

2012

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Recommended Citation

Ford, Amy C. and Davis, Tracy (2012) "Integrating Standards: Considerations for Language and Writing," *Language Arts Journal of Michigan*: Vol. 27: Iss. 2, Article 10.
Available at: <https://doi.org/10.9707/2168-149X.1904>

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Amy C. Ford and Tracey Davis

Integrating Standards: Considerations for Language and Writing

These days teaching is influenced by state adopted standards, whether the standards drive the instruction or whether they are approached in a less obvious way. Michigan adopted the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010) in June 2010, and how teachers choose to incorporate them into their classrooms is presently in flux. As teacher educators, we have found that we, too, are struggling with how exactly to include these new standards into our instruction, particularly with respect to grammar and writing. This paper has emerged from a conversation between a linguist who teaches pedagogical grammar and a writing methods instructor who asked: How do teachers integrate these standards into their Language Arts instruction?

In our Language Arts methods courses on teaching writing and teaching grammar, we assess students' prior knowledge about grammar by asking a question: What rules were you

To begin, some of the terminology in the CCSS may be unfamiliar (e.g. subjective case, verbals, subjunctive mood), and while the standards provide some examples, they do not explain all the nuances associated with each concept. One of the authors had never heard of the subjunctive mood until she took a foreign language, and the other author knows about case because she is a linguist, not because she learned about it in middle school.

taught about grammar? The answers are telling. Don't end a sentence in a preposition. Don't use a double negative. Don't use ain't (it isn't a word). Don't start a sentence with and or but. We will ignore the negative spin on all of these rules, and instead focus on the fact that none of these "rules" are actually required by grammar. Indeed, a linguist would argue that none of these even remotely represent

rules of grammar. So what are they? We think of them as more opinions about language use than rules of grammar and as a linguist and English teacher educator, try to instill in our pre-service teachers this distinction.

Grammar is one aspect of language, a set of rules that speakers must follow in order to be mutually intelligible. Subject verb agreement, plurality, tense, and aspect are all significant parts of English grammar. However, we also have rules for capitalization and punctuation, rules to follow when we are writing a narrative, when we are writing a persuasive essay, when we are speaking and not writing at all. These rules are rules of language, and the CCSS is careful to address gram-

mar as part of standards for language. In other words, there is no section of the CCSS entitled standards for grammar.

Language about Language

Our pre-service teachers often find the CCSS for language daunting to say the least. As most of our students are products of the Michigan educational system, we imagine some practicing teachers might feel the same, and for good reason. To begin, some of the terminology in the CCSS may be unfamiliar (e.g. subjective case, verbals, subjunctive mood), and while the standards provide some examples, they do not explain all the nuances associated with each concept. One of the authors of this article had never heard of the subjunctive mood until she took a foreign language, and the other author knows about case be-

cause she is a linguist, not because she learned about it in middle school. These standards also indicate that students' grammatical knowledge needs to be more explicit than tacit (e.g.

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3.1a "Explain the function of nouns, pronouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs in general and their functions in particular sentences"), requiring teachers to also have a strong understanding of the rules for language use. Realistically, teachers can look up these terms either in a grammar book or to the myriad of resources on the internet for an explanation, but that does not help them figure out how to actually teach the concept, which is our second reason the standards can seem overwhelming for pre-service and practicing teachers.

When asked to explain when to use *the* and when to use *a* or *an*, a group of pre-service teachers was quite capable of explaining the difference between the indefinite articles *a* and *an*, but stumbled when it came to the difference between *the* and *a*. Their first response was to say, "that's just the way it is." Based on the names *definite* and *indefinite* and a bit of brainstorming, they could figure out that *the* was used for something specific, while *indefinite* was used for something in general. This explanation was certainly a step in the right direction, but failed to help them answer why in the statement, "I went to see a play, yesterday. The play was about a frog," *a* is used in the first sentence while *the* is used in the second to refer to the same play. Our native speaker intuitions, while

extremely useful in our own talking and writing, can make explaining the structure of language to others quite difficult.

Standard English

A final issue that teachers may have with the CCSS for language is the constant reference to "Standard English." Just what is standard? We often define it as newscaster English, but there is still regional variation. For instance, in Michigan there are signs that read, "Drive slow in ice and snow." When a group of future English teachers were asked if "go

From a linguistic perspective, the idea that there are multiple acceptable grammars is not new.

slow" was grammatically acceptable, most saw absolutely nothing wrong with it. In Michigan *slow* has taken on adverbial properties constituting a "Standard" English distinct from other Standard Englishes in which *slow* would be written as *slowly*. There is nothing wrong with Michiganders' use of *slow* instead of *slowly*. We know that language changes over time; just consider Shakespeare's English to the English we speak now. Language variation evolves naturally; in this case, the conversion from *slow* to *slowly* most likely evolved from the influence of the adjective/adverb *fast*.

From a linguistic perspective, the idea that there are multiple acceptable grammars is not new. Prescriptive grammar is the grammar that books and experts tell us to use, and is often conflated in education with the notion of formality. For example, prescriptively, one should use "whom" when "who" is asking about someone in the object position of a clause. Many of our pre-service teachers believe "whom" is just a more formal way to say "who" and do not realize that there is a grammatical rule explaining its usage.

Descriptive grammar is the grammar that people actually use when they speak, and it may differ rather dramatically from prescriptive grammar. There are many varieties of descriptive grammar, which account for the variation between dialects as we have seen in some of the examples in this paper. This grammar is often what teachers refer to as "informal" English. It is within this grammar that we find the complete lack of *whom*, a trend that is increasing across the United States including in newscaster English. Thus, as teachers, we have to ask if it is really imperative that students learn the *who/whom* distinction or not. Similar examples of language change affecting our current grammar involve the past tense of *dive* (*dived* or *dove*?) and *sneak* (*sneaked* or *snuck*?). It is sometimes difficult to find a consensus as to what the past tense actually is. Teaching Standard English, then, is not an exact science.

Perhaps we struggle with an exact definition of Standard English because, while the concept is clear, it is not actually spoken in Michigan or anywhere else for that matter. The part of the United States that is considered as coming closest to speaking "Standard English" is the Midland area: Pennsylvania, Ohio, Indiana, and into Illinois (McCrum & MacNeil, 2005). However, when Michiganders were asked where the best English was spoken, the vast majority said Michi-

gan (Preston & Niedzielski, 2000). However, when people in Alabama were asked the same question, they chose Maryland as the state with the best English. Thus, while the Midlands may theoretically use English that is similar to that which we are teaching in school, it is not universally recognized as the "best." As a side bar, we have to stress that the Midlands dialect most closely resembles Standard English, but that does not mean the language they use actually *is* Standard English. For example, the positive *anymore* (e.g. "Buying books is so expensive anymore") is alive and well in the Midlands, but hardly acceptable elsewhere, including Michigan.

Language Variation

In addition to Standard English, the CCSS for language ask that teachers "recognize variations from standard English in their own and others' writing and speaking" (6.1e). We think it important to acknowledge language variation in Michigan. If Michiganders believe Michigan to have the best English, to which English exactly are they referring? To Yooper English spoken on the Upper Peninsula with its object of the preposition deletion (e.g. *You want to come with?*) and preposition deletion (e.g. *I'm going Marquette*) (Remlinger, 2009)? To African American Vernacular English (AAVE) found in many parts of the state and with its own set of grammatical rules? To the incredibly common "I seen it" often heard from certain groups of Michiganders? These dialects all make up Michigan and the people of Michigan.

One's dialect is integrally attached to one's identity (Hanson & Liu, 1997; Johnstone, 2011; Delpit, 1995). It is what makes us accepted by our community, whatever defines that community. No matter what the most prestigious dialect may be, one's home dialect holds a certain covert prestige marking the speaker as an "insider" in the community. While Standard English may be the dialect of school and some employers, it very well may not be the language of the home or between friends. While teachers can stress the importance of Standard English to be successful, success at the cost of being mocked by family and friends is rarely worth it to most students. True success can be found by the person who can code-switch, that is, who is able

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to speak and write in one dialect while at school or on the job, but use another when in her or his home and neighborhood (Wheeler & Swords, 2006; 2010). Therefore, when we teach the CCSS language standards, not only do we have to teach Standard English, but we also have to teach a respect and understanding for other dialects, and in turn, code-switching.

This respect and understanding of other dialects needs to be addressed early on. The CCSS unconsciously draw attention to dialect differences as soon as students begin school. For example, in first grade the language standards expect students to be able to use personal pronouns (1.1d). Standard English identifies seven nominal pronouns (*I, you, he, she, it, we, they*), but some dialects include an eighth pronoun for plural

you (e.g. *yous, yins, y'all*). Also in first grade, students are expected to “Use singular and plural nouns with matching verbs in basic sentences (e. g. *He hops; We hop*),” (1.1c) and “Use common, proper, and possessive nouns” (1.1b). Both of these standards require speakers of AAVE to code switch. In Standard English number is inflected on the noun, meaning that nouns are pluralized, and agreement is inflected on the verb, meaning that the third person singular (e.g. *he, she, it*) uses a particular form of verb (e.g. *hops*). AAVE uses a different set of grammatical rules to determine inflection on nouns and verbs.

Bringing all of these ideas together, teachers these days not only need to be able to navigate the terminology of the standards and translate it into accessible terms for students, but

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they also need to be able to do so with the idea that language variation is natural and a valuable resource for grammar instruction (Wheeler & Swords, 2006). They need to view and employ students’ dialects as the foundation upon which to build knowledge about language and grammar.

Application in the Classroom

In their efforts to teach a standards-driven curriculum, teachers may be inclined to design lessons around a standard and require students to “master” the grammatical skill before moving on to the next standard. However, the National Council of Teachers of English’s “Beliefs about the Teaching of Writing” emphasize that teachers should be able to “interpret curriculum documents, including things [in their curriculum] that can be taught while students are actually writing, rather than one thing at a time to all students at once.” Grammar instruction is meaningful when taught in the context of meaningful inquiry and student writing. With this in mind, we suggest that teachers incorporate the CCSS into units of focused study and writing workshop in ways that respond to dialect diversity in the classroom.

Inquiry

A “Key Design Consideration” of the CCSS is that “several standards can be addressed by a single rich task” (CCSS, p. 5) that integrates the language arts. Rather than conceive of language and writing instruction as a series of “tasks,” we draw from the work of Katie Wood Ray (2006b) to envision writing curriculum as units of study focused on topics that are important to writers. This approach, which employs inquiry as a method of instruction (Ray, 2006a), is aligned with the K-5 standards for writing that call for students to “[...] gather information from provided sources to answer a question” (K.8, 1.8, 2.8, 3.8) and participate in shared research and writing projects,” such as exploring several “how-to” books and using them to compose instructional writing (1.7). These research and critical thinking skills lay the foundation for students in the upper elementary grades to conduct more complex “analysis, reflection, and research” (4.7, 4.8, 4.9, 5.7, 5.8, 5.9). To integrate these standards of Writing with

standards for Language, teachers can employ inquiry-based units of study around focused topics, including grammar and language use, and genres of writing. We will explore how teachers might design units around these two topics.

In units of study around grammar, students explore a range of texts to illuminate the various ways writers use language for audience effect. For instance, they can investigate how and why writers use adjectives and adverbs, looking for similarities and differences across uses and texts. When adapted to students’ developmental levels, this would support first graders in using “frequently occurring adjectives” (1.1.f), second graders in using and choosing adjectives and adverbs (2.1.e), and fourth graders in sequencing adjectives in conventional ways (4.1.d). Such units of study enable teachers to guide students’ exploration of language, identify patterns of usage, and experiment with different parts of speech and grammatical structures in their own writing.

When an inquiry approach is applied to students’ writing, it makes visible students’ intuitive use of language and distinctions between dialects and Standard English. In their book *Code-Switching Lessons: Grammar Strategies for Linguistically Diverse Writers*, Rebecca Wheeler and Rachel Swords (2010) characterize these distinctions as formal versus informal to reflect the difference between the language students speak in their homes and neighborhoods and school-sanctioned writing. Code-switching lessons begin by exploring

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the concepts formal and informal with students, highlighting how we adapt our communication for different audiences. Using examples from everyday life (how we wear certain clothing to certain places) and literature (how writers use vernacular speech in characters’ dialogue) before applying the concepts to writing enables students to meet the Language standards for Grade 4 that call for them to “differentiate between contexts that call for formal English (e. g., presenting ideas) and situations where informal discourse is appropriate (e.g. small-group discussion)” (4.3.C) and for Grade 5: “compare and contrast the varieties of English (e.g. dialects, registers) used in stories, dramas or poems” (5.3.B). Wheeler and Swords provide a list of children’s books that portray different language varieties and include an example of how Pat McKissack’s *Flossie and the Fox* can be incorporated in this inquiry around code-switching. This book not only features a vernacular dialect, but also fosters appreciation for language variation: using her vernacular tongue, Flossie outsmarts the fox, who speaks “formal.” Such literature can be studied in detail in classrooms where dialects are closely aligned with Standard English, but the power of the contrastive method of code-switching lies in the process of discovery through analyzing similarities and differences between students’ informal use of language in their writing and formal language.

Building on the concepts of formal and informal language, inquiry continues in code-switching lessons as students examine teacher-selected excerpts from student work in order to

Building on the concepts of formal and informal language, inquiry continues in code-switching lessons as students examine teacher-selected excerpts from student work in order to compare grammatical patterns of vernacular and school-based writing.

compare grammatical patterns of vernacular and school-based writing. To guide students' inquiry, the teacher identifies patterns of vernacular grammar from students' writing, creates a chart depicting those patterns as well as the standard form, and asks students to engage in contrastive analysis (Wheeler & Swords, 2010). This approach prepares students to "recognize variations from standard English in their own and others' writing and speaking," (6.1.e) a Grade 6 standard. By focusing on patterns, not errors, in student writing, students' dialects are positioned as resources for teaching and learning. As an inquiry-based approach to analyzing students' writing, code-switching lessons build on students' prior knowledge of their home language while adding new knowledge about Standard English. Wheeler and Swords (2010) offer units of study on subject-verb agreement, possessives, and verbs, providing teachers a way to design units of instruction around grammar and language that incorporate the CCSS for Language that refer to language variation.

While units of study can focus directly on issues of language, they can also be designed around genres of writing. In inquiry-based genre studies, students engage in close examination of texts from the perspective of a writer in order to make explicit the distinguishing characteristics of a genre (Ray, 2006b). Teacher and students make visible these characteristics during the "reading immersion" phase wherein students "read like a writer" (Ray, 2006b). During this phase, teachers can guide students' attention to how authors use language and grammar specific to the genre, highlighting how genre conventions are shaped by readers' expectations. For instance, in genre studies of memoir, teachers might emphasize how authors "use verbs to convey a sense of past, present, and future" (1.1.e) and "to convey various times, sequences, states, and conditions" (5.1.c). They could compare how writers use verbs in memoirs with how they use them in other genres, such as how-to's, in which writers frequently use the imperative verb tense when conveying a sequence of instructions. Because reading like a writer illuminates these characteristics of genres as well as the "work they do in the world" (Ray, 2006b), they prepare students to write a variety of texts with different purposes (K-5.1-3). The purpose of genre studies, and other units of study, is to help students envision what it is they are trying to write (Ray, 2006b).

Writing Workshop

A writing workshop approach allows teachers to make grammar instruction more meaningful, and therefore, more engaging and effective, than teaching grammar as isolated skills,

decontextualized from meaningful writing. We know that these traditional methods of instruction for teaching grammar are not effective for most students (Weaver, McNally, & Moerman, 2001). Writing workshop allows students a great deal of choice and flexibility in the topics they write about and genres in which they write. While allowing choice and flexibility, writing workshop is highly structured in predictable ways, characterized by routines and rituals that enable writers to focus on their writing. This structure consists of daily mini-lessons which usually launch each workshop; time for students to talk, write, revise, and work on their pieces; teacher and peer writing conferences; and sharing sessions that typically conclude the workshop each day (Calkins, 1996). Opportunities to teach grammar are embedded in the writing workshop approach.

While there are a multitude of ways to incorporate grammar instruction within writing workshop, we focus on the variety of minilessons teachers can do throughout the writing process. Linda Dorn and

Carla Soffos (2001) articulate three types of minilessons relevant to meeting the CCSS: skills, craft, and strategy. These types of minilessons provide a framework for thinking about how language and

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grammar instruction can be integrated in writing workshop and into multiple stages of the writing process. Incorporating minilessons on language and grammar into multiple stages takes into consideration the recursive nature of "the process" and responds to writers' diverse needs.

According to Dorn and Soffos (2001), each minilesson can be broken down into three steps: Introduce, Discuss, Apply. To introduce a minilesson, the teacher sets the stage by situating the topic in the context of the writing workshop, perhaps by recapitulating what writers have been working on, explaining what good writers do, or using a touchstone text to illustrate something about writing. Next, the teacher "discusses" the process that they are asking students to do and demonstrates how to do it, incorporating meaningful writing, that is, the writing of teachers, students, or "published" authors. Finally, the teacher coaches students in applying the process to their own writing before granting them writing time to experiment with what was taught and providing individualized support through conferences. In order to execute these three steps, teachers need to be able to explain and demonstrate what they want students to know and be able to do, and as we noted, even when teachers perceive themselves as successful writers, explaining the CCSS for Language can be a daunting task. Therefore, we include explanations of the standards as we describe the different ways they can be incorporated into writing workshop as skills, craft, and strategy lessons.

Probably the most familiar way to teach grammar is to teach skills lessons that emphasize conventions as part of the editing process. The skills that are taught are derived directly from standards and may involve editing for capitalization or

end punctuation (Dorn & Soffos, 2001). Teaching skills lessons that address the CCSS standards for language as part of an editing workshop can enhance the quality of students' published pieces. However, skills lessons can be conducted throughout the writing process. For teaching particular conventions, Jenny Mechem Bender's (2007) handbook *The Resourceful Writing Teacher* offers skills lessons on using periods, using correct spelling, punctuating dialogue, and using paragraphs, all of which may seem to focus on punctuation, but involve rules of grammar. For instance, determining where to put a period entails deciding what words make up a sentence, and the presence of an aligned subject and verb are considered defining elements of a sentence. Explaining the conventional use of periods in terms of sentences to a young writer may be difficult. While using periods becomes intuitive as we develop as writers, explaining how and when we use them becomes elusive. Yet the CCSS call for kindergartners to "recognize and name end punctuation" (2.b) and for first graders to "use end punctuation" (1.2.b). In the drafting stage of the writing process, one way teachers can explain to students how to use periods is to invite them to say a complete thought in their head, then write it down with a period at the end so that readers stop and think. During revision, teachers can explain to students that writers decide when to use periods by rereading their writing out loud to see if each sentence, or group of words separated by a period, makes sense and if a sentence doesn't make sense, writers combine them with the groups of words that come before or after. Teachers' explanations or discussions about the concept of using periods are followed by a demonstration in which the teacher models how to use periods.

By fourth grade, the concept of using periods shifts to focus on the composition of the sentence. Fourth graders are expected to "use complete

Craft lessons make visible the strategic decisions and specific techniques authors use to make their writing more effective for their audience.

sentences recognizing inappropriate fragments and run-ons" (4.1.f). To support students in meeting this standard, teachers might explain that students can avoid on-and-on sentences by considering whether to use words like *and*, *so*, and *then* or end the sentence (Bender, 2007). They can emphasize that it's important to give readers a chance to think, so writers should decide where they want readers to pause their reading and think. While lessons on skills such as using periods can be incorporated throughout the writing process, they have the potential to impede writing if students are still wrestling with ideas: students can become distracted by "correctness," even though the language teachers use in minilessons emphasizes appropriateness.

Craft lessons offer teachers another way to incorporate the CCSS for language in drafting and revision stages. Craft lessons make visible the strategic decisions and specific techniques authors use to make their writing more effective for their audience (Dorn & Soffos, 2001). Jeff Anderson's (2005) book *Mechanically Inclined* offers an array of craft lessons that use mentor texts and students' writing to illustrate how

writers use grammar for effect. For instance, he links pronoun use with tone and point of view, pointing out that a first person point of view, which uses I/we so that the narrator is a central character in the story, fosters a sense of immediacy and emotion in the reader. Explaining how pronoun use conveys point of view could be a valuable minilesson in a writing workshop in which students are composing memoirs, or writing narratives as prescribed by the CCSS for Writing (K-5.3), while meeting the CCSS of Language related to pronouns that begin in Grade 1 with students using "personal, possessive, and indefinite pronouns (e. g. I, me, my; they, them, their; anyone, everything)" (1.1.d). Anderson (2005) includes accessible explanations of grammatical rules in light of craft along with a plethora of illustrative mentor texts that may be incorporated into craft lessons to highlight the strategic choices writers make with respect to grammatical constructions for audience effect. These craft lessons offer a second way to teach the CCSS as part of writing workshop.

A third kind of minilesson, the strategy lesson, involves modeling for students how to solve problems they encounter as writers (Dorn & Soffos, 2001). Strategy lessons are vital for fostering independent writers and showing students how to perform fac-

ets of the writing process. In *Code-Switching Lessons*, Wheeler and Swords (2010) provide examples of strategy lessons that extend the learning from students' inquiry. Code-switching lessons teach

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students how to draft by modeling whole-class collaborative drafting and how to edit by modeling how to change, not correct, students' writing to reflect the formal pattern. To introduce a strategy lesson on editing, say, for plurals, teachers review the concept of plurals derived from the class's inquiry. Referring to the Code-Switching Chart, the teacher begins a conversation about the differences between formal and informal plural patterns. As part of this discussion, the teacher models editing strategies with student work, guiding students in collaboratively editing the piece. The language used in the lesson is positive to convey that when students compose in their home language, they are actually writing "correctly" when following the informal pattern. After students apply the editing strategy to their own writing, they share how they approached the task by explaining the decisions they made to make specific words reflect formal plural patterns. This kind of assessment keeps the focus of the minilesson on the strategy while addressing the CCSS related to plurals.

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Last Words

Teachers with knowledge of linguistics, an intuitive sense of language variation, or experience with various dialects may be prepared to incorporate code-switching into their language arts curriculum. Those who hesitate to do so should know that studies have demonstrated that contrastive analysis enhances students' mastery of written Standard English (Sweetland, 2007, cited in Godley, et. al., 2006). One teacher who employed contrastive analysis saw students' pass rate on the state's standardized writing assessment increase from 60% to 79% to 94% over a two year period (Godley, et. al., 2006). Gains this substantial cannot be taken lightly, and we are eager to explore how to integrate contrastive analysis into our Language Arts methods courses.

As the state of Michigan migrates from the Grade Level Content Expectations for Language Arts to the CCSS, we await the assessments that are guaranteed to follow. How will the designers of the new state-mandated standardized tests interpret these standards? How will they evaluate students' capacity for recognizing language variation in literature and in their own writing? How far across grade levels will testing span? What would it mean to evaluate first graders' ability to meet the standards for subject-verb agreement and plurals? Unless a student's home language is Standard English, it essentially means evaluating students' ability to code-switch. We contend that code-switching and valuing language variation is valuable for all students, including those already well-versed in Standard English. We hope that the designers of the state-wide assessments agree and take this opportunity to design more equitable assessments that level the playing field between students whose home language resembles Standard English and those that offer the richness of variation.

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