

Standards Paper

Peter Muer

Liberty University Graduate Student

Liberty Graduate Research Symposium 2015

Abstract

Standards and guidelines are an important framework to utilize as a guide for developing the curriculum, building strong lesson plans, and helping teachers in the instruction of their students; as well as setting a course and direction (vision and mission) for schools to take to lead their students (Posner & Rudnitsky, 2006). In addition, they also set a level for educators and teachers and students to aim for in trying to reach instructional and academic excellence. Moreover, standards, guidelines, curriculum, and subject matter should be thoughtful, instructive, and challenging to students to help them to seek, learn, know, express, reflect, progress, excel, grow, serve, lead, and contribute. Further, the building of these standards must be a collaborative effort which brings together government, administrators, educators, teachers, parents, students, and community leaders to produce the highest and best framework for teachers to instruct and students to learn in a positive, encouraging, and meaningful educational ascent (Posner & Rudnitsky, 2006).

Standards Paper

Introduction

In this paper, I plan to compare three standards (national, state, & published) for ninth grade English Language Arts; discuss their similarities, differences, strengths, and weaknesses; explore which combination will yield the best structure and level to form an ideal curriculum and instructional model; and draw conclusions about the overall standards and their application. Moreover, these three standards do seem to be solid curricular frameworks; however with relation to the differing needs of educators, teachers, and students perhaps a combination of the three would work the best in practice. Further, it is hard to make the argument that any group or stakeholder has the best ideas, so a combination of different good ideas and approaches should yield a strong framework, curriculum, and academic model.

Similarities & Differences

The similarities between the three standards (federal, state, and published) are primarily that each standard seeks to build skillsets in the students in reading, reading comprehension, writing, thinking, listening and speaking, and using the English language well (CK, 2013; NCTE, 2013; VDOE, 2010). Moreover, each standard seeks to cover the important topics in English Language Arts (reading, writing, speaking, comprehension, composition, use of language, grammar, thinking, reflection...) that students must learn to excel in secondary school, college, work, and life (CK, 2013; NCTE, 2013; VDOE, 2010). The differences between the standards are in complexity, depth, and sophistication, as well as in key focus areas. The published standards (Core Knowledge) are much more complex and multi-layered and in depth than the state standards (Virginia Dept. of Education) and are a bit more advanced and more in depth than the national standards (National Council of English Teachers) (CK, 2013; NCTE, 2013; VDOE,

2010). Further, the published standards tend to go much more deeply into serious literature (Great Books), reading, thinking, comprehension, reflecting, writing, and incorporating knowledge and ideas from the coursework – all to very high academic levels (CK, 2013). The state standards seem to try to develop reading, writing, and research skills in the students in specific and straightforward assignments and seem to leave the more complex and deeper explorations into the subject matter for later grades (VDOE, 2010). Moreover, the national standards seem to take a middle road between the published and state standards, covering all major topics (reading, writing, thinking, reflecting, listening, speaking, doing research, using modern technology and information, respecting diversity, using language well, participating in literacy groups...) and doing so at a solid level which freshman students can excel at and seek to achieve to beginning academic levels for secondary school (NCTE, 2013). Furthermore, the published standards are written by scholars, researchers, and professors; while the state standards are written by government administrators and educators; and the national standards are written by educators and teachers; so each will have a somewhat different perspective, vision, mission, foundation, and overall structure. The national standards do reflect a more enlightened and broad and thematic vision of the standards and guidelines which lead to an overarching (broad, big picture) curriculum; whereas the state standards are more assessment and result focused which lead to a more pragmatic curriculum; and the published standards seem to focus on a more deep, sophisticated, complex, scholarly, and comprehensive background which leads to a more advanced curriculum (CK, 2013; NCTE, 2013; VDOE, 2010).

Strengths & Weaknesses

The strengths of the published standards (Core Knowledge) is that they cover all the major areas of the English Language Arts and challenge educators, teachers, and students to seek and

attain a high level of knowledge and application in the ninth grade ELA (English Language Arts) subject area (CK, 2013). The weakness may be that the level of sophistication, complexity of the great literature covered, and level of reading, thinking, and writing may be beyond the skillsets and abilities of secondary school students; especially ninth graders. Further, the strengths of the state standards (Virginia Standards) are that they are very clear, sensible, practical, and effective; and cover the important basics of the English Language Arts well (reading, writing, researching...), especially for the beginning ninth grade level (VDOE, 2010). The weakness is that they don't cover some of the needed additional skillsets, especially thinking, reading great literature, encouraging serious creativity and imagination, sophisticated use of the language in word and spoken form, and developing critical and reflective practices in the students. Moreover, it is important in educational frameworks (standards and curriculum), theories, and practices to balance the big picture (national standards) with the detailed one (state standards), and to balance sophistication and complexity (published standards/Core Knowledge) with the simple, straightforward, and practical (state standards) (CK, 2013; NCTE, 2013; VDOE, 2010). Moreover, the three standards discussed here are generally strong but the published standards are perhaps a bit too complex and lengthy, the state standards are a bit too subject and lesson oriented and too pragmatic (not enough learning spirit); and the national standards are very good in the big picture format, but do not give quite enough detail on literature, composition, language, and advanced learning activities (CK, 2013; NCTE, 2013; VDOE, 2010).

Combination/Ideal Curriculum

In light of the positives and negatives and comparisons set out above, perhaps the best guidelines and standards framework and model that could be used to create and develop an excellent and ideal curriculum, would be a combination of the three standards. I think using the

published standards (CK) framework as the foundation with the national standards (NCTE) as the overarching learning arc and with the state standards (VDOE) being the main source of academic lesson planning and instruction, perhaps a very good curriculum structure would result. This seems to be the perfect mix of the big picture, more focused main topic picture, and the detailed subject area and lesson picture – all leading to an excellent model of guidance, sound ideas, lesson planning, and instruction. For instance, the published standards (Core Knowledge) with its sophisticated foundation in great literature, high ideals, and knowledge combined with the serious commitment of the national standards to reading, writing, comprehending, thinking, reflecting, researching, and using the language well combined with the straightforward commitment and instructional English Language Arts lessons of the state standards makes for an ideal curriculum model (CK, 2013; NCTE, 2013; VDOE, 2010). This is a model which would definitely challenge students to learn and achieve at beginning, intermediate, and advanced ninth grade secondary school ELA levels; and to learn and progress in the basic, core, and advanced skillsets required for higher levels of secondary school, college, and beyond.

Conclusion/Summary

In conclusion, standards and guidelines are important in developing the curriculum, the ideals, the subject matter, and the overall course of the academic journey, but they must be accompanied by thoughtful decision-makers, educators, and teachers and their focus must be on the development, encouragement, and formation of bright futures for the students. To quote from the textbook: “our central message in this book has been that when we teach, we should teach with a purpose...our purposes should be made explicit in the form of educational goals and intended learning outcomes...to help the student-traveler along on an educational journey” (Posner & Rudnitsky, 2006). Therefore, we need a structure in place to guide us and to teach

from. Further, the standards, guidelines, framework, and models are very important; but even more than this, our essential main vision, mission, purpose, and goal must be: to prepare good, thoughtful, knowledgeable, wise, and caring students who will go out into the world to serve, create, achieve, build, help, lead, and contribute to making the world a better and brighter place. Lastly, to quote the Bible: “get wisdom, get understanding; do not forget my words or turn away from them. Do not forsake wisdom, and she will protect you; love her, and she will watch over you. The beginning of wisdom is this: get wisdom. Though it cost all you have, get understanding. Cherish her, and she will exalt you; embrace her, and she will honor you. She will give you a garland to grace your head and present you with a glorious crown” (Proverbs 4:5-9, NIV).

References

CK. (2013). *Core knowledge foundation*. Hirsch, E. D. Retrieved from

<http://www.coreknowledge.org/>.

NCTE. (2013). *National curriculum standards: English language arts*. Retrieved from

<http://www.ncte.org/standards/ncte-ira>.

Posner, G. & Rudnitsky, A. (2006). *Course design: A guide to curriculum development for teachers*. Boston, MA. Pearson.

VDOE. (2013). *State curriculum standards: English language arts*. Retrieved from

http://www.doe.virginia.gov/testing/sol/standards_docs/english/.