Filler, and Teacher as Manager are not mutually exclusive. The models emerged as a result of reflection on particular lessons at a particular moment in the teaching lives of these three teachers. However, the models may serve as examples of archetypes of teacher decision-making and may provide a context for thinking about teacher decision-making.

Discussion of Implications for Administrators

Administrators use evaluation models to assess the effectiveness of a teacher for re-employment and to facilitate professional growth through observation and post-observation conferences. Schön (1987) asserted teachers who reflect become less dependent on the thinking of others and are able to construct a new vision for instruction, empowering them to act with confidence. Administrators can help teachers

reflect on their practice during the post-observation conference. Administrators can facilitate professional growth by focusing on a teachers' ability to impact student learning. The post-observation conference can be used to provide a structure for systematic reflection on instruction.

In Oklahoma, most districts use one of two evaluation models that double as professional growth models. Marzano's (2007) model, used with the teachers in this study, is based on the Art and Science of Teaching Framework, which outlined and provided a checklist of teacher behaviors to be observed. Additionally, the framework calls for a pre- and post- observation conference where the teacher and administrator talk about the lesson and the behaviors that were observed.

Each of the sixty elements in the Marzano model has a separate scale as discussed in chapter three, and specific reflective questions that pertain to specific teacher behavior. Administrators negotiate sixty elements with sixty rubrics and sixty reflection questions as they observe and prepare for a conference with a teacher. For example, element one in the Marzano model (Learning Sciences, 2013) is *Provide Clear Learning Goals and Scales*. The evidence for this goal is

- Teacher has a learning goal posted so that all students can see it.
- The learning goal is a clear statement of knowledge or information as opposed to an activity or assignment.
- Teacher makes reference to the learning goal throughout the lesson.
- Teacher has a scale or rubric that relates to the learning goal posted so that all students can see it.
- Teacher makes reference to the scale or rubric throughout the lesson.

After observing, the administrator applies a rubric to the evidence. The rubric for this element, *Provide Clear Learning Goals and Scales*, is below.

Rubric for Element One

Innovating	Applying	Developing	Beginning	Not Using
Adapt and creates new strategies for unique student needs and situations in order for the desired effect to be evident in all students.	Provides a clearly stated learning goal accompanied by a scale or rubric that describes levels of performance and monitors for evidence of the majority of students understanding of the learning goal and the levels of performance.	Provides a clearly stated learning goal accompanied by a scale or rubric that describes levels of performance, but the majority of students are not monitored for the desired effect of the strategy.	Uses strategy incorrectly or with parts missing.	Strategy was called for but not exhibited.

Once the administrator has scored the evidence on the rubric, they use a series of reflective questions during a post-observation conference. The suggested reflective questions for the element, *Provide Clear Learning Goals and Scales*, are below.

Reflective Questions for Element One

Innovating	Applying	Developing	Beginning	Not Using
What are you learning about your students as you adapt and create new strategies?	How might you adapt and create new strategies for providing clearly stated learning goals and rubrics that address the unique students needs and situations?	In addition to providing a clearly stated learning goal accompanied by a scale or rubric that describes levels of performance, how can you monitor students' understanding	How can you provide a clearly stated learning goal accompanied by a scale or rubric that describes levels of performance?	How can you begin to incorporate some aspects of this strategy into your instruction?

		of the learning goal and the levels of performance?		
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There is a list of evidence, a scale, and a set of reflective questions for each of the sixty elements. Unfortunately, rarely does a teacher perform one teaching behavior at a time. Classrooms are multi-dimensional, serving a variety of purposes and containing a variety of events, all happening at the same time (Doyle, 2007). In Danielson (2007) and Marzano (2007) models, administrators are expected to observe and assess individual elements of teaching as if each is observable and measurable as a discrete entity. Carr (2003) calls this the professional conception of teaching defined in terms of acquisition of skills of pedagogy and management. Doyle asserts the multi-dimensionality of the classroom makes predictable behavior concerning pedagogy and management almost impossible.

During each teacher's video, the outside evaluator looked for nine of the sixty elements in the Marzano model, but could have scored more. To score nine elements, she watched the videos multiple times. In the daily life of her job as a principal, she wouldn't be able to watch a lesson multiple times or even watch videos at all- she would have to rely on what she saw in a single observation. From the teacher's

perspective, unless the specific elements the principal wants to see are discussed in a pre-observation conference, how could a teacher exhibit multiple behaviors simultaneously while considering the needs of 30 or more students in the unpredictability of a classroom and know that those are the elements the principal intends to rate? What if the principal is scoring the teacher's ability to *manage response rates*, but the teacher has chosen to focus on *grouping students to interact with content* and is moving about the room facilitating conversation within groups? Unless the principal follows her around the room and hears every interaction, the teacher cannot be accurately scored. The best scenario would be for the principal to change course and score what she sees. But, the teacher is thinking on her feet as she reacts to situations in a classroom, and the administrator is thinking on her feet as she reacts to what she sees the teacher doing and assesses the interactions in the classroom. All of this is happening while the principal is juggling multiple elements with a rubric for each element. If the point of the observation is to help a teacher examine practice, the multiple element model may be of limited value.

Because both the teacher and administrator are in the moment during the observation, reflective questions have to wait until a later conversation. At that point, the teacher has taught other lessons, worked with multiple students, and moved on from that particular teaching moment. Even though the reflective questions for each element are specific to the element and would facilitate conversation about teaching and learning, there are so many indicators it is problematic for an administrator to keep everything straight. Sixty elements with sixty rubrics and sixty reflective questions focuses on so many elements that teachers may find it difficult to reflect on their

practice in a post observation conference. In other words, at what point does an administrator have so much data that it becomes too much?

Teachers and administrators rarely conduct multiple observations or multiple viewings of a video to construct and discuss specific reflective questions. While this study confirms that conversation can help teachers be reflective of their practice (Dewey, 1960; Schön, 1987; & Valli, 1997), the process of multiple observations, watching videos, and lengthy post-observation conversations is time-consuming and complicated. Having fewer reflective questions might facilitate the administrator and teacher actually having conversation about the lesson as opposed to working through a checklist.

Discussion of Implications for Practicing Teachers

This study reinforced strategies that can help teachers examine their practice. Teachers in the classroom can benefit from time for reflection, peer observation and conversation, and the opportunity to see themselves teaching through video. Time is built into the school day for preparation before teaching, but there is no time designated for reflection, peer-to-peer conversation about teaching, or conferences with instructional coaches or administrators. The teachers in my study expressed frustration about the reality of moving from one day to the next with barely enough time to plan, let alone reflect on their practice.

It is important for teachers to be able to see and hear themselves in the act of teaching. A powerful part of this study was the opportunity for teachers to watch a video of themselves and to reflect on their effectiveness. “Even though the teacher may be influenced by any powerful sources outside herself, the responsibility to act lies

within” (Lampert, 1985, p. 180). Lampert suggests the ability of the teacher to see and define a problem leads to their efficacy in being able to solve the problem (Lampert, 1985).

Administrators can facilitate further action by adding a video element to a classroom observation and including video as part of the post-observation conference. Even when the post-observation conference is held on the same day as the observation, the tumult of a school day may cause teachers to forget their thoughts and actions; but video is a powerful reminder and conversation starter that could add to the relevance of the post-observation conference.

Video provides an additional benefit of examining a unique moment in time. As the teachers and I watched the videos of their teaching, there were moments that surprised the teachers and elements of instruction that seemed superfluous to me until teachers explained what they were doing. The one observation evaluation where the observer is attempting to score a particular element of teaching in the moment seems ineffective. Ms. Bowman’s reflection on scanning the room as students read is an example of a behavior that I didn’t fully understand until our conversation about three students in the room and her desire to focus on them, in particular, during that one minute of observation time. Without the ability to examine that moment by watching it several times so she could recall and remember why it was important would have been a moment missed. Yet a moment like that plays a role in her application of research and the development of her own theory of teaching and learning. Perhaps most importantly the event shows she is actively teaching the student.

The three teachers in this study liked to talk about their practice and expressed a desire to be reflective about their practice with each other. They shared concerns and helped each other through their collaborative conversations. On a larger scale, social media may provide an accessible forum for teachers to share common concerns and help each other with best practices.

Discussion of Implications for Pre-Service Education Classes

I have taught an English Methods course at a local university for the past four years, working with students who are preparing for their internships in secondary language arts classrooms, so my approach to the discussion of implications for a pre-service education class tends to the practical. While the students in the English methods course are placed in a classroom for thirty hours, they write reflective pieces over specific areas such as curriculum, assessment, and classroom management. But those reflections are based on what they see another teacher do, as opposed to what they are doing. One requirement of their observation hours is to teach one lesson. Adding video to the lesson they teach might be a useful mechanism to promote reflection.

Reflection of one's own teaching could happen in instructional rounds where the class decides together a strategy and skill to focus on for a 10-15 minute lesson and then practice on each other using different texts. It would be easy to video each student, and to discuss the videos with each student. The idea of a pre-service teacher having experience in instructional rounds similar to medical clinical rounds and participating in a reflective conference seems promising.

Discussion of Future Areas for Research

This qualitative study explored the perceptions of teachers as they made decisions concerning their practice. However, the open-ended interviews illuminated other topics that could be explored with other teachers.

This study revealed three distinct styles of decision-making: Teacher as Thinker, Teacher as Time-Filler, and Teacher as Manager. Are these common styles for other teachers? What other styles of decision-making are there? Do teachers switch their decision-making styles to fit specific situations or does each teacher possess a dominant style?

One of the assumptions of this study was that teacher efficacy plays a role in decision-making, but does it also play a role in the ability to be reflective about practice? If time for reflection were built in to a teacher's day, would teachers be more effective? Would teachers stay in the profession if professional growth were supported and embedded in work? Would teachers be happier, or would student achievement improve?

Each teacher made decisions about their classroom based on intuition, personal experience, collegial planning, and outside influence. However, all three teachers were influenced by state standards, state assessments, and expectations of their school and district. What if all of that were removed? In the absence of state standards and assessments, how would a teacher make decisions about what to teach? What if there were no evaluation tool? Would a teacher interact differently with students? Would a teacher's sense of "best practice" change if not expressed through how they are evaluated?

Although Valli's (1992) levels of reflection helped inform this study, the data was not analyzed for the progression of those levels. A future study could focus on ways to help teachers utilize all five of Valli's levels of reflection concerning practice.

It would also be of interest to apply Carr's (2015) conceptions of teaching as teachers reflect on their practice. For Carr, there are two conceptions of the role of the teacher: vocational and professional (p. 226). Vocational conceptions include teachers as cultural custodians, caring professionals, and social workers. Professional conceptions of teaching include teachers as classroom technicians, general practitioners and business executives or sales people. Would a teacher's reflection on practice be different if reflected upon from a different conception of themselves as teachers? A future study could focus on how principals, instructional coaches or curriculum directors question teachers' practice to see how questions and conceptions have an impact on teachers' reflections.

Limitations of the Study

There are limitations to any qualitative study. This study involved only three teachers over an eight-week period. Although the small sample over a short period of time provided a valid snapshot of these teachers and their decisions, a longer time frame and more teachers would have provided more data.

Conclusion

This case study asked three middle school language arts teachers how they decided what to teach. The three teachers made decisions using their intuition, personal experiences, collegial planning and a myriad of outside influences such as standards, evaluation instruments, and continued education.

Teachers are in constant decision-making mode. They fix, change, redirect, and plan before, during, and after teaching. In addition to reflection, teacher efficacy affects decisions. Efficacious teachers believe they can bring about student learning and don't wait for outside influences to identify what is important for students to learn; efficacious teachers know what works in their classroom. Through reflection, teachers can think about what they already know about their students, their curriculum, and their instruction.

When education is in flux, as it currently is in Oklahoma, with new standards, assessments as evaluation processes, it seems important to have teachers who can make instructional decisions based on student need and knowledge of their discipline, and then, carry out those decisions. Educators engaged in day-to-day, purposeful decision-making and intentional reflection will continue to have a positive effect on learning as legislatures, community groups, and testing companies attempt to exert more and more influence over the instructional lives of teachers and students. Hoyrup and Elkjaer (2006) asserted, "reflective practice illuminates what the self and others have experienced, providing a basis for future action." Perhaps the "future action" for teachers, such as the three in this study, is to not only find ways to have a positive effect on learning *despite* the influence of legislation and influence of outside entities, but also to take "future action" to *shape* legislation and influence of outside entities. Perhaps then, policy would respect and value the efforts of reflective, efficacious teachers.

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Appendix A: Teacher Efficacy Survey

Teacher Beliefs - TSES		This questionnaire is designed to help us gain a better understanding of the kinds of things that create challenges for teachers. Your answers are confidential.								
<p>Directions: Please indicate your opinion about each of the questions below by marking any one of the nine responses in the columns on the right side, ranging from (1) "None at all" to (9) "A Great Deal" as each represents a degree on the continuum.</p> <p>Please respond to each of the questions by considering the combination of your current ability, resources, and opportunity to do each of the following in your present position.</p>		None at all	Very Little	Some Degree	Quite A Bit	A Great Deal				
1. How much can you do to get through to the most difficult students?		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
2. How much can you do to help your students think critically?		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
3. How much can you do to control disruptive behavior in the classroom?		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
4. How much can you do to motivate students who show low interest in school work?		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
5. To what extent can you make your expectations clear about student behavior?		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
6. How much can you do to get students to believe they can do well in school work?		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
7. How well can you respond to difficult questions from your students?		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
8. How well can you establish routines to keep activities running smoothly?		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
9. How much can you do to help your students value learning?		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
10. How much can you gauge student comprehension of what you have taught?		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
11. To what extent can you craft good questions for your students?		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
12. How much can you do to foster student creativity?		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
13. How much can you do to get children to follow classroom rules?		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
14. How much can you do to improve the understanding of a student who is failing?		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
15. How much can you do to calm a student who is disruptive or noisy?		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
16. How well can you establish a classroom management system with each group of students?		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
17. How much can you do to adjust your lessons to the proper level for individual students?		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
18. How much can you use a variety of assessment strategies?		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
19. How well can you keep a few problem students from ruining an entire lesson?		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
20. To what extent can you provide an alternative explanation or example when students are confused?		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
21. How well can you respond to defiant students?		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
22. How much can you assist families in helping their children do well in school?		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
23. How well can you implement alternative strategies in your classroom?		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
24. How well can you provide appropriate challenges for very capable students?		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9

Tabulation of Teacher Beliefs-Teacher Efficacy Scale

Survey Items	Ms. Bowman	Ms. Whitwell	Ms. Richard
1. How much can you do to get through to the most difficult students?	8	6	9
2. How much can you do to help your students think critically?	9	9	9
3. How much can you do to control disruptive behavior in the classroom?	8	7	9
4. How much can you do to motivate students who show low interest in schoolwork?	7	6	9
5. To what extent can you make your expectations clear about student behavior?	9	9	9
6. How much can you do to get students to believe they can do well in schoolwork?	9	8	9
7. How well can you respond to difficult questions from your students?	8	7	9
8. How well can you establish routines to keep activities running smoothly?	7	7	9
9. How much can you do to help your students value learning?	7	7	9
10. How much can you gauge student comprehension of what you have taught?	9	8	9
11. To what extent can you craft good questions for your students?	9	6	9
12. How much can you do to foster student creativity?	9	6	8
13. How much can you do to get children to follow classroom rules?	9	8	8
14. How much can you do to improve the understanding of a student who is failing?	7	7	9

15. How much can you do to calm a student who is disruptive or noisy?	8	7	8
16. How well can you establish a classroom management system with each group of students?	9	8	9
17. How much can you do to adjust your lessons to the proper level for individual students?	8	5	8
18. How much can you use a variety of assessment strategies?	9	5	9
19. How well can you keep a few problem students from ruining an entire lesson?	6	7	8
20. To what extent can you provide an alternative explanation or example when students are confused?	9	6	9
21. How well can you respond to defiant students?	8	6	7
22. How much can you assist families in helping their children do well in school?	6	5	9
23. How well can you implement alternative strategies in your classroom?	8	6	8
24. How well can you provide appropriate challenges for very capable students?	9	7	9
Total Score/Mean Score	195/8.12	163/6.79	208/8.6

Appendix B: Teaching Framework Rubric

Element: Identifying Critical Information

Not Using	Beginning	Developing	Applying	Innovating
Strategy was called for but not exhibited.	Uses strategy incorrectly or with parts missing.	Signals to students which content is critical versus non-critical, but the majority of students are not monitored for the desired effect of the strategy.	Signals to students which content is critical versus non-critical and monitors for evidence of the extent to which the majority of students are attending to critical information.	Adapts to and creates new strategies for unique student needs and situations in order for the desired effect to be evident in all students

Element: Organizing Students to Interact with New Knowledge

Not Using	Beginning	Developing	Applying	Innovating
Strategy was called for but not exhibited.	Uses strategy incorrectly or with parts missing.	Organizes students into small groups to facilitate the processing of new knowledge, but the majority of students are not monitored for the desired effect of the strategy.	Organizes students into small groups to facilitate the processing of new knowledge for the majority of students and monitors for evidence of group processing.	Adapts to and creates new strategies for unique student needs and situations in order for the desired effect to be evident in all students

Element: Organizing Students to Practice and Deepen Knowledge

Not Using	Beginning	Developing	Applying	Innovating
Strategy was called for but not exhibited.	Uses strategy incorrectly or with parts missing.	Organizes students into groups to practice and deepen their knowledge, but the majority of students are not monitored for the desired effect of the strategy.	Organizes students into groups to practice and deepen their knowledge and monitor evidence of the extent to which the group work extends the majority of students'	Adapts to and creates new strategies for unique student needs and situations in order for the desired effect to be evident in all students

			learning..	
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Element: Noticing When Students Are Not Engaged

Not Using	Beginning	Developing	Applying	Innovating
Strategy was called for but not exhibited.	Uses strategy incorrectly or with parts missing.	Scans the room making note of when students are not engaged and takes action, but the majority of students are not monitored for the desired effect of the strategy.	Scans the room making note of when students are not engaged and takes action and monitors for evidence of the extent to which the majority of students re-engage.	Adapts to and creates new strategies for unique student needs and situations in order for the desired effect to be evident in all students

Element: Managing Response Rates

Not Using	Beginning	Developing	Applying	Innovating
Strategy was called for but not exhibited.	Uses strategy incorrectly or with parts missing.	Uses response rate techniques to maintain student engagement in questions, but the majority of students are not monitored for the desired effect of the strategy.	Uses response rate techniques to maintain student engagement in questions and monitors for evidence of the extent to which the techniques keep the majority of students engaged.	Adapts and creates new strategies for unique student needs and situations in order for the desired effect to be evident in all students.

Element: Demonstrating Intensity and Enthusiasm

Not Using	Beginning	Developing	Applying	Innovating
Strategy was called for but not exhibited.	Uses strategy incorrectly or with parts missing.	Demonstrates intensity and enthusiasm for the content in a	Demonstrates intensity and enthusiasm for the content in a	Adapts and creates new strategies for unique student

		variety of ways, but the majority of students are not monitored for the desired effect of the strategy.	variety of ways and monitors for evidence of the extent to which the majority of students' engagement increases.	needs and situations in order for the desired effect to be evident in all students.
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Element: Identifying Areas of Pedagogical Strength and Weakness

Not Using	Beginning	Developing	Applying	Innovating
The teacher makes no attempt to perform the activity.	The teacher attempts to perform this activity but does not actually complete or follow through with these attempts.	The teacher identifies specific strategies and behaviors on which to improve but does not select the strategies and behaviors that are most useful for his or her development.	The teacher identifies specific strategies and behaviors on which to improve from routine lesson segments, content lesson segments and segments that are enacted on the spot.	The teacher is recognized as a leader in helping others with this activity.

Element: Evaluating the Effectiveness of Individual Lessons and Units

Not Using	Beginning	Developing	Applying	Innovating
The teacher makes no attempt to perform the activity.	The teacher attempts to perform this activity but does not actually complete or follow through with these attempts.	The teacher determines how effective a lesson or unit was in terms of enhancing student achievement but does not accurately identify causes of success or difficulty.	The teacher determines how effective a lesson or unit was in terms of enhancing student achievement and identifies specific causes of success or difficulty and uses this analysis when making instructional decisions.	The teacher is recognized as a leader in helping others with this activity.

Element: Evaluating the Effectiveness of Specific Pedagogical Strategies and Behaviors.

Not Using	Beginning	Developing	Applying	Innovating
The teacher makes no attempt to perform the activity.	The teacher attempts to perform this activity but does not actually complete or follow through with these attempts.	The teacher determines the effectiveness of specific strategies and behaviors regarding the achievement of subgroups of students but does not accurately identify the reasons for discrepancies.	The teacher determines the effectiveness of specific strategies and behaviors regarding the achievement of subgroups of students and identifies the reasons for discrepancies.	The teacher is recognized as a leader in helping others with this activity.