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# Literacy and Lenses: Can the New Michigan Merit Curriculum Support the Mission of Covenant Christian High School's English Department?

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# Literacy and Lenses: Can the New Michigan Merit Curriculum Support the Mission of Covenant Christian High School's English Department?

## **Abstract**

The need for curriculum restructuring as a solution for addressing the changing needs in Michigan's public schools has led to the creation and implementation of a new Michigan Merit Curriculum (MMC) based on the latest educational research into the needs of 21st century students. Covenant Christian High School in Grand Rapids, Michigan, is a private, parental school that is evaluating and revising its curriculum in anticipation of adding the ninth grade to the school next year. The question has been raised in the English department whether the MMC could be used to support the Reformed, biblical mission of the school, which exists because this is the parents' desire for their children's education. Research into the philosophical assumptions that provide both the underpinnings of the MMC and those of the private parental high school showed a serious conflict between the two worldviews and their implications for educational practice.

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Literacy and Lenses:  
Can the New Michigan Merit Curriculum Support  
the Mission of Covenant Christian High School's  
English Department?

by

Suzanne R. Looyenga

B.A. Trinity Christian College, 1996

Thesis  
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
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Date

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## Abstract

The need for curriculum restructuring as a solution for addressing the changing needs in Michigan's public schools has led to the creation and implementation of a new Michigan Merit Curriculum (MMC) based on the latest educational research into the needs of 21<sup>st</sup> century students. Covenant Christian High School in Grand Rapids, Michigan, is a private, parental school that is evaluating and revising its curriculum in anticipation of adding the ninth grade to the school next year. The question has been raised in the English department whether the MMC could be used to support the Reformed, biblical mission of the school, which exists because this is the parents' desire for their children's education. Research into the philosophical assumptions that provide both the underpinnings of the MMC and those of the private parental high school showed a serious conflict between the two worldviews and their implications for educational practice.

Covenant Christian High School, a parental school opened in 1968 by an association of parents from the Protestant Reformed Churches, presently has an enrollment of just over 200 students in grades 10-12 as it approaches the 42<sup>nd</sup> year of its existence. In addition to being a private, parental school, it is a school that was begun in the Reformed, Calvinistic tradition of Christian schooling. The principles of the great 16<sup>th</sup> century Protestant Reformation, based on the Word of God, the Bible, have been the driving force behind the setting up of schools like this one that have differed in several important respects from other schools, both private and public.

Major changes are being planned for the school over the next two years that will lead to the addition of a ninth grade class, a significant structural change to the present school building, and even more importantly, to a complete reevaluation of the curriculum and the production of a written curriculum plan for every course offering by the fall of 2012. Prior to this time, individual teachers have taken on the responsibility for determining the subject content that would be taught in the classroom, the pedagogical methods they would use, and how they would integrate a Reformed worldview into their disciplinary areas.

Even as the association, board, and teachers of the high school address these changes, the State of Michigan has been in the process of adopting and promoting a new curriculum and assessment program for high school students residing in the state, a move that will have an impact upon students in both public and private schools. Citing the future need for a completely different kind of workforce within the state in the face of a radically changing national and global economy, the state Board of Education has adopted new curriculum standards known as the Michigan Merit Curriculum (MMC) for students in grades K-12. Although private parental and parochial schools in Michigan do not legally fall under the curriculum mandate unless they voluntarily seek accreditation by the state, their students' assessment performance on the



Michigan Merit Exam (MME), which is based upon the MMC, will determine the amount of scholarship money they obtain for higher education from the state. Therefore it appears that it is in the best interests of this Christian parental school and of other private and parochial schools to evaluate the expectations of the MMC and to align their instruction to the MMC in the content areas to be assessed by the MME if this is at all possible.

One disciplinary area that has received significant attention from the state is that of the English Language Arts (ELA). Along with the math and science curriculum standards, the standards for ELA were the first to be researched and developed by the Michigan Board of Education (MBOE), primarily because of the increasing need for a workforce in Michigan that is prepared to meet the changes in technology and communication that have taken place over the past four decades. According to the documents published by the MBOE in 1996, the High School Content Expectations (HSCE) for English are based upon research that shows that in order for students to be successful in the college and in the well-paying jobs of today's workforce, they require four years of English language arts instruction, in which "all expectations are addressed in increasing levels of complexity and sophistication." The areas to be addressed in the ELA classes are the areas of reading, writing, speaking, listening, viewing, and expressing (p. 24).

As one of the states belonging to the United States of America, which must compete in a *global* economy, Michigan has also been involved in a movement to align its curriculum with those of other states for the nation's best interests. The Michigan Board of Education unanimously adopted the Common Core State Standards for ELA and mathematics on June 15, 2010, joining 37 other states in embracing what state board's communications director, Martin Ackley (2010), has described as "a set of rigorous, college and career-ready K-12 curriculum

standards that states across the nation are considering adopting to bring consistency in education across the states” (para. 1). Ackley further noted that these standards, though written for subject content alone, were internationally benchmarked (para. 2).

Although mandated by the state for use in its public schools, Michigan’s new curriculum is intended for use by its private and parochial schools as well. In the introduction to the *Michigan Curriculum Framework* (2006), which provided the structure for the Michigan Merit Curriculum, the Michigan State Board of Education and the Michigan Department of Education described this framework as “a resource for helping Michigan’s public and private schools design, implement, and assess their core content area curricula” (p. 6). Covenant Christian, though it is a relatively small Christian school in the suburbs of one of Michigan’s larger cities, is also affected by state, national, and international interests in education.

Nevertheless, it must be remembered that at the bottom of all curriculum decisions lie presuppositions about students, the reality in which they live, their life’s purpose, and the moral code according to which they live. These presuppositions inform every decision about every area of schooling including the work of every state and government agency and every school association, school board, parent, and student from day to day.

Jaarsma and DeBeer (1953) formulated a statement of the Calvinistic philosophy of Christian education in response to the urgent demand for a clear guideline for evaluating and revising curriculum. In his overview of the basis for covenantal Christian education, De Beer remarked that

Every motive or activity of man involves an underlying philosophy whether consciously recognized or not. A philosophy is simply a statement of purposes or

relationships to be attained, or of the reasons or motives for activities or goals.

(p. 4)

Our nation and the states have spent much money, time, and effort with the intention of providing what they consider to be the best education for the students in the American public school system. Curricula have been redefined and refined to include statements of vision or mission statements meant to articulate educational purposes and guide practice in the classroom. Much research in the field of education has provided documented evidence of best practices and meaningful assessments in the classroom for all students, regardless of race or gender, ability, or physical status.

But it was not only the nation and the states that concerned themselves with the future of education in America. As the new millennium was approaching, private schools of the Reformed Christian tradition also expressed concern for the direction of 21<sup>st</sup> century education in Christian schools. Vryhof, Brouwer, Ulstein, and VanderArk (1989) incorporated the work of a group of Reformed Christian educators, administrators, professors, and pastors who met in Chicago during the late 1980s to discuss the future of the schools of their tradition. In it, the very first affirmation presented was “Clarifying and Applying a Statement of Mission.” The authors elaborated upon this necessity: “Parents, staff and students discuss frequently and confirm by consensus the school’s goals. They rephrase and restate from time to time the biblical rationale for the school’s statement of purpose so that it makes sense to each new generation of teachers, students, and parents. School structures—administrators, boards, committees—are in place to keep practice in line with mission” (p. 23).

In their 7<sup>th</sup> affirmation, “Preparing for Later Vocational and Educational Opportunities,” the committee members concurred that it was necessary for students in the Christian schools to

learn a core knowledge base and develop essential life skills, which knowledge base “includes the story of God’s people as found in the Bible and church history, the central realities of the natural world, the basic expressions of the larger culture, and a sense of history—all seen through ‘the spectacles of Scripture’” (p. 49). The essential life skills taught to students should encompass, they believed, reading, writing, mathematics, communication through various media, finding and critically processing information, and independent learning. For those teachers, administrators, and curriculum supervisors who shape curriculum, the authors insisted that the guiding question should be, “If the purpose of education is to train students to take their place in the world, what is that world like these days?” (p. 50).

But underlying the skills and objectives to be taught, learned, and assessed is something more than research, documentation, and application of “best practices.” As Fennema (2007) wrote, “The nature of the curriculum of the Christian school depends on viewpoint; again, one’s theology informs one’s pedagogy” (p. 23). It is worldview, ultimately, that shapes curriculum, whether it includes objectives carefully chosen by the state, based on state-sponsored research into best practices, or goals desired by the parents of a private school’s children as expressed in the school’s mission statement.

Also in agreement with this idea that worldview is ultimately what shapes curriculum, Van Brummelen (1994) wrote that it was impossible for a curriculum to be neutral, because even those that attempted to be objective would still “hold to certain values that leave a ‘value residue’ in the minds and hearts of students, such as the belief that thinking rationally is more important than “accepting in faith certain matters of morality and belief” (p. 2).

Van Brummelen (1994) further explained that differences in world views lead to different views on education and even to diverse approaches to curriculum theory and practice. Even when teachers may not have expressed a worldview that is clearly defined, Van Brummelen insisted that what teachers believe about the nature of the students they teach, their role as teachers, and what content they consider relevant to their students will have an impact upon how they put the curriculum into practice (p. 4).

As this planning of curriculum and practice continues over the coming years, the parent association of Covenant Christian High School, speaking through the school board, has expressed the desire to remain faithful to the original mission of the school. They see curriculum as the means by which their children are prepared to live their lives as dual citizens, not only as residents of the State of Michigan and of the United States of America here and now, but as children of their King Jesus Christ in His everlasting kingdom. Their expectations are for their children to be able support themselves, their families, and the cause of Christ's Kingdom financially as part of the state's changing workforce, but more importantly, to serve the cause of King Jesus as stewards of the material and spiritual gifts God has given them to develop here on earth with a view to the everlasting life to come as His children in a new heaven and earth. And these parents want their children to be aware of the reality around them and within them in order to engage this world's culture with the message of Christ's redemption and to live to glorify God and enjoy Him forever in covenant fellowship.

This study, then, will involve researching these "reasons and motives" as framed by the philosophies that have informed recent state and national decisions regarding curriculum and instruction. Its conclusions are intended to enable the association of parents, the school board members, and the teachers to make decisions about curriculum and instruction at Covenant

Christian High School, and in particular, its English department. The intent of these decisions is to preserve the original mission of the school and to engage the present reality of its students' social and cultural position in today's world and the world of the future.

### **Statement of the Problem**

It is critical during this time of curriculum review at Covenant Christian High School that the parent association, the school board, and the teachers come together to reaffirm the beliefs upon which the school is founded. At the same time, they must look to the future with a clear vision of what enduring understandings, knowledge, skills, and attitudes they want students to have when they leave the school for higher education and/or the workplace, and serve now and later in their own homes, places of worship, and local communities.

The research in this paper is directed toward finding an answer to the problem of whether the mission of Covenant Christian High School, as applied to the English Language Arts program, can be met by using the new Michigan Merit Curriculum.

### **Research Questions**

This research seeks to answer the fundamental question: Is it possible for the new Michigan Merit Curriculum to support the mission of Covenant Christian High School's English department?

To address this fundamental question, the following sub-questions will also be considered:

1. What are the philosophical underpinnings of the Michigan Merit Curriculum, specifically the English language arts curriculum?

2. What worldview and stated mission of Covenant Christian High School need to be integrated into the English curriculum?
3. What principles will guide the decision-making process?

### **Definition of Terms**

The following key terms that appear in this study are defined below to avoid ambiguity and establish clarity in understanding the problem, the research findings, and discussion.

**Accreditation:** An ongoing and collaborative process which confirms that a school has met a set of standards deemed essential for quality education for all students (*Michigan Curriculum Framework*, 2006, Appendix C, p. 1).

**Assessment:** “The act of determining the extent to which the curricular goals are being and have been achieved” (Wiggins & McTighe, 1998, p. 4).

**Benchmarks:** Statements which indicate what students should know and be able to do at various developmental levels (i.e., early/late elementary school, middle school, and high school)” (*Michigan Curriculum Framework*, 2006, Appendix C, p. 1).

**Calvinist:** These are those who follow the theological worldview of the 16<sup>th</sup> century Protestant Reformer, John Calvin. This worldview is based upon his belief in God’s sovereignty as Creator of all things, His revelation to His creatures in creation, but more importantly, in His inspired and inerrant Word, and the covenant relationship that He has established with His elect people in Jesus Christ.

**Constructivist:** This refers to both an educational philosophy and a methodology for teaching and learning that “highlights the student construction of knowledge on a path to learner autonomy” (Erickson, 2001, p. 228).

**Content:** This includes “subject matter from the disciplines of English language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies” (*Michigan Curriculum Framework*, 2006, Appendix C, p. 1).

**Content Standards:** These are “broad descriptions of the knowledge and skills students should acquire in the core academic subjects” (*Michigan Curriculum Framework*, 2006, Appendix C, p. 2).

**Covenant:** As a theological term, this is “the vibrant relationship of mutual knowledge and love between God and His elect people in Jesus Christ” (Engelsma, 2000, p. 3).

**Curriculum:** In its broad form, curriculum refers to “a particular ‘course to be run,’ given a desired endpoint. A curriculum is more than a syllabus, therefore: Beyond mapping out the topics and materials, it specifies the activities, assignments, and assessments to be used in achieving its goals...They specify what the learner will do, not just what the teacher will do” (Wiggins & McTighe, 1998, p. 4).

**Education:** This is the anticipated result of the course of study in a school (Vander Ark, 2000, p. 17).

**Mission:** This refers to the stated purpose of the school, or desired end of schooling there (Vander Ark, 2000, p. 18).



**Objectives:** Objectives are statements of what measurable content or skills the student must know or be able to do (Erickson, 2001, p. 229).

**Performance Standards:** These refer to the desired student output: what students can do and how well they can do it (Wiggins & McTighe, 1998, p. 4).

**Process Skills:** These skills refer to internal student abilities that increase in their sophistication over time, including reading, writing, speaking, and thinking (Erickson, 2001, p. 229).

**Standards:** These are an agreed-upon level of performance that demonstrates proficiency or achievement” (*Michigan Curriculum Framework*, 2006, Appendix C, p. 3).

**Strands:** These are clusters of related content standards often representing disciplines (geometry, physical science, or history) or a cross-cutting theme (inquiry)” (*Michigan Curriculum Framework*, 2006, Appendix C, p. 3).

**Technicist:** This is one who believes that reality can be controlled and the problems of life can be solved by using technology and science as methods and tools (Schuurman, 1997, p. 1).

**Vision:** This is a description of the philosophy and ideals upon which a school’s curriculum, instruction, and assessment are based (*Michigan Curriculum Framework*, 2006, Appendix C, p. 3). For the Christian school, the vision is the philosophy of education that states the school’s beliefs about God, creation, the fall into sin, God’s covenant, redemption, and the Kingdom of God (Vander Ark, 2000, p. 18).

**Worldview:** This may be defined as “a way of perceiving the meaning of life,” or as “a comprehensive framework of basic convictions about life” (Van Brummelen, 1994, pp. 2, 24).

## **Review of the Literature**

### **Philosophical Underpinnings of the Michigan Merit Curriculum**

The philosophy that served as the framework for the MMC has arisen from a naturalism that was intended to be an alternative or neutral ground upon which the common schools of the nation could maintain a separation between state-sponsored schooling and the varying religious beliefs of an influx of immigrants into America. Over time, this philosophy came to be expressed in the beliefs of naturalistic humanism that have increasingly undergirded public education in Michigan almost from the beginning of its existence as a territory. The structure and language of the MMC and its framing documents have exhibited traits of the four predominant schools of educational philosophy that have developed within this naturalistic framework over the past few decades. Although each of these schools brings a different emphasis as to the “how” of education, all are in agreement as to its “why.”

Author George R. Knight (1998) has said that educational philosophy does not differ from philosophy in general, but is “general philosophy applied to education” (p. 13), and therefore examining the philosophical assumptions of the Michigan Merit Curriculum must consist of viewing at least three central philosophical categories or branches: the metaphysical, which deals with the nature of reality; the epistemological, which is the study of knowledge and its nature, sources and validity; and the axiological, which is the determination of what is of value both ethically and aesthetically (p. 18). Since the philosophical framework of the Michigan Merit Curriculum is naturalism, the study examined this philosophical framework and modes of expression in education.

Research into the history of the philosophical/religious background of Michigan's common-school system revealed that very early on, naturalism replaced religion, in particular the Christian religion, as the framework for non-religious instruction in Michigan. Territorial land reserved for schools under the provisions of the Congressional Act of 1804 was awarded to the state when it became a territory in 1805, and by 1829, a Department of Education had been formed. Starring and Knauss (1969), reported that as early as 1876 "the authorities of the public schools found it impossible to have religion taught to pupils whose parents professed diverse doctrines, even if the constitutionality of doing so would be taken for granted" (p. 147).

As an alternative to the common schools, the state did allow parents the freedom to begin private or parochial schools in order to offer their children instruction based upon their distinctive Christian worldviews if they so desired. Meanwhile, the state's "common" schools more and more embraced a naturalistic humanism, expressed in various orientations to curriculum that reflected the effects of the growing industrial and technological capabilities upon American society (Starring & Knauss, 1969, p. 147).

The essence of the framework within which these educational components functions was described by Sire (1997), who stated that in naturalism, the idea of God or of a supreme Being was dismissed. Sire's (1997) description of six basic propositions of naturalism illustrated this: (1) Matter exists from eternity and is all there is in the universe; (2) The cosmos exists as a closed system with uniformity of cause and effect; (3) Human beings are "complex machines" and personality consists of merely chemical and physical properties; (4) Death is extinction of both the person and the individuality; (5) History is linear, consisting of causes and effects, but without an overarching purpose; and (6) Ethics is related only to human beings. Sire (1997) noted that there were two major ways that naturalism has been currently put into practice as a

philosophy in our world: as secular humanism and as Marxism. It was the former that became predominant in the American public schools (pp. 54-61).

Knight (1998) wrote that this form of humanism, known initially as “educational humanism,” spawned various “schools” of philosophy, each of which expressed educational theory and practice in different ways, although there were overlapping ideas among them. Knight also saw a direct relationship between basic beliefs that people held during by the 20<sup>th</sup> century and how they viewed educational components such as the nature of the student, the role of the teacher, curricular emphasis, instructional methods, and the social function of the school (p. 37).

The website of the Council for Secular Humanism (2011) defined secular humanism as a “comprehensive, non-religious life stance,” or as it quoted prominent secular humanist Paul Kurtz: “a body of principles suitable for orienting a complete human life.” Secular humanists place themselves on a continuum between atheism, which denies that God exists, and religious humanism, which honors the dignity of men and women created in the image of God and the moral/ethical laws that are written upon their hearts. While firmly denying the existence of any supernatural force or transcendent being, the secular humanist insists that a system of ethics is possible through scientific judgment of results that are achieved by certain human behaviors (“What is Secular Humanism?” p. 1).

Stating that there was no word to adequately define secular humanism in the English language, Paul Kurtz (2003), then editor-in-chief of the Council’s *Free Inquiry* magazine, coined a new word derived from Greek roots to describe this type of humanism: eupraxsophy. Eupraxsophy, he asserted, focuses not only upon loving wisdom (philosophy), but also upon practicing right action. Kurtz explained further that

Moral philosophers should be interested in developing the capacity for critical ethical judgments. That is an eminent goal. But eupraxsophy goes further than that, for it focuses on creating a coherent ethical life stance. Moreover, it presents hypotheses and theories about nature and the cosmos that at any particular point in history were based on the best scientific knowledge of the day. (p. 1)

Although it was not explicitly called by this name, the idea of eupraxsophy, which unites knowledge to its practice, was visible in the language of the *Michigan Merit Curriculum Framework* (MCF). This document, published in 1996, was the precursor to the actual Michigan Merit Curriculum and introduced the content standards and draft benchmarks for it. This document was intended to present, according to its introduction,

a content and a process for developing curriculum that enables schools to realize Michigan's vision for K-12 education: Michigan's K-12 education will ensure that all students will develop their potential in order to lead productive and satisfying lives. All students will engage in challenging and purposeful learning that blends their experiences with content knowledge and real-world applications in preparation for their adult roles, which include becoming literate individuals, healthy and fit people, responsible family members, productive workers, involved citizens, and self-directed, lifelong learners. (p. 6)

Yet, more than simply providing standards and objectives for knowledge, the MCF also focused upon how that knowledge would be applied in the lives of Michigan students after their high school education had been completed. The vision statement for the English Language Arts

section of the MCF proclaimed that “The ultimate goal for all English language arts learners is personal, social, occupational, and civic literacy” (2006, p. 15).

Van Brummelen (1994) identified four different orientations to curriculum derived from this naturalistic worldview that have been prominent in public schools over the past 50 years. Among these were those of the academic traditionalists, who embrace essentialism and perennialism; the technicians, whose approach favors empiricism and behaviorism; the deliberative thinkers who consider reflective practice to be the best way to determine decision-making; and finally, the constructivists, who believe that students construct their own meaning and knowledge as the teacher/facilitator provides the experiences and resources necessary to do this (pp. 7-17).

While all four of these orientations were evident in the language and suggestions for implementation of the MMC, it was the educational orientation of the business technician that was predominant among them. This was seen in its very systematic approach of determining the goals the school should seek to attain and the experiences students needed to achieve them. These, then, were carefully organized into lists of skills and objectives with assessments created to provide the data that would offer proof of attainment.

Van Brummelen (1994) described this orientation: “Technicians want to control and manage the curriculum, the teacher, the learner, and the learning environment. They emphasize the question, ‘How can we most proficiently accomplish what we want to do?’ They find efficient means to reach predetermined, detailed, and measurable ends” (p. 10).

This technicism was heavily influenced by the business-derived educational philosophy of Tyler (1949), education adviser to six U.S. presidents, and author of *Basic Principles of*

*Curriculum and Instruction*. It was Tyler's (1949) belief that the objectives of education were ultimately matters of choice that depended upon the value judgments of those who held the responsibility in the school, although he conceded that a comprehensive philosophy of education was necessary to guide in making these judgments" (p. 4).

Nevertheless, Tyler (1949) stated, there is a great deal of disagreement regarding "the basic source from which these objectives can be derived" (p. 4). He noted that knowledge, skills, and attitudes that form the objectives of the schools have arisen from either studying the perceived needs of students in contemporary life (the source favored by the progressivist) or by studying educational philosophy itself in order to determine the basic traditional values of society that have been transmitted from one generation to another by means of education, which is the source favored by the essentialist. Tyler then stated his own belief that there was no single source of information that was adequate to provide a basis for wise and comprehensive decisions about the objectives of the school, and that education, in his opinion, was "the process of changing the behavior patterns of people" including "thinking and feeling as well as overt action" (pp. 5-6). This is the approach a behaviorist would prefer.

Research into the effects upon the educational decisions made in the state of Michigan over the past decade showed this dual influence of perceived needs of students and philosophical views of curriculum designers. Preeminent in the push for standards and objectives has been the Business Roundtable (BRT), an organization formed to address the needs in the nation's changing business and technological climate. The BRT, by its own description a powerful lobbying organization, has as its agenda to change the shape of American education in order to ensure America's continued strength in global competition: supporting world-class education and lifelong learning systems for all Americans, ensuring that the U.S. continues to welcome "the

world's best and brightest minds", and by promoting "breakthrough research and development" supported by public and private investments (Business Roundtable, 2009, p.1).

The set of educational reform goals that came from the 1989 meeting of the BRT were based upon the principles of the Total Quality Management model, which Fitzgerald (2009) called a "philosophy and a system for continuously improving the services and/or products offered to customers," which system arose because "the technologies of transportation and communication have replaced national systems with a global economy, [and] nations and businesses that do not practice TQM can become globally non-competitive rather rapidly" (p. 1).

The essential elements of TQM as applied to education were described as (1) awareness and commitment for everyone; (2) a clear mission; (3) a systems planning approach; (4) teaming replacing hierarchy; (5) enabling and empowerment replacing fear; (6) a focus on mastery learning; (7) management by measurement; (8) development of student TQM skills; (9) a humanistic and brain-compatible focus; and (10) a transformation plan (Fitzgerald, 2009, pp. 1-4).

The plan formalized by the BRT in 1989 was initially delivered to the public as Outcome-Based Education (OBE). According to Sunseri (1994), this plan had its origin in the ideas of sociologist Dr. William Spady, the "Father of Outcome-based Learning." Sunseri (1994) quoted Spady's description of OBE as "focusing and organizing all of the schools' programs and instructional efforts around clearly defined outcomes we want all students to demonstrate when they leave school" (p. 13).

Business technicism also led to extensive research into what worked best in America's classrooms in the last decade before the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Daniels, Bizar, & Zemelman (2001)



reported these so-called best practices had been identified for every important content area in secondary schools by “national curriculum research centers, twenty subject-matter professional associations, scores of capable individual researchers, and thousands of on-the-line classroom teachers” (p. 13) at that time. Further, they noted that although the recommendations had come from a diversity of content area specialists, all of whom had their own particular visions for the classroom, the fundamentals of their insights were “remarkably congruent” (p. 13).

Meanwhile, at the state level, Michigan’s answer to the *America 2000* and *No Child Left Behind* legislation, which called for an accountability system among states and annual yearly progress reports, was *Education: Yes! – A Yardstick for Excellent Schools* approved by the State Board of Education in 2002. This has also become the means by which Michigan worked toward aligning state requirements with federal requirements.

In 2002, the Michigan State Board of Education asked the United States Department of Education to develop grade-by-grade expectations for the content of the disciplines of reading and the English language arts as well as mathematics, so that the achievement of expectations that was be measured in the assessments required by NCLB could be clarified for state and local school systems. Also at this time, Governor Jennifer Granholm hired an independent consulting firm, Achieve, Inc., to conduct a review of the content expectations in ELA and math that had been developed by committees of Michigan educators working to align curriculum with state standards. The goal of this evaluation was to compare the curriculum objectives with the best standards from other states and nations (Achieve, Inc. 2003).

By 2006, the provisions of the Michigan Merit Curriculum had been signed into law. Although their technicist orientation was evident, it was also plain that the standards were

written to address other philosophical orientations as well. This was illustrated by the English Language Arts (ELA) documents that were studied.

The present Michigan State Board of Education's guide for an ELA curriculum in grades 9-12 was developed to assist teachers in successfully implementing this new Michigan Merit Curriculum in the area of English literacy. The stated goal in its *High School Content Expectations* (2007) for ELA is "personal, social, occupational, and civic literacy," which is defined as "understand [ing] the different functions of English language arts for personal, social, and political purposes (e.g., for personal enjoyment and interest; for communicating with and understanding others; for accomplishing goals, understanding others' perspectives, shaping opinions and attitudes, and controlling behaviors)" (Michigan Board of Education (MBOE), 2007, p. 5).

The document consisted of the following sections: (1) *Curriculum Unit Design*, which set the goals for "engaging and effective units" that were also "coherent and rigorous," and "began with the end in mind;" (2) *Relevance*, which called for "instruction that was clearly relevant to today's rapidly changing world," i. e., "Real-world learning experiences;" and (3) *Student Assessment*, which promoted both "assessment of learning" and "assessment for learning" and defined "sound assessments" with 11 desirable criteria to guide them (MBOE, 2007, p. 4).

Language arts content expectations placed the emphasis upon the student's ability to comprehend informational text and to exhibit reading and writing skills in the workplace. This was done by organizing the standards into four strands: Reading, Writing, Speaking, and Listening & Viewing. The strands were further divided into 14 standards, and 91 expectations, which were intended to promote recursive and reinforcing language teaching processes, or

processes that are “addressed repeatedly and at increasingly complex levels throughout the lessons from grade 9 through grade 12” (MBOE, 2007, p. 4).

That the nation and state have taken several philosophical orientations into consideration is evident in a departure from past concerns with merely objectives-based assessment of content and skills. The Michigan Merit Curriculum’s High School Content Expectations (HSCE) have been organized by what the MBOE terms “Big Ideas and Dispositions.” This type of organizational style and terminology for curriculum standards has been derived from the work of Wiggins and McTighe (1998) as presented in their seminal work *Understanding by Design*.

Wiggins and McTighe (1998) said that teachers, referred to as educational designers, are constrained by national, state, district, or institutional standards that specify what their students, or primary clients, should be able to know and do. These standards serve as a framework for teaching and learning priorities in their classrooms, along with their students’ other (non-external) needs (pp. 7-8). The authors have stated that not everything of knowledge and skills that appears in these standards, however, is worthy of learning in greater depth and breadth.

The authors have defined this deeper learning as *understanding* or “wise use of knowledge and skill”, a “real learning” which has lasting value because it is transferable to other inquiries. Understanding, they insisted, is in direct opposition to “amnesia” and/or “inert knowledge” which is too often the result of education that centers upon planned activities to teach skills and facts. In order for instruction that leads to understanding, the two have proposed a strategy for “backward planning” of the school’s curriculum” in order to make the facts, skills, and behaviors learned in school more “connected, coherent, meaningful, and useful” (Wiggins & McTighe, 2003, slide 7).

Wiggins and McTighe (1998) proposed questions, which they termed essential questions, as the “doorways to understanding” (p. 26). These questions would be derived from key concepts, or Big Ideas, that made it possible to transfer what was learned in the classroom into life in both present and future. The criteria for these questions would be that they must direct the student toward the Big Ideas and be (1) important to argue about; (2) at the heart of the discipline; (3) recurring; (4) provocative of other questions; (5) habits of mind when people face real problems; (6) instigators of other concepts or issues to discuss; and (7) able to be used to “organize purpose for meaningful and connected learning” (pp. 29-32).

Further research revealed that in addition to its concern with deeper understanding of certain knowledge and skills that would be prioritized by the teacher, the MMC included a behavioral component that addressed ethical considerations and was meant to assist students in dealing with personal, relational, and societal influences in their individual lives. In a webinar presentation July 7, 2007, the Michigan Board of Education (MBOE) stated that the recommended dispositions of the Michigan Merit curriculum’s ELA were intended to serve as “a lens to focus student thinking toward social action and empowerment.” This document asserted that the overarching goal for the HSCE was for students to exhibit “habits of mind” or “dispositions” which would be developed through reading writing, listening, speaking, viewing, and expressing experiences encompassing a broad range of literary, nonfiction literary, and informational texts” (MBOE, 2007, slide 4 ).

While the MMC itself is predominantly technicist in its language, the writers of Michigan’s Curriculum Standards have also recognized certain qualities that have been present in those who have been successful inventors, designers, and entrepreneurs, and have sought to develop these characteristic behaviors in students along with the skills and knowledge necessary

to perform well in the workplace. These qualities, actually considered to be learned behaviors, had already been promoted in the business world as *Habits of Mind*.

According to their originators, Costa and Kallick (2000), habits of mind are “behaviors we exhibit reliably on appropriate occasions...broad, enduring, and essential lifespan learnings that are as appropriate for adults as they are for students” (p. viii). The authors described some sixteen behaviors that characterize successful people, stating that abundant data was collected to prove their effectiveness and described them as “a force directing us toward increasingly authentic, congruent, ethical behavior, the touchstones of integrity...the tools of disciplined choice making... the primary vehicles in the lifelong journey toward integration...the “right stuff” that makes human beings efficacious (p. 13).

Further, Costa and Kallick (2000) insisted that these habits of mind transcended all of the other subject matters commonly taught in school and were characteristic of those who performed at their peak in every area of society “whether they be in homes, schools, athletic fields, organizations, the military, governments, churches or corporations. They are what make marriages successful, learning continual, workplaces productive and democracies enduring” (p. 13).

The purpose of developing these habits of mind, then, was seen as behavioral--being able to motivate, activate, and direct one’s own ability. But there were also constructivist overtones. The students, in order to answer the overarching questions guiding the curriculum, are expected to construct their own understanding of the world, determine their place in it, and structure a moral code by which they will live by increasing their literacy-- building skills at reading, writing, speaking, listening, and viewing that will enable them to come to a knowledge that can be transferred to the world of the workplace.

Michigan students are expected to leave high school not only with 21<sup>st</sup> century skills and content knowledge, but also with values that they have constructed with the facilitation of a teacher: a human construct for living in a world viewed and experienced through the lens of the human eyes. Thus the naturalistic philosophy is worked out practically in and through the secular humanistic worldview.

Allowing the English teacher to have jurisdiction over the literature that would serve the teaching of the required content and skills of the ELA was a nod to the academic traditionalists in the line of E.D. Hirsch, who favored a listing of content and skills and wanted to maintain rigor in high standards, but desired to do this in such a way as to preserve a particular culture (Oakes & Lipton, 2007, p.78). For the teacher oriented toward traditionalism, the literary canon of Western culture could be made to serve, theoretically, as well as another culture's canon, or a blend of both, or everything the teacher desired, so long as the required content and literacy skills were taught through them.

That the ELA curriculum was build around dispositions, big ideas, themes, and essential questions intended to encourage students to actively engage in learning and constructing their own social reality provided the *praxis* that the critical theorists / constructivists have coveted for their classrooms in order to combat existing social inequities (Oakes & Lipton, 2007, p. 79). The common core of beliefs underlying the big ideas and themes and guiding questions were intended to provide the opportunity for “reflection, considered judgment, practice, and response” valued by the deliberative followers of Schwab’s practical arts approach as well as by social reconstructionists concerned with social justice and societal transformation (Van Brummelen, 1994, p. 233).

The naturalistic humanism of the MMC overall is seen throughout in its elimination of any mention of God, or even of a Supreme Being; its assumption of an evolutionary process that brought all of reality into being and continues to unfold to an unknown end; its view of knowledge as an objective entity to be grasped through reason; its view of the individual as self-determinant and autonomous; and finally of value as far as curriculum content as being in the “eye of the beholder,” and virtue of being “what works” for the majority in society to accomplish the goal of success for the individual competing in society, for the state competing among states, and for America competing among nations to experience the greatest influence and economic success.

### **The Mission of Covenant Christian High School**

The mission of Covenant Christian High School has its basis in a Reformed worldview, a view that sees all of reality through one lens: the lens of the Word of God. It states: “The mission of Covenant Christian High School can be summed up by saying that the school exists to assist parents in rearing covenant young people and fitting them for useful and fruitful covenant living. All of life begins and ends in God, and covenant living involves loving and serving the God of our salvation in our study, our work, and our play” (Mission and Beliefs, n.d.). In other words, the mission for educating children at Covenant Christian High School has a covenantal basis consisting of two parts: rearing covenant children and fitting them for fruitful covenant living, which is further defined as “loving and serving the God of our salvation.” Reality, in metaphysical terminology, then, begins and ends in an eternal God.

A Reformed worldview is a worldview that has arisen from a world-and-life-view based upon the Protestant Reformation’s position that God’s Word in the Scriptures is the only authority for the doctrine and life of the believing child of God. Believing also that the

Reformed confessions stated in the *Heidelberg Catechism* (1563), the *Canons of Dordrecht* (1618-19), and the *Belgic Confession of Faith* (1561) best interpret their biblical worldview, the parents and supporters who formed the original school society of this parental school subscribe to these as well, and require that the teachers of their children express their consent to these expressions of sound doctrine found in God's Word.

It is the belief in a covenant relationship that God has established with believers and their children that is at the heart of the Reformed Christian school's existence. According to Berkhof (1953), this has been the case since the inception of Christian schools of the Reformed tradition: "The fact is that in our struggle for Christian schools the doctrine of the covenant was always the great presupposition (p. 250). Berkhof further noted that God's covenant, revealed first in the Old Testament to the patriarch Abraham and his descendants, was a result of God's own desire to establish "a closer union, more intimate relationship, lasting friendship and mutual devotion with believers and their seed" (p. 251).

Engelsma (2000) explained that the importance of God's covenant promise lies in the fact that it is "a vibrant relationship of mutual knowledge and love, represented in scripture not as a lifeless contract but as a marriage, or as a father-child relationship. For us men, women, and children, it is the enjoyment of salvation and life itself. It is the greatest good, the chief end of man, and the purpose both of creation and redemption" (p. 4).

Engelsma (2000) added that although not *every* child born or adopted into a covenant family is one of God's elect children, parents must teach *all* of their children. He based this belief upon exhortations found in both the Old and New Testaments of Scripture ( Deuteronomy



6:1-9; Ephesians 6:4) to parents diligently teaching their children “all the words that will bring the children to the fear of the Lord” (p. 6).

While their children are still infants or young children, believing parents in the churches of the Reformed denominations bring their children, whether biologically born to them or adopted into their homes, to be baptized with water as a sign and seal of the covenant of God with them and their children. At this time, they also make a vow before--and with the approval of other believers in their churches-- to raise their children according to the command of God to His people. Engelsma (2000) also added: “On the one hand, this instruction of their children is one of the outstanding covenant responsibilities of parents, that is, one aspect of their calling as friend-servants to love, serve, and glorify God. On the other hand, it is the means whereby God brings the reborn covenant child to spiritual maturity so that he or she becomes a developed man or woman of God, capable of a life of good works” (p. 6).

The parents who established Covenant Christian High School are referred to as *believers*, meaning those who know and believe in the God of the Bible, the God who is described in the *Belgic Confession of Faith* as being “one only simple and spiritual Being, which we call God, ...eternal, incomprehensible, invisible, immutable, infinite, almighty, perfectly wise, just, good, and the overflowing fountain of all good” (Article 1).

Further, Article 2 of this Reformed confession states that God’s people know God by two ways: “... by his creation, preservation, and government of the universe” and “by the way that he makes himself more clearly and fully known to us by his holy and divine Word.”

True knowledge for the student in the Christian School, then, is knowledge of this God to Whom everything in this world belongs – the God Who has revealed Himself. In *The Christian*

*Story and the Christian School* (2003), J. Bolt, Professor of Systemic Theology at Calvin College stated it thus:

It is the Christian conviction about God's revelation that makes specifically Christian thinking a possibility. God's Word in the Bible is "a lamp to our feet and a light for our path" (Psalm 119:105). Life, in all its fullness, as created by God, is discovered and enjoyed in the light of God's revelation...Christian education is scripturally directed education, learning that is rooted in revelation. Because God has spoken and to the extent that he has, we are able to see things from his point of view (p. 136).

Wolterstorff (1985) also spoke to this idea of knowing through revelation in his monograph, "Biblical Knowing and Teaching", saying that the Christian life is not the life of a "pure spiritual soul" attached to a body, nor is it the life of a mind that happens to be "imprisoned in a chunk of flesh". Rather, he stated, "it is the life of a creature who is soul and body, inner man and outer man, a conscious personal being and a biological being" (p. 313). The biblical model of knowing, according to Wolterstorff, is "named by some theologians as 'co-relation', in which the knower is in the Truth, participating in it and walking in it" ... "not rational deduction, but interaction" (pp. 320-321).

Because Covenant Christian High School is a parental school begun by an association of parents, those who do the work of teaching in the school are answerable to that association. The school board consists of parents chosen to be the representatives of all of the parents who enroll their children in the school, and its members have been given the responsibility to oversee the instruction of their children in its every aspect. Teachers are hired by the school board based on

their pedagogical credentials but also their spiritual credentials, that is, holding in common the beliefs about God and His Word held by the parents who have opened the school, or as Engelsma (2000) described them, “confessionally Reformed, with a love for the Reformed truth and principles as we know them and confess them and with an eagerness to teach them and apply them in every area” (p. 75).

One of those areas, or disciplines, in which Reformed truth and principles have been applied in schools of the Reformed Christians has been that of the English Language Arts. With all creation around them having been created by the Word of the Sovereign God, i.e., by the second person of the Trinity, Jesus Christ (John 1:2), and having received the written Word of God as His revelation in the Scripture, God’s people have been “People of the Word” from the beginning.

The Bible reveals that Adam, the first man, was created to communicate with God as he walked with Him in the Garden of Eden. He was privileged to interact first with God’s creation-- even naming the animals as he saw God’s creative purpose in them-- and later with Eve, the mate God gave him in response to the loneliness Adam felt as the animals strolled with their mates (Genesis 2).

Hanko (1980) wrote, “There was contact between the Word of God in Adam and the Word of God in the creation about him. This contact which enabled Adam to hear God’s Word was by means of God’s Spirit in his heart.” And Hanko (1980) noted further the great wonder that Adam not only *heard* the Word of God, but *spoke* it as well, as “an echo of the Word of God”. This communication between God and Adam, he said, was “at the very basis of the fellowship of God’s covenant” (p. 37).

Nevertheless, the story of mankind according to the Bible, is a story of the fall of mankind, as Adam and Eve disobeyed God's spoken truth, responded to Satan's spoken lie, and as sin entered the realm of paradise in Eden, they realized the dreadful consequences of sin--estrangement from fellowship with God. Hanko (1980) commented upon this as well: "Another speech of God was heard in creation other than the speech in Paradise. This was the speech of God's curse which obscured and drowned out, silenced with harsh and raucous notes, the speech which Adam had previously heard" (p. 38). Besides losing his most of his ability to see, hear, and perceive the Word of God in creation, man lost his ability to speak it.

Only by God's grace, through the redemptive power of His Son, Jesus Christ, "the Word made flesh" to dwell among us", according to the inspired apostle John (John 1), was that ability to understand God's Word restored. Once again man and woman could see God's revelation in creation and communicate in a covenant fellowship with Him. This could only be accomplished by atonement for the sin that had caused the estrangement. The "glimmerings of natural light" that remained in humankind in their natural, unredeemed state were no longer enough to bring them to a saving knowledge of God without the outpouring of the Spirit of Christ into their hearts to testify with their own spirits of that relationship with God (Romans 8:16).

Language, whether spoken, written, heard, or read--is part of the cultural reality that surrounds every man, woman, and child, even though it is not the original language of Paradise. In *Testament of Vision*, the late Reformed literary critic H. Zylstra (1954) wrote, "Language, unless one abstracts it from reality to the point at which it becomes a mechanical signal system, is one of the spiritual arts. It reveals reality, truth: it speaks to mind, mind responds to it (p. 89). Zylstra (1954) also said that all cultural realities "exhibit a religious allegiance and an ultimate loyalty...all of them are faith-founded, all laid on an altar, all dedicated to a god," and therefore,

education in language is, for the Christian teacher is helping the child to discern “the God behind the culture, the assumption underlying the thought, the dogma beneath the action, the soul in the body of the thing” (p. 99).

For the covenant people of God, the goal of education in the language arts is to cultivate the use of His gift of the spoken and written word to communicate praise to God, joy in our relationship with Him and speak the truth about reality. God has revealed Himself and continues to do so by His Word and Spirit through the preaching of His Word of Truth. He also has shown Himself in creation and in history and mankind has responded. Those responses illustrate that the story of communication is part of “The Story” of creation, fall, and redemption, as God speaks and His creature respond to Him. Communicating this well to the children in Reformed, covenantal schools is an essential part of language education, because it gets to the heart of all of reality, the “soul in the body of the thing.”

### **Principles That Will Guide the Decision-Making Process**

The principles upon which the decision of whether the MMC can support the mission of Covenant Christian High School’s English department will be made include the philosophical assumptions each has about (1) the reality of the world in which we live (2) knowledge and its source (3) the relationship of child and teacher in the classroom, (4) the knowledge that the child needs to have in order to thrive within this reality, (5) the source for that knowledge, and (6) the way that values, both moral/ethical and aesthetic, are to be acquired by the child.

As the research showed, the beliefs that curriculum designers have about each of these aspects has implications for the interaction that takes place between teachers and students in the

classroom, what knowledge is important and how it can be accessed, how it will be taught, and applied to life both inside and outside of the classroom, and how it will be assessed.

That the presuppositions underlying the MMC and the mission of Covenant Christian High School's English department both referred to lenses through which they viewed reality were also evident. The ultimate goal of the MMC was for students to develop "Habits of Mind" through which they would focus in order to apply what they learned in school to situations experienced during the rest of their lives. The ultimate goal of Covenant Christian High School's English department was for students to use the Word of God as the spectacles through which they viewed reality, applying its wisdom to their lives in relationship with God and with others.

## **Discussion**

### **Summary**

For the framers of the MMC, naturalism has led to a reality without a Creator-God, a world of matter and living creatures that have their existence by evolution through a multiplicity of random chemical processes, a world of causes and effects that continues on to an indeterminate end. Reality consists of the "here and now" that can be experienced; when life ends, so does experience and individuality. For now, one can learn by experience what works and what does not, and live by the principles that experience teaches while in this world. The results of scientific research can be helpful inasmuch that it gives convincing data about what has worked thus far. With the accumulation of more data comes more knowledge, and with more knowledge, the possibility of a better life. By exercising reason, one can use knowledge to grasp hold of power, material wealth, and fame. Knowledge is objective, a commodity to be

handled with skill and efficiency so that it can achieve a desired end. By means of questioning and reasoning with the mind about behaviors that have worked both for others and oneself in various situations, behaviors can be acquired that enable empowerment of the individual to reach his or her potential as a successful, balanced individual.

A view at life through the lens of God's Word presents an entirely different view. Not only does it include all of the reality of the world around us, but there is also the reality of a Creator-God and a world that transcends us, yet includes us by His reaching out to His creatures. The God of Scripture created all things by the Word of His power, but remains intimately involved in every detail of its existence by His providential care for it. All things exist by Him and for Him, yet His creation's crowning glory is man, made after God's own image and in His likeness (Gen.1:26). Sadly, there is also the blight of sin's reality with which to contend, but there is also a redemption-reality that can be comprehended when the Spirit within testifies to it. Man and woman are physical beings, but also spiritual, so they can have a relationship with God, Who is Spirit and Truth, Wisdom and Justice, Beauty, and Goodness in His very essence. His Word is the lens through which all of reality comes into focus, and it is a Word for all times and all peoples. Its reliability surpasses the reliability of all data gathered; its Truth transcends all of the truths spoken down through the ages, and therefore it provides an absolute standard by which to test all other spirits, or philosophies (I John 4:1).

Research made it evident also that each of these worldviews or lenses has implications for the classroom when consistently applied. While there appeared to be a congruity in much of the content that could conceivably be taught to 21<sup>st</sup> century students that would prepare them for continuing education and/or the workplace, views of the aims of education, the student, and the teacher's function in the classroom proved to be polar opposites.

The aims of education framed by the principles of naturalism and distributed by the Michigan Department of Education (MDOE) are permeated with secular humanistic values. Its ELA goals promote success in life through literacy, defining literate individuals as those who “understand the different functions of English language arts for personal, social, and political purposes (e.g. for personal enjoyment and interest; for communicating with and understanding others; for accomplishing goals, understanding others’ perspectives, shaping opinions and attitudes, and controlling behaviors” (MDE, 2006).

Children in the classroom based upon naturalism’s dogmas are encouraged to “believe in themselves” as the ultimate interpreters of reality by seeking knowledge, apprehending it to themselves, and applying it to their lives. They are led to construct from their own individually unique experiences both inside and outside the classroom a meaning for life that brings them to the places they want to be as individuals. Beauty, truth, justice, and goodness are relative terms to be discerned by their own feelings and attitudes as the teacher provides facilitating experiences in the classroom. For them, language is a yet another tool by which they might conceivably accomplish their construction of the reality in which they want to live, and therefore it is important to that end. Cooperation with others in the classroom is a valuable way to learn what works in the “real world.” And, if they can manipulate causes to produce their desired effects, and if the molecular forces within have combined to produce some inherent ability, it is possible that some of them may even live on in the words they have left behind even after they cease to be alive as individuals any longer at their death. Either way, they are important “stakeholders” in the “educational enterprise” and their possession of the “intellectual capital” need for global success in 21<sup>st</sup> century America gives them intrinsic value.



Children in the classroom that is undergirded by the belief in the sovereign God who has created all things are believed to be intrinsically valuable because He has made them. They belong to Him, body and soul, for time in history and also for eternity. Those whom God has elected before time began are precious recipients of His grace and Holy Spirit, entrusted for a time to earthly parents to nurture them physically, emotionally, and spiritually to maturity, and destined for eternal life with Him in His Kingdom both in this life and in the next. They are sinners no less than all others they encounter in this world, but they are seen as redeemed sinners through the work of Jesus Christ, the Savior of the world, on their behalf. They are unique individuals, but their purpose is found as a necessary part of a living organism, the spiritual Body of Jesus Christ. They have been individually fashioned to fill a specific place, with unique physical characteristics, intellectual and spiritual gifts, and personalities given by God to be nurtured and trained as tender plants by their godly parents (Ps. 128:3).

The teachers who are hired to continue that work in the classroom see themselves in this sphere as true curriculum planners- those who are “running the course” with their students as it becomes more and more complex. Together with these parents, they learn from an early age that God is the origin and meaning of life, the Source of all true knowledge and wisdom to apply that knowledge rightly in service to Him. They learn that all that is beautiful, true, just, and good is so because He Who is essentially all of these has said so. They discover the amazing gift that language is for God to communicate with them, and for them to respond with love reflecting love back to Him and to others for His sake. Their classroom is collaborative, for all are working toward the same goal, acknowledging the need for the unique gifts each brings to this work as a vocation from God, both . And as they mature, we see their desires becoming more and more His

desire, their behavior becoming more and more selfless as they come to they know the Way, the Truth, and the Life that leads to perfect joy and fulfillment forever in Him (John 14:6).

## Conclusions

Because of the dichotomy between every aspect of the worldview of the MMC and the Reformed, Calvinistic worldview, except for the need for certain core skills and knowledge required to participate in the culture in which we all live in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, it would be impossible to take the Michigan Merit Curriculum as it is has been framed by naturalism and expect it to serve the mission of Covenant Christian High School.

The work of Wiggins and McTighe is, however, a valuable contribution to curriculum planning in any situation because of its structure for “backward planning” with the end of education in view. The “Big Ideas” and “Essential Questions” that they have suggested to facilitate curriculum planning in all of its stages are essentially worldview questions, and these can be written to make the *how* of education serve its *why* in the Reformed Christian classroom.

As every Christian teacher knows, “one size does not fit all” in the classroom, and there will be some students that will be unable to meet the more rigorous demands of the MMC and the assessment of the MME with “success” as defined by its authors. Regardless of the planning and creativity of the teacher, the interest stirred in the curriculum, and the desire to learn, some students will be unable to do this, and sadly, some will, because of lack of spiritual maturity, be unwilling participants. The MMC, for all of its “real world relevance,” is after all a view of reality through a distorted lens.

## Implications

The reality that all citizens of this world know is that of *fallenness*--of a world that can only partially reveal the fullness of God's creative glory and groans to be released to full praise; of children "conceived and born in sin, who are subject to all miseries," even the condemnation of Adam (Form for the Administration of Baptism of Infants) ; of parents and teachers who, despite their best efforts and intentions, fall short of the calling to nurture and discipline covenant children as their heavenly Father would have this done.

It is also the reality that there is a Savior; there is redemption from sin, and forgiveness, and newness of life in Jesus Christ for students, parents, and teachers alike, but not for them alone. They have a mission to develop the gift of language and of the interpretation of language so that they can communicate reality to those around them in the "love language" of Jesus Christ.

And finally, it is the reality that this world is not all there is and is to be. Christ's Kingdom is already established in our hearts, and soon He will return to rule His people in a new heaven and a new earth that eternal and perfect, and where only one language is needed for the people of the Word.

If these "Essential Understandings" can be integrated into every curriculum plan, we can be satisfied that our curriculum planning serves our school's mission. Even though the lens through which we now see is smudged and darkened by sin and its effects upon us and upon creation, one day we will see "clearly, face to face" with God. And in the ultimate revelation of Him, we will know "even as we are known" (I Cor. 13: 12).

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B.A. Secondary English Education, Trinity College (1996)

### **Academic Employment**

Teacher (10-12), Covenant Christian High School, Grand Rapids, MI (2007-present)

Teacher (6), Adams Christian School, Wyoming, MI (2004-2007)

Teacher (9-12), Heritage Christian High School, South Holland, IL (2001-2004)

Teacher (6-9), Protestant Reformed Christian School, South Holland, IL (1997-2001)

Substitute Teacher (6-8), Calvin Christian School, South Holland, IL (1996-1997)

(9-12), Illiana Christian High School, Lansing, IL (1996-1997)

### **Academic Awards**

Secondary Teaching Award, Trinity Christian College (1997)

### **Publications and Presentations**

“Teaching Christianly in a Post-Modern Culture”- Protestant Reformed Teacher’s Institute sectional (2008)

“Backward Planning with a View to Worldview” – Protestant Reformed Teacher’s Institute Sectional (2006)

### **Professional Memberships**

Teacher Education & Development Committee, Protestant Reformed Teacher’s Institute (2008-present)

National Council of Teachers of English

Association for the Supervision of Curriculum Development