

ABSTRACT

Title of dissertation: PEDAGOGICAL PRACTICES IN THE TEACHING OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE IN SECONDARY PUBLIC SCHOOLS IN PARKER COUNTY

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State and local learning standards consistently call for student proficiency in standard English usage and grammar. NCTE standards for secondary teachers (grades 7-12) include expectations for English language knowledge, including English grammar. High stakes tests, as well, both for teacher candidates and secondary students, include assessments of grammatical knowledge and proficiency. However, there have been few studies of ELA teachers' attitudes toward or practices in grammar instruction over the past 30 to 40 years (see Godley [2007] and Smagorinsky [2011]), an absence not surprising given NCTE perspectives and research (e.g., Braddock, Lloyd-Jones, and Schoer [1963], Hillocks [1986], and Weaver [1996]) that question the efficacy of teaching grammar as a means for improving writing ability.

After the close of the first quarter of the 2008-2009 school year, I surveyed 369 English/language arts teachers from a large, highly-diverse, semi-urban mid-Atlantic public school system to determine their attitudes toward and practices in the teaching of grammar. Results based on 91 completed surveys from teachers in grades 7-12 indicate that nearly 85% of Parker County English/language arts teachers who responded include grammar and language study – and about half are regularly doing so. Just over half include it one or two days per week, and half give it less than one-quarter of their

(average) 81-minute period. Common practices include selected-response grammar exercises, sentence combining and transformation, and use of students' own writing as material for review or editing, all with an "emphasis on standard American English."

Nearly 72% believe students who are proficient in standard English will have greater opportunity for success in higher education or the workplace, but only 36% welcome all students' dialects/language as valid in the classroom – and only 15% would like students to acknowledge and respect language diversity. Although the findings indicate little direct association between teachers' attitudes and practices regarding grammar instruction, they nonetheless raise serious questions about attitudes toward students' personal dialect and language and the decisions teachers make regarding grammar instruction in their classrooms.

PEDAGOGICAL PRACTICES IN THE TEACHING OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE
IN SECONDARY PUBLIC SCHOOLS IN PARKER COUNTY

by

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Preface: In Search of Understanding – A Personal Rationale for the Study

Language is not an abstract construction of the learned, or of the dictionary-makers but is something arising out of the work, needs, ties, joys, affections, tastes, of long generations of humanity, and has its bases broad and low, close to the ground.

--Walt Whitman

As a student coming through a large public school system during the 1960s and 70s, I was taught the “traditional” language and grammar of English. Consequently (or not), I graduated knowing how to construct a sentence, a paragraph, a cohesive essay. In the 30-plus years since, I have sent my own three children through the same county’s schools; they each (depending on the teacher) had a smattering of grammar instruction, as noted in reviewing their homework and tests, but it seemed of little importance. Overall, the specific study of language appeared to be fading gradually from the curriculum until, when I began teaching English in a county public middle school in the late 1990s, it was nearly nonexistent. Grammar/comp books were no longer assigned; department chair and staff development personnel reminded me of the experts and the research, all claiming language instruction (and grammar specifically) to be passe at best, and at worst, an impediment to students’ learning to write.

Meanwhile, my seventh- and eighth-grade students’ writing, with the rare exception, was appalling. I could often barely read it -- not due to illegibility, but to a lack of order or continuity. It soon became clear that my writers were floundering mainly because they had no real grasp of how to write a simple sentence. Bright students, who knew and could tell me what they wanted to express, were nonetheless unsure of how to do it on paper; among other things, their writing lacked clarity of thought, consistency of

verb tense, and adherence to conventions of punctuation and usage. In our discussions of their writing, I soon learned the majority of them had not been taught even the most rudimentary elements of the grammar of their language.

As I tried to coach students along, I found it difficult because we were without a shared language to discuss our shared language. If I spoke to them of the subject of the sentence or of a prepositional phrase, for instance, I would be met with blank stares. I could have been (indeed, was) speaking a foreign language. I tended to see these students, products of six or seven years of schooling in a county that did not endorse language study, as operating at a serious writing deficit. I was convinced I could help. Yet when I proceeded to “start at the beginning,” teaching grammar basics using some outdated composition books I found in a storage closet, I was informed that this was a misuse of instructional time. Stunned, I put the books away – and felt my first doubts about the efficacy of teaching grammar to improve writing.

When I would come across a well-written paper in the early days of the school year, I would put it aside and ask the writer where he or she had gone to elementary school. Almost invariably, the answer would be “in Trinidad” or at “St. Mary’s,” but rarely in our local county public schools. In seeking to understand why language instruction was now discounted, I first talked to other teachers in my building and to curriculum designers at the county level. They told me unequivocally that my belief in the efficacy of grammar instruction in aiding student writing was misguided. I was repeatedly told of the multitude of studies by which I could be enlightened. No one knew specifics; no one could cite an actual study, but most repeated what they understand the research to show:

specific grammar instruction does not aid in improving students' writing. Instead, as children learn to talk by talking, they should learn to write by writing.

Workshop strategies, with self-selection of topic and form, with peer review of written work, with no requirement to adhere to spelling norms, punctuation, or grammatical "rules," proliferated. Journaling was also encouraged. We got to return papers to students with a simple checkmark on top, indicating the work had been done. No "corrections" or "grades" necessary to hinder creativity and lower self-esteem. Teachers enjoyed the system -- much less time-consuming. And we were, after all, on the cutting edge of the research, we were told. We felt justified in going along with this. And at first I did, admitting my own uncertainty of how best to assist my students. But before long my own experience with them and their writing undermined the premises of the system. The students were *not* becoming better writers, for all the writing they were doing...quite the contrary. They (and I) were becoming all the more frustrated as time wore on. Parents complained of students' lack of writing skill; I made excuses for not teaching the grammar I thought would help; students had trouble even reading each other's writing.

My uncertainties grew, and eventually I set out to find the research related to systematically teaching grammar and to see for myself why this specific instruction might be deemed unnecessary. This investigation is driven by my need to understand the implications and complications of direct and systematic language and grammar instruction in the secondary English/language arts.

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Chapter One: Overview

Conceptual Framework

Underlying this investigation is the concept of *language ideologies*, described by Gal (1998) as the assumptions about language use and language diversity -- and the pedagogy surrounding them -- that are evident in classrooms, both overt and implied. Godley (2007), in citing the work of Bloome, Katz, & Chapman (2003) and Pomerantz (2002), notes that “language ideologies influence literacy instruction in significant ways by framing particular uses of language as acceptable or unacceptable and by positioning particular students as more- or less-skilled language users” (p. 103). When teachers require students to adhere to standard English in their classrooms, when vernacular dialects are either embraced or “corrected” there, when language diversity is discussed or when it is ignored, these can all be seen as implicit indicators of those teachers’ language ideologies.

Implications for students can be great. Indeed, Fordham & Ogbu (1986) suggest that negative attitudes toward students’ language (in their case, African-American Vernacular English) even contribute to those students’ unwillingness to embrace education and school culture. Language ideologies “create and uphold systems of power in institutions such as schools by positing some languages or dialects as more grammatical or educated than others” (Godley, 2007, p. 104). Even a teacher’s silence on the subject bespeaks an ideology.

The Conference on College Composition and Communication and the National Council of Teachers of English have long maintained a clear statement of their ideology

regarding language, as seen explicitly in the 1974 policy resolution, *Students' Right to their Own Language*, wherein they affirm

...the students' right to their own patterns and varieties of language, the dialects of their nurture or whatever dialects in which they find their own identity and style. Language scholars long ago denied that the myth of a standard American dialect has any validity. The claim that any one dialect is unacceptable amounts to an attempt of one social group to exert its dominance over another. Such a claim leads to false advice for speakers and writers, and immoral advice for humans. A nation proud of its diverse heritage and its cultural and racial variety will preserve its heritage of dialects (1974).

For teachers concerned with the educational and social inequities abroad in the United States (Haberman, 2006; Noguera, 2000, Ogbu, 1987; Schleppegrell, 2004), this ideology might seem the obvious one to espouse, dismissing the need to hold to an arbitrary "power language" such as standard English. But dissenting voices, Delpit (1995) and Ladson-Billings (1992), for instance, strongly suggest that speakers of "stigmatized" dialects or languages¹ benefit from gaining a command of standard English in order, also, to gain greater access to the mainstream culture, therefore encouraging specific instruction in the grammar of the current standard language, even while valuing

¹ Stigmatized dialects are defined by Godley (2006) as those "varieties of English often devalued in schools, business, government, and the media. The term stigmatized highlights the prejudicial social attitudes that mark these dialects and the people who speak them" (30).

the linguistic richness of all students' dialects. Bourdieu and Passeron (1973) acknowledge that skill in manipulating the recognized language of the powerful in a society is a component of *cultural capital*, defined as

the educational inheritance or the differential ability of the sons and daughters of educated parents to be judged as better students by their teachers, ...thus partly explain[ing] differential educational trajectories for students originating from different class factions”

<http://www.nd.edu/~olizardo/papers/cultural-capital-final-v.1.pdf>.

The language ideologies inherent in these dichotomous viewpoints bring to the fore the controversies over pedagogy in language and grammar that have been debated for over one hundred years. (Key components of the debate will be presented in Chapter 2, Review of the Literature.) English/language arts teachers who have not considered their own ideologies would be well-served (as would their students) in doing so. Only as teachers acknowledge their attitudes, conceptions, and misconceptions about language and grammar instruction can they make necessary adjustments to ensure that all students in their care become sufficiently adept at manipulating their own language for a variety of contexts. The survey of pedagogical practices and attitudes toward language undertaken in this investigation will provide them an opportunity for that reflection.

Rationale for the Study

The 2003 edition of the *Handbook of Research on Teaching the English Language Arts* (the purpose of which, the editors state, is “providing an integrated perspective on the teaching of the English language arts”) reviews in this, its second edition, “past and present developments, issues, and controversies” in the field and

identifies “priorities for English language arts teaching and learning” (p. xiii). A perusal of the contents shows studies of language to be numerous. Among the articles listed are “Language Varieties, Culture and Teaching the English Language Arts,” “Linguistics and Teaching the Language Arts,” “Language, the Language Arts and Thinking,” and “Grammars and Literacy Learning.” Smith & Stock, in their contribution to the volume entitled “Trends and Issues in Research in the Teaching of the English Language Arts,” note, “A number of studies currently informing English educators about the cultural and linguistic resources that students from diverse backgrounds bring with them to school have been conducted” (p. 117), citing seven. They also call for “additional research into language use” (p. 117) and close the article with the reminder that

[d]uring the next decade, as English educators continue to grapple with the pedagogical and political issues confronting teachers and students in a multicultural society in an era of breathtaking change, we will continue to explore the social nature of language learning and use and the social dimensions of thought and learning (p. 126).

Attention to language -- how it is used, how it is taught and learned, and its social and political implications for teachers and learners -- is very much a part of current language arts research. In addition, two recent books published by NCTE deal specifically with issues of language and grammar: Wheeler & Swords’ *Code-Switching: Teaching Standard English in Urban Classrooms* (2006) and Benjamin & Oliva’s *Engaging Grammar: Practical Advice for Real Classrooms* (2007), a reminder of the key position that language -- and instruction in language and grammar -- are coming to hold in today’s American classrooms.

The importance of this trend can be seen clearly at the local level, as well, specifically in Parker County. Beginning with the Class of 2009, students who wish to graduate must pass a statewide high school assessment in four content areas, one of which is English. This requirement has caused much controversy, as it could prevent great numbers of high school seniors in the county from graduating. (According to the Department of Education for that state, 16% of seniors state-wide, and a full 35% of seniors in Parker County would be affected, as noted in an article of a prominent local newspaper, dated 10/29/08. To protect anonymity, reference is not included.) This could, of course, have a devastating effect on graduation rates. Implications go well beyond the personal, which would be dire enough in terms of individual accomplishment and preparedness for higher education or the workplace; indeed, the residual effect on county unemployment rates, crime, dependency, etc., would be difficult to overestimate. “Would these youths, who are some of the community’s most vulnerable and needy youths, be released into society. . .without a high school diploma come 2009 and beyond? This is a question each of us must face directly and not shy away from answering” (Andoh, 2009). [Note: As of the date of this writing, the most recent reliable data I have been able to find on dropout and high school completion for Parker County are through the 2007-2008 school year only, found in the Common Core of Data (CCD), National Center for Education Statistics, U.S. Department of Education (November, 2010). Data from subsequent years, when available, will provide an interesting comparison, following the inception of the new graduation requirements.

See nces.ed.gov/pubs2010/100largest0809/tables.asp.]

Bill and Melinda Gates would concur with Andoh's concerns about graduation and readiness for high education, taking this local issue to the national level in their November, 2008, *Forum on Education in America*.

Completing high school ready for college is a key transition point in the path out of poverty. A second transition is earning a post-credential with value in the workplace. If young people fail to make the first transition, it's unlikely they will make the second. If they fail to make the second, it's likely they will be poor (Gates, 2008).

While only education is at issue here, some researchers have noted a high correlation between crime and lack of educational achievement. For example, Linda Darling-Hammond, in her keynote address to the Association of Teacher Educators in 2006, included statistics showing the relationship between third grade reading scores and prison populations. And in school systems where minority students are the majority, as is the case in Parker County, "the high rate of school-forceouts among students of Color" (Smitherman, 2000) should not be discounted. These considerations highlight the need for investigation into what is being taught about language and grammar in today's English/language arts classrooms. And while proficiency in standard English is but one facet of local and national assessments, its importance is critical beyond the assessments themselves. Students' abilities with language can have a decided impact on test success in other disciplines, as well, and in academic success overall.

Student writers enter the classroom with diverse needs and skills, including multiple languages, grammars, cultures, and extracurricular literacy practices; therefore, various approaches and assessments are

necessary in order to decrease the gaps between more-advantaged and less-advantaged writers. *Attention to these gaps is especially important because writing acts as a gatekeeper; weak writing skills limit school, job, and advancement opportunities* (Gere, 2008, p. 15) [emphasis added].

If competence in language, grammar, usage, and writing play a key role in scholastic accomplishment, equally as important then are teachers' *attitudes* toward the teaching of these -- and (often more subtly), their attitudes toward *students' use* of language (i.e., the teachers' language ideologies) -- and how these attitudes influence achievement for good or for ill. Smitherman (2000) notes,

Foundational studies of language attitudes led sociologists to conclude that language and speech cues elicit social perceptions of cultural groups, and that attitudes toward the language or language variety of cultural groups reflect attitudes toward the groups themselves (p. 6),

then goes on to confirm that these studies "reveal the stark relationships between linguistic and social biases" (p. 6). And as Godley, citing Blake & Cutler (2003) and Perry & Delpit (1998), notes, "...research on language attitudes and language-related controversies has demonstrated that negative beliefs about the grammaticality, logic, and even morality of stigmatized dialects are widespread in U.S. society and difficult to change" (2006). "How you teach grammar depends on what you believe it does" (House, 2009, p. 98).

Attitude is not limited to considerations of language, of course. Many researchers highlight the importance of attitude in addressing the broader issues of equity and diversity in student achievement -- and how attitude (consciously or unconsciously)

influences instruction and expectation on the part of the teacher. “An abundance of research suggests that teachers’ personal beliefs drive professional practice” Guerra and Nelson (2009) state. They cite Yero (2003), Bocchino (1993), and Shulman (1999) in claiming that “for lasting changes in behavior to occur, beliefs and assumptions must be brought to consciousness, and the deep structures supporting behaviors must be addressed” (Guerra & Nelson, 2009). Jacqueline Jordan Irvine, in her extensive work on cultural equity in education, goes so far as to say that for teachers, “the pedagogy [is] less important than their beliefs about the very nature of teaching itself” (2003, p. 10); she quotes Postman and Weingartner (1987) in their observation that “[t]here can be no significant innovation in education that does not have at its center the attitudes of the teacher” (2003, p. 72).

Given then, that 1) pedagogical practice is at least influenced by teachers’ attitudes (and many researchers would submit it to be *driven* by attitude, as noted above); 2) that linguistic diversity in Parker County classrooms is the norm today (as is true in many other urban and semi-urban districts across the United States); and 3) that “dominant pedagogical responses to stigmatized dialects are damaging and counter-productive; [a] substantial body of scholarship has demonstrated strong connections between teachers’ negative attitudes about stigmatized dialects, lower teacher expectations for students who speak them, and thus lower academic achievement on the part of students” (Godley, 2006, p. 31, citing Bowie & Bond, 1994, and Ferguson, 1998); I might then be justified in concluding that an investigation of the pedagogical practices and attitudes in English/language arts classrooms is warranted. Practice and attitude

should indeed come under careful scrutiny. What teachers are teaching about grammar and language, how they are teaching it -- *and why* -- matters.

A first step in investigating English language instruction and attitude is to explore what is currently happening. The survey undertaken here provides an opening step in determining from the teachers themselves how grammar study is approached in their classrooms and how they feel about it. Knowledge of current practice and attitude provides valuable insight into the most beneficial avenues of staff development and, ultimately, improved student achievement in English and writing. Data gleaned through this investigation can, I purport, provide vital information in the effort to boost student performance through a new attention to instruction in language. In the broader view, practices in Parker County Public Schools can provide a solid contextual comparison for similar urban and semi-urban school districts across the United States.

An added benefit of this survey is the reflection and attention to ideology and methodology it will prompt in respondents. Through retrospective reporting of their practices, “individual teachers extend...their knowledge and awareness of instructional activities” (Koziol, 1986, p. 64). That alone can be a catalyst for positive change. As Ringo (2006) claims, “The life of a teacher is filled with choices...[in a] constant negotiation over content, practice, and pedagogy [in an] attempt to provide meaningful learning opportunities” (p. 32). Participation in this survey can assist in that fundamental negotiation.

Research Questions

I address six questions in this investigation.

- 1) What are teachers' self-reported attitudes toward English language/grammar instruction?
- 2) What language ideology do teachers report as driving or prompting that English language/grammar instruction?
- 3) From teachers' reports, what do they perceive as the desired end of the English language/grammar instruction carried out in their classrooms?
- 4) How much English language/grammar instruction is taking place in a given teacher's Parker County ELA classroom, according to self-reports?
- 5) What specific practices do teachers report they carry out in English language/grammar instruction?
- 6) Do teachers' reported attitudes toward English language/grammar instruction influence how much it is taught in their classrooms, according to those reports?

Definitions of Terms used in this Study

language: a system of signs, symbols, gestures, or rules used in communicating (American Heritage Dictionary, 2005)

language instruction: any specific classroom teaching that addresses spoken and written communication using English, including mechanics, usage, grammar, linguistics, and the terminology used in their study; often generically (and not always correctly) called "teaching grammar," as seen in much of the following reviewed literature; for purposes of this investigation, language instruction does not include study of vocabulary or spelling.

mechanics: conventions of capitalization and punctuation used in written communication

usage: the conventions that govern the way the language is used by the speakers of that language; in the context of this investigation, usage refers to the standard conventions of Edited American English (Grammar Tips, 2000).

Edited American English: “the variety of English usage that is widely accepted as the norm for the public writing of school essays, newspapers, magazines, and books” (Kolln, 2006, p. 374), with an acknowledgement that style books for the various publications (and teachers’ preferences at schools and universities) are not fully consistent in their recommendations of the “norm.”

Standard English: often used synonymously with Edited American English, this is “the most widely accepted term used by linguists and educators...to refer to the oral and written dialects of English privileged in U.S. academic, civic, and professional institutions and the mainstream media” (Godley, 2007).

linguistics: the scientific study of the nature, structure, and variations of language, including phonetics, phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics, sociolinguistics, and pragmatics (American Heritage Dictionary, 2005). (Note: Sociolinguistics is the aspect most applicable in this investigation.)

grammar: While the definitions above are purposely simplistic in order to be concise, the definition of grammar, integral to this investigation from its inception, demands much more. A search of the literature reveals that *grammar* does not have a fixed meaning. Many grammars are studied and espoused, and new “theories of grammar” are continually emerging. (See Hudson, 2001; Halliday, 1985; Lakoff, 1998; Lamb, 1999; and Langacker, 1987 & 1990.) Among those that surface in even a superficial discussion of grammar are these: traditional grammar (also known as “formal grammar,” “school

grammar,” or traditional school grammar/TSG); intuitive grammar (also known as intrinsic grammar); comparative grammar; universal grammar; structural grammar; transformational/generative grammar; functional grammar; rhetorical grammar; and cognitive grammar. While most of these have no direct bearing on this study, failing to list and describe them would imply that *grammar* is a simplistic or agreed-upon term or concept. To complicate the matter further, not only are there many varieties of grammar (and the list above is by no means exhaustive), but often the same *kind* of grammar is referred to differently by different writers. Lines of distinction are rarely well-defined; at times authors clarify their meaning, but often do not, assuming a common understanding of terms that does not exist. *Grammar* is used in many ways, without much specificity, making understanding elusive. Therefore, more detailed definitions of the various terms will be presented in the review of the literature.

Chapter Two: Review of the Literature

Historical Context

While issues of language diversity and instruction in grammar appear often in current research and debate, they are by no means new. The extant literature, which can be traced into the 1800s, is multitudinous; tracking the chronology can help to situate today's attitudes and practices in historical context. While much of the literature on grammar falls to one side or the other of a debate on whether it should even be included in the English/language arts curriculum, far more can be found opposing the practice than favoring it. Much of the argument can be said to be circular: authors refer to authors who write of "the literature" and make assumptions about "the studies" without providing adequate detail about how these are carried out, what they purport, or where to find them. Unearthing the work that initially evoked the controversy requires a diligent search. The 1894 Report of the Committee of Ten serves as an appropriate place to begin.

The Report, which Nelms (2000) calls the start of high school English as it is known today, included grammar (along with rhetoric, analysis, philology, and literature) as one of the "disparate strands" (p. 49) of instruction to be included under the umbrella of English education. "The extent to which the subject they invented still stands," he contends (p. 49), "in virtually the same form, and is required of all high-school students, is dramatic testimony to the success of [the Committee's] efforts." The Report itself states the main objective of teaching English to be "...to enable the pupil to understand the expressed thoughts of others and to give expression to thoughts of one's own" (Report, 1894). Not only were grammar and language study *not* called into question; they were presumed to be integral to the broader study of English.

In language texts published in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, even so soon after the Committee of Ten Report, many authors address a connection between grammar and composition. Lockwood, for example (1901), begins her text with language and usage review. “The exercises in these chapters are so arranged as to furnish valuable written work; but if it is desired, the chapters may be used primarily for reference” (p. vi), suggesting that the grammar had likely been addressed in an earlier stage of schooling. Only a few years later, McLean (1911) similarly states in *his* English text, “[t]he practical value of grammar is emphasized in the Composition. Its use and importance are constantly kept before the pupil by the application of its principles in oral and written work” (p. 4). In these and other texts of the era, grammar instruction is often seen as a natural complement to the development of writing.

Among the earliest articles calling the teaching of grammar into question is one authored in 1906 by Franklin Hoyt, assistant superintendent of Indianapolis schools. After a brief sketch of the Greek and Latin underpinnings of grammatical study, as well as an acknowledgement of their logical inconstancy in transfer into Germanic-based English, Hoyt lists the most commonly-held beliefs about the need to teach grammar anyway. Included on his list are “valuable training in thought;” “preparation for all or any of the sciences” and “the study of other languages;” “true discipline of the understanding” and “the logical faculties;” and “observation and thought” (Hoyt, 1906, pp. 473, 474). No mention is made of a connection to writing. The call throughout is for grammar to be studied only after grade 8, unless with “exceptional pupils,” and especially if taught by “superior teachers” (p. 476). And since only about one-tenth of pupils enter a

high school” at all (p. 477), the need for systematic grammar instruction in the elementary grades is seriously questioned.

Even should research demonstrate that the study of grammar is of some disciplinary value, it would still need to be determined whether the same amount of time and energy devoted, say, to developing greater facility in the use of language as a means of expression, would not yield a larger return to the pupils (Hoyt, p. 476).

Meanwhile, the early twentieth-century work of American linguists such as Leonard Bloomfield and the structural grammarians began to influence thinking about language in general. These scholars were among many others writing of *grammars* instead of grammar, claiming, as Grinder & Elgin describe (1973) that “grammars are not supposed to be prescriptive or normative. They are supposed to reflect the real structure of the language for the real people who use it” (p. 31). This sparked the long and continuing debate over prescriptive versus descriptive grammar: Proponents of the latter claim that language *as used by native speakers of that language* should be the determiner of what is “right,” rather than an arbitrary “standard of right” dictating what native speakers of a language should or should not use, as purported by proponents of prescriptive grammar. (See Patterson, 1999, for further discussion of prescriptive and descriptive grammars.)

The simultaneous rise of linguistic structuralism with the 1911 founding and subsequent growth of the National Council of Teachers of English presents an interesting overlap. For the NCTE, “a professional organization of educators in English studies, literacy and language arts...dedicated to promoting English education at all

levels from kindergarten through graduate studies” (answers.com, 2009) and official voice of America’s English teachers, the linguistic research of the era provided an apt model -- and long-lasting implications -- for how language and grammar would subsequently be taught in America’s classrooms.

Bloomfield and the structuralists approached language from a scientific-method point of view, leaning heavily on positivist and behaviorist theory in observing and painstakingly describing language as used by native speakers, even from the smallest components of phoneme and morpheme, but usually staying within the realm of words, rather than venturing into syntax (Harris, 1993). Structuralism defined, as well, the work of anthropologists and missionaries in observing indigenous peoples and recording their languages. Bloomfield himself did much linguistic work with Native-American tribes in the Americas. Harris (1993) describes this structural grammar as the

...[t]emper of the linguistic times: that it was primarily a descriptive and taxonomic science, like zoology, geology, and astronomy; that *mental* speculations were...an abandonment of science; that all relevant psychological questions (learning, knowing, and using a language) would be answered by behaviorism; that *meaning* was outside the scope of scientific inquiry (pp. 27, 28).

These respected scientific approaches and methodologies were not lost on the National Council. From its earliest years, its official position has been congruent with the philosophy and practices of structuralism. The impact of early linguistic studies in these fields on the implications for grammar instruction in the classroom, then, is difficult to overestimate.

Linguists were practicing *science* in the first half of the 1900s, and the NCTE published many grammar studies then that mirrored the methodologies of the structuralists. For example, in 1925, it published the anthropological studies of Charles Fries of the University of Michigan regarding the observable language of American speakers of English. Fries took surveys; he compiled data from letters by ordinary folk in ordinary work and family circumstances; he carefully noted what Americans were actually saying, usages they were really using. He reported his findings in “What is Good Grammar?” (1925), an article in which he states that the actual usage of speakers of the language should be the basis for “correctness.” His “observe and record” method, his call for descriptive practices over prescriptive -- for the teacher to stop “correcting” a child’s actual usage or accent -- show the influence of the structuralist model. And when a linguist like Bloomfield published a paper opposing “the unfortunate outgrowth of the general-grammar idea...of normative grammars...which often ignore actual usage in favor of speculative notions...of authority and some of the fanciful rules (as, for instance, about the use of *will* and *shall*) [that] still prevail in our schools” (Grinder & Elgin, 1973, p. 31), his ideas were not incongruent with those found in NCTE publications of the era.

Fries and NCTE followed that first study with *American English Grammar* in 1940 and *The Structure of English* in 1952, both also reminiscent of scientific structuralist methodologies. The language in use by students, they purported, was of greater value than the “correct” version of their language being taught by traditional teachers of grammar. Similar investigations were regularly being published by NCTE, adding to the literature opposing traditional grammar instruction or a “standard” grammar that should

be “taught,” among them Leonard (1918), Reeves (1920), Ruhlen & Pressley (1924), and Pooley (1942), for example. Pooley, as quoted in McDavid (1965), confirms that

For three or more decades the National Council of Teachers of English as encouraged, sponsored, and financed important researches in grammar.

We know by objective investigation what grammar will do and what it will not do... (p. 46).

Fully 27 of the first 28 works cited by McDavid (1965) as justification for NCTE’s position on direct grammar instruction were published by the organization itself.

By the 1940s and 1950s, the Council had taken the lead in calling for the discontinuation of the direct teaching of traditional school grammar, as noted in some of its publications of the time. For one indicative example,

[i]n the March 1946 *English Journal*, educator and former NCTE

President Lou LaBrant wrote: “We have some hundreds of studies which now demonstrate that there is little correlation . . . between exercises in punctuation and sentence structure and the tendency to use the principles illustrated in independent writing”

(<http://www.ncte.org/centennial/blastfrompast/grammar>).

LaBrant’s language ideology with regard to grammar exemplifies the Council’s stance, later stated clearly in a formal resolution adopted by the organization at its 1985 annual business meeting in Philadelphia:

The National Council of Teachers of English affirm the position that the use of isolated grammar and usage exercises not supported by theory and research is a deterrent to the improvement of students’ speaking and

writing and that, in order to improve both of these, class time at all levels must be devoted to opportunities for meaningful listening, speaking, reading, and writing; and that NCTE urge the discontinuance of testing practices that encourage the teaching of grammar rather than English language arts instruction

<http://www.ncte.org/positions/statements/grammarexercises>.

Thomas (2000) describes LaBrant as one who “would challenge those who appeared to accept the English language as a frozen form, those who seemed to believe that English grammar rules had been passed down from above and chiseled in stone” (p. 85), preferring a less-restrictive model for improving students’ writing. One of her better-known analogies for the writing process is drawn from architecture: she would rather have her students “building houses” than merely “drawing blueprints” (LaBrant, 1957, p. 257).

Writings by and about LaBrant indicate a language ideology that embraced dialect variety and disregarded an arbitrary “standard” dialect of English, encouraging students to write what they felt more than to have them conform to traditional prescriptive methodologies. “Free-writing,” she states, “would cultivate in students a sincere concern for their words; thus, students themselves would seek to conform to the conventions of language” (Thomas, 2000, p. 87), without the need for specific instruction in those conventions. LaBrant exemplifies many authors of the era who allude to the “hundreds of studies” (1946, p. 127) that refute the validity of direct grammar instruction, a great number of which were products of NCTE, as noted above. As recently as October of 2006, its stance was reiterated in a blanket declaration to its members: “The National

Council of Teachers of English has not changed its position on the teaching of grammar”

<http://www.ncte.org/about/press/rel/125932.htm>.

Equally as important, NCTE also took the lead then (and continues today) in countering the knuckle-cracking, memorize-grammar-for-grammar’s-sake image and practice so often synonymous with traditional “English class,” advocating boldly for the value and validity of all dialects and challenging the idea that usage “errors” should be the sole determiner of writing quality. In its 1994 *Resolution on Language Study*, it called for “developing the language awareness of teachers and students” through examining such issues as “how people’s attitudes vary towards language across culture, class, gender, and generation;” and “how ‘correctness’ in language reflects social-political-economic values” <http://www.ncte.org/positions/statements/languagestudy>. The study undertaken here aligns closely to these questions of attitudes, correctness, and cultural values.

In 1991, the Council published *Grammar and the Teaching of Writing*, by linguist and California State Northridge English professor Rei Noguchi, which includes a section entitled “The Research” (p.2) that summarizes the major literature from 1959 through 1986 and provides a suitable framework for describing the long-running grammar debate.

Although studies questioning the value of formal grammar instruction for improving writing occur in print as early as ... 1906, such studies have appeared in increasing numbers in the last half of this [20th] century. ...A few studies defend the study of formal grammar, but the anti-grammar have... far outnumbered the pro-grammar (p. 2).

Noguchi, while not analyzing in-depth the various studies he cites in his book, does provide a “sampling” of those he says “question the value of formal grammar instruction” (1991, p. 2). His list includes what he specifically calls “studies,” those most cited in the discussion of the merit of systematic traditional school grammar instruction. In preparing this review, I closely read eight of the ten he includes that oppose the practice: DeBoer (1959); Meckel (1963); Elley, et al (1975/76); Sutton (1976); Tabbert (1984); and Hartwell (1985), and summary meta-analyses by Braddock, et al (1963) and Hillocks (1986), the former covering related studies from 1957 to 1963, the latter from 1967 to 1986.

Each of these studies appears on Noguchi’s list because it is considered a major voice in the case against systematic language instruction or traditional school grammar. Each questions the validity of formal grammar study in the English classroom. Each encourages other ways of improving student writing. A closer look at these studies is merited here.

The DeBoer study (1959) speaks of “a widespread impression that the teaching of grammar is disapproved of in contemporary thought” (p. 413). It mentions several “survey[s] of current practices” (p. 414), done in various parts of the country that show the popularity of grammar to be waning. DeBoer later lends a personal assessment: “[F]or basic improvement of young people’s speaking and writing, the study of systematic grammar does not appear to be the most effective instrument” (p. 415). No empirical data are provided, although DeBoer does cite several empirical studies in this article. For instance, he relates how Sears and Diebel (1926), in a study of children’s errors in oral English, find that more 8th graders make pronoun errors than students in

earlier grades; they then conclude that the 8th graders, who have naturally studied more grammar, must be confused by all the study. Similarly, Evans (1939) “discovered that significantly superior results in punctuation could be obtained teaching punctuation directly” (DeBoer, 1959, p. 416), rather than in “teaching grammar.” DeBoer later concludes,

[A] close examination of some of the reports of the effectiveness of grammar instruction might reveal flaws in research design or conclusions not fully warranted by the evidence. The impressive fact, however, is that in all these studies, carried out in places and at times far removed from each other, often by highly experienced and disinterested investigators, the results have been consistently negative so far as the value of grammar in the improvement of language expression is concerned (p. 417).

Meckel (1963), next on Noguchi’s list, is not a study, but a review of research pertaining to teaching composition and literature, covering a period of nearly 50 years (1906-1945). Rather than delineate each of the studies here as he has done in the review, it is perhaps more efficient simply to quote some of his conclusions regarding traditional school grammar instruction.

1. There is no research evidence that grammar as traditionally taught in the schools has any appreciable effect on the improvement of writing.
2. The training periods involved in transfer studies have been comparatively short, and the amount of grammar instruction has frequently been small.

3. There is no conclusive evidence, however, that grammar has *no* transfer value in developing composition skill.
4. More research is needed on the kind of grammatical knowledge that may reasonably be expected to transfer to writing.
5. Research does not justify the conclusion that grammar should not be taught systematically (p. 981).

Next, chronologically, is the Elley, et al study (1976), wherein the researchers allude to “sixty years of empirical studies” (p. 5), but call them into question, claiming they are often “much too brief,” (p. 6), usually having been conducted over less than one school year, typical of the behaviorist quasi-empirical studies of the day. They challenge conclusions that are often based on “a single essay per child” (p. 6). They purport that the studies are “usually very limited in scope” (p. 6), and therefore not generalizable. They worry, too, that teachers’ negative attitudes toward grammar “often contaminate the results of the studies” (p. 6), ultimately concluding, “There are clear gaps in the research on the utilitarian effects of grammar teaching, and the skeptic could be excused for retaining an open mind” (p. 6).

Elley and his cohort, however, set out to design their *own* study in New Zealand, taking care to avoid some of the problems evident in others’. They used three teachers and “three carefully matched groups of students [who] studied three different English programmes for a period of three years” (p. 7). One of the programs was a transformational grammar course that utilized grammar, rhetoric, and literature strands. The next included rhetoric and literature strands, “but substituted extra reading and creative writing for the transformational grammar strand” (p. 9). The third focused on a traditional

grammar course, including subjects, predicates, parts of speech, inflections, sentence structure, etc. Students' progress was assessed via three avenues: essays, tests of language skills, and attitude surveys.

With regard to empirical data, the Elley, et al study provides five tables of data, with n-values, p-values, and standard deviations. The authors are vague about how the figures come to be and what they represent, however, and little is said of *how* the scoring was done in each assessment, especially regarding the essays. The reader does learn that students were given a pre-test (full battery) at the beginning of Form 3 (comparable to Grade 9 in the U.S.) and at the end of each of the next three school years. Four criteria were assessed in the essay (content, mechanics, style, and organization), using a 16-point scale.

The Elley, et al study is one of the most-often cited examples of why grammar instruction is unnecessary. Yet, not one of the following statements, quoted from the analysis, discussion, and conclusion sections of the study, taken in the order they appear in the analysis, can be said to advocate the dismissal of grammar instruction from the curriculum. The inconclusive nature of the findings prompts the researchers to proceed with caution. They conclude (p. 12): "On none of the twelve variables did any English program show a significant superiority." On page 16 the researchers state,

After careful marking by panels of briefed English teachers...it was found that the three groups showed no differences in mean scores. As in the earlier years, the evidence indicated that the different programmes produced no important divergent effects on the pupils.

Their next major conclusions are these: “This study could be said to provide little discomfort for those who support the study of grammar” (p. 18); and grammar instruction “still requires a deliberate value judgment to decide whether to include or exclude it from the English programme. Lovers of English language may well continue to justify its instruction” (p. 19). My study here prompts that deliberation.

Noguchi’s next item, the Sutton paper (1976), provides an analysis of 12 national standardized tests and what they require regarding knowledge of grammar. When only one, the Metropolitan Achievement Test, tested specific grammatical terms, Sutton asks, “Why not drop such study then and concentrate on communication skills, so often lacking in today’s graduate?” (p. 37). His concluding contention is that “[t]here is no evidence to support the notion that knowledge of grammar terminology aids one in being a better writer, reader, speaker, or listener” (p. 40), although he does concede that usage instruction should not be completely ignored.

The Tabbert study (1984), meanwhile, employs a 4-fold argument against teaching grammar. 1) Students already know the grammar of their language; 2) grammar study is difficult and unexciting; 3) insisting on correct usage is just “linguistic etiquette” (p. 30) and “the linguistic preference of the elite” (p. 40); and 4) “true literacy is more than the negative virtue of not making mistakes, and it cannot be attained primarily through analyzing sentences and memorizing rules” (p. 42). No empirical data are employed in this argumentative essay. The points he makes, however, address other noteworthy aspects of the literature and debate on language and grammar instruction.

Tabbert's claim that "kids already know the grammar of their language," for instance, likely stems from a definition like that of Nelson Francis' "Grammar 1" (1954, p. 300):

The first thing we mean by "grammar" is the set of formal patterns in which the words of a language are arranged in order to convey larger meanings. It is not necessary that we be able to discuss these patterns self-consciously in order to be able to use them. In fact, all speakers of a language above the age of five or six know how to use its complex forms or organization with considerable skill.

This intrinsic grammar, what Kolln (1981) calls "the internalized system of rules that speakers of a language share" (p. 140), is indeed already known and practiced by native speakers of the language before they enter school.

Tabbert's second argument, that grammar study is "difficult and unexciting," might be made of any academic subject, depending upon a given student's interest and inclination. History and algebra might also be found challenging and dull by some, yet that is hardly a rationale for abandoning their study.

Tabbert's item three, "linguistic etiquette," as "the preference of the elite" presages the work of Schleppegrell (2004), who acknowledges this reality, but argues that students nonetheless be systematically taught the linguistic skills that will bolster their success in the milieu of school. Her work argues for

a visible pedagogy that helps students analyze language and come to a better understanding of the ways that knowledge is constructed and

presented through language...[and] simultaneously considers issues for second language learners, speakers of nonstandard dialects, and other students who do not have access to opportunities for advanced literacy development in informal contexts outside of school (p. xii).

Her call throughout the book is for “more explicit focus on language in teaching all subjects” (p. xii). This same “explicit focus” is what I am seeking through this dissertation study: focused attention on teachers’ attitudes toward the language and grammar of the students in their care and (more important) their attitudes toward the students themselves – and their educational opportunity.

In considering Tabbert’s item four, few would argue that memorizing rules and avoiding errors make one a good writer. On the contrary, Hancock (2005) claims that the goal of studying grammar is “to bring that unconscious grammar to conscious light and to explore ways in which effective writing works in harmony with that natural language” all students bring with them to the classroom (p. 2). Having students understand the structure of a written sentence -- the value of each component in conveying precisely what they intend to say, and just how each word in a sentence relates to all the other words, then giving students the tools to convey their thoughts clearly in writing -- is the ultimate aim, he contends.

Sams (2003), a champion of the sentence diagram and proponent of traditional school grammar, concurs, expressing a similar idea of the goal of a consistent, long-term program of grammar study.

Students who are taught that words, phrases, and sentences bear specific relationship to one another and who are taught to analyze carefully these

relationships develop an enhanced ability to recognize weak links in their own and others' writing (p. 63); and [U]nderstanding the structures and relationships [in sentences] contributes to an increased awareness of options in writing, of opportunities for combining, embedding, controlling emphasis, and enhancing clarity (p. 62).

Schlepppegrell, Hancock, and Sams do not dispute Taggart's premise of a linguistic elitism underlying the conventions of standard English, but would offer *all* students, not just privileged speakers of the mainstream dialect, the opportunity to learn those conventions and use them to their advantage.

Noguchi also references two meta-analyses of numerous studies on his research list: Braddock, Lloyd-Jones, and Schoer (1963), and Hillocks (1986). Kolln (1981) comments on the former, noting

[t]he authors' conclusions in every other area of composition, without exception, are couched in tentative language, as well they should be: "some of his procedures...seem very questionable, and some of his conclusions seem to leap beyond the reasonable distance" (p. 36). Such qualifications concern the methodology as well as the interpretation of data in every area except the teaching of grammar (p. 140),

although, she points out, the same concerns about the data should apply to studies of grammar, as well. In the latter meta-analysis, Hillocks and two other researchers reviewed and analyzed over 500 studies (including dissertations) dealing with writing, which were conducted between 1963 and 1982. Of that great number, only 60 were detailed in the meta-analysis; the rest they eliminated for lacking adherence to specified

methodological and/or reporting criteria. Thirteen of the 60 were studies of grammar.

Hillocks cites the same Elley, et al study (above) as the one “most ambitious of the effects of grammar” (p. 136) yet later concludes, “None of the studies reviewed for the present report provides any support for teaching grammar” (p. 138).

Hartwell (1985) summarizes the existing body of literature on research in grammar instruction this way: “...seventy-five years of experimental research has for all practical purposes told us nothing. The two sides are unable to agree on how to interpret such research” (p. 106). He continues, “Any experimental design can be nit-picked, any experimental population can be criticized, and any experimental conclusion can be questioned or ignored. It may well be that the grammar question is not open to resolution by experimental research” (p. 107). While the research may not provide resolution, it certainly provokes conversation about teachers’ attitudes and practices with regard to grammar and language instruction. My study offers teachers the opportunity to consider their place in this dialogic continuum.

Although there appears to be renewed interest in specific grammar/language instruction, as noted earlier, Godley (2007) claims that “...empirical studies of grammar instruction have been scarce in English language arts research for the past 20 years, leaving researchers and practitioners unclear about the characteristics of effective grammar instruction” (p. 103). Godley, at the University of Pittsburgh, is among a few current researchers bringing questions of grammar efficacy to the fore in American urban classrooms. Her conclusions to date are aptly summarized in the closing to her article cited above:

...[T]he field of literacy studies should not continue to overlook grammar and language instruction and should instead work to integrate it into literacy learning in productive ways. Language is both the means and the object of English Language arts instruction (Luke, 2004) and thus cannot be separated from literacy learning (p. 125).

Other current American researchers/practitioners in the field include Craig Hancock (University of Albany) and Mary Schleppegrell (University of Michigan), both of whom are cited above.

From reviewing the relevant literature, I have drawn several conclusions, including these: There is great divergence of opinion (by respected voices on both sides) on the teaching of grammar; teachers have choices about grammar and how (or even whether) it is taught; it may be likely that a stronger teacher is one whose language ideology and practice are aligned; and (most important for this investigation), a survey of how teachers report they are making sense of and providing instruction in grammar is justified.

On Defining "Grammar"

The issue of the validity of grammar instruction research is complicated by the difficulty in defining the term *grammar* and in distinguishing it from other aspects of language. Even among English teachers, it is often used interchangeably with usage, mechanics, and/or grammatical terminology, which are all, in fact, different. Gleason (1965) conjectures that the distinction between grammar and usage "has never been sharp, and for some it has been very confused" (p. 17).

Finding even a straightforward generic definition of the term can be difficult.

“The grammar textbooks used in American schools through the nineteenth century mostly defined grammar more or less in the following manner: ‘English grammar is the art of speaking and writing English correctly’” (Gleason, 1965, p. 7). Fromkin and Rodman (1993) call it “the sounds and sound patterns, the basic unit of meaning, such as words, and the rules to combine them to form new sentences. ...The grammar, then, is what we know; it represents our linguistic competence” (p. 13). Williams (2005), meanwhile, calls grammar “the formal study of the structure of a language [that] describes how words fit together in meaningful constructions” (p. 2). He admits to keeping the definition “concise but sufficiently broad to include a wide range of language features and forms” (p. 2), which perhaps undermines the precision he seeks. Even Noam Chomsky, esteemed linguist and grammatical paragon, himself admits, “We use the term ‘grammar’ with a systematic ambiguity” (1968).

For nearly every grammar book or book about grammar available, there is a new definition of the term. After encountering this multitude of “definitions,” one might be justified in wondering whether grammar instruction is even possible when defining it is so elusive. Implications for elementary, middle and high school classroom teachers can be daunting. In the “Definitions” segment of this paper, I delineated nine distinct types of grammar. While a brief description of each is admittedly presumptuous, given that entire books can be found on any one of them, a comprehensive review of the literature requires it nonetheless.

Traditional (or *formal* or *school*) grammar, also known as TSG (traditional school grammar), earned its name only after the subsequent grammars came along. Before

them, grammar “traditional”ly meant the naming and systematic study of the various parts of the English language, dealing with the forms of words and their arrangement in sentences. It was one leg of the Greek educational trivium, along with rhetoric and logic (Joseph, 2002), involving the study of commonly accepted prescriptive rules for speaking and writing the standard language of an educated populace (as found, for example, in style books of newspapers and publishing houses), including punctuation, capitalization, and usage, and to specific terminology for naming and discussing these concepts. Much of the grammar controversy stems from the broad, diverse range of language skills that much of the early literature included under the umbrella of traditional grammar.

Intuitive (or *intrinsic*) grammar is not a means of studying and applying grammatical concepts, as are the others; it is the understanding that humans inculcate the grammar of their native language as they learn that language; it does not have to be formally taught. Schuster (1999) describes it in saying,

Grammar, then, refers to an internalized set of rules that determine whether words and phrases communicate meaning. ...Grammar, in this sense, is built into our heads. We have a deep intuitive feel for the grammar of our native language. And it is true that nobody has to teach native speakers the grammar of their language; they already know it at an early age (p. 519).

Intuitive/intrinsic grammar would not be a part of systematic grammar instruction in the classroom, except in drawing on students’ underlying knowledge of their language.

Hancock (2005) points out that “coming to understand grammar is a lot less like learning

a new language than it is like becoming aware of an old, familiar one, ...of bringing your current, growing language into conscious light” (p. 5).

Comparative grammar refers to the work of linguists in studying the similarities and differences among various languages of the world. They look for patterns, for indications that two or more languages might have originated from a single source; comparatives work from a viewpoint of strict observation. Language “families” can be uncovered through comparative grammar investigation. Harris (1993) notes that comparative linguists require “staggering diligence and an astonishing breadth of knowledge;” he places their work “solidly among the chief intellectual accomplishments of the nineteenth century” (p. 15). Comparative grammar might be brought into a secondary ELA classroom in discussions of word etymologies, cognates, etc.

Universal grammar, as described by Fromkin and Rodman (1993), investigates “[t]hose laws that pertain to all human languages, representing the universal properties of language” (p. 17). Chomsky gave a good deal of study to this aspect of linguistics during the early 1960s, as noted in Harris’ (1993) comments on the paper Chomsky presented at the 1962 International Congress of Linguistics. Universal grammar, while undoubtedly the inherent foundation of all language study, is not directly applicable to the secondary English/language arts classroom.

Structural grammar, or structuralism, accounts for the underlying construction, or structure, of a given language. It can be traced to the work of Saussure and his 1916 *Course I General Linguistics*, which Harris (1993) calls “the beginning of modern, scientific linguistics” (p. 16). In it Saussure distinguishes the notions of diachronic linguistics (over centuries) versus synchronic linguistics (static, or within, say, the

generations of a family), and introduces the ideas of *parole* (actual verbal activity like speaking, writing, listening, and reading) and *langue* (the background system of language that makes linguistic behavior possible) (Harris, 1993). The work of Sapir (1916, 1921) and more notably, Bloomfield, furthered the idea of structural grammar in the early twentieth century, as noted previously. Harris (1993) claims the structuralists' phonological and morphological analyses were rich, detailed, revealing investigations; the methodologies were probing. Syntactic analyses were haphazard...and contained far more discussion of phenomena linguists would now call morphological than they would syntactic" (p. 30).

Transformational-generative grammar has its roots in the work of linguists Zellig Harris and Noam Chomsky in the 1950s and 60s, moving a bit more into the study of syntax, of meaning within a sentence, rather than focusing solely on sound and word, as had the structuralists. Transformations were set forth as a tool for understanding and analyzing sentences, for "bringing order to the third and highest level of linguistic analysis," syntax (Harris, 1993, p. 32). With the publication of *Syntactic Structures* in 1957, Chomsky "changed the focus of linguistics radically" (Harris, 1993, p. 41). In it he set forth two critical definitions: 1) *language* he calls "a set (finite or infinite) of sentences," and 2) *grammar* he calls "a device that generates all of the grammatical sequences of [that language] and none of the ungrammatical ones" (Chomsky, 1957, p. 13). He attempted to create a model that would generate "all and only the set of sentences possible in a language – a generative grammar" (Harris, 1993, 40). Chomsky's theories dominated linguistics for many years, but not without much controversy -- called by Randy Allen Harris "the linguistic wars." It is interesting to note the sequence of chapter

titles in his book: from Chapter 3, The Chomskyan Revolution, to Chapter 9, The Collapse. It might be said that transformational-generative grammar was persistently deconstructed by Chomsky's many and diverse linguistic opponents over a period of about 20 years. In a statement typical of much of the literature regarding TG's demise, Brame (1976) states, "I think it can be accurately said that generative semantics fails on almost every single proposal or suggestion for the analysis of a fragment of English grammar that it has advanced" (p. 67). Harris concurs: "The movement had grown so unwieldy [as to be] worthless. Even sympathetic linguists were left with nothing but a vast new view of the whole, messy, commingling, social-mental, signifying thingamajig, language" (1993, p. 241).

Functional grammar, a model "originally developed by Simon Dik at the University of Amsterdam in the 1980s, "is a general theory of the organization of natural language...[that] attaches primary importance to functional relations at different levels in the organization of grammar" (functionalgrammar.com), manifested in American classrooms not so much as a theory of grammar as an approach to instruction in grammar (although articles discussing it do not typically make this known). Constance Weaver's 1996 *Teaching Grammar in Context* espouses a functional approach: a teacher will present only as much formal grammar as necessary to reduce students' writing errors. Much of the nomenclature of traditional grammar is deemed unnecessary in the functional model; students can recognize and apply correct punctuation and usage even if they are unable to assign to them the appropriate terminology. Functional simplicity is adequate. An acceptance of "correctness" is assumed in functional grammar; teachers

plan lessons on an area of need, as seen in actual student writing. No consistent plan for grammar instruction is utilized.

Recent work by M.A.K. Halliday and his colleagues, called Systemic Functional Linguistics, is described by Hillocks & Smith (2003) as being “deeply engaged in examining how texts convey meaning and how they relate to their social contexts” (p. 725), purporting an extensive model in which “language, life, the universe and everything can be viewed in communicative (i.e., semiotic) terms” (Halliday & Martin, 1993, p. 23). In SFL, *where* specific words appear in a given sentence indicates much about what the speaker/writer is emphasizing. Halliday (1985) introduces the *theme* of a sentence as the topic (perhaps more traditionally identified as the *subject*) of that sentence; the remainder he calls the *rheme*. “The majority of the work in SFL [Systemic Functional Linguistics] has been devoted to elaborating the theoretical perspective...and to demonstrating that perspective is useful for analyzing both model texts (cf. Ravelli, 1996) and student texts (cf. Schleppegrell, 1998)” (Hillocks & Smith, 2003, p. 727).

Rhetorical grammar, as proposed by Kolln (1991), argues for grammar study that will allow students “to consider the conscious knowledge of sentence structure as your tool kit” (p. viii). Different situations call for different writing techniques, different levels of formality, different word choice. Kolln does not advocate “correctness” as the end of rhetorical grammar study; instead, she reminds her students, “Understanding rhetorical grammar, then, means understanding the grammatical choices available to you when you write and the rhetorical effects those choices will have on your reader” (p. 3).

Cognitive grammar, or cognitive linguistics, a relatively new theoretical field of study, considers the interconnectedness of human perception, thought, meaning-making,

language and communication -- a connection that is becoming more readily apparent as the field is progressing -- and it is expanding, as well, into other realms of inquiry. A recent headline from Harvard Medical School's "Health News," for instance, proclaims, *Brain Activity Linked to Grammar* (2006, p. 1). "Even if language does not organize thought, the study of language has greatly enhanced our understanding of thought. Specifically, much of the research in cognitive science is linguistically based" (Marzano, 2003, p. 688).

According to Australian scholar David Lee (2001),

cognitivists argue that linguistic structure [i.e., the grammar of a language] is a direct reflex of cognition in the sense that a particular linguistic expression is associated with a particular way of conceptualising a given situation (p. 1).

Particular grammatical constructions or phenomena are noted by cognitive linguists; they are observed, investigated, written about, debated, and marveled at, all as a means of understanding how meaning is made, and how people communicate within the constraints of language and their physical bodies. Humans notice similarities between things, make connections among them, and understand one thing better because of how it is like another (Lee, 2001). This has been demonstrated in language, as in nearly every aspect of human awareness. "The connections between language...and the cognitive processes ...may be closer than has traditionally been thought" (Lee, 2001, p. 7).

As research in cognitive linguistics continues and the body of literature grows, researchers gain new insight. An especially intriguing aspect of the discipline is its attention to the cultural dimension of language, as well as to the lexical and structural, as in

speech acts, mental spaces, frames, "...the ways in which human beings use language in everyday social interactions," and the "...ongoing adjustments by participants to each other's moves" (Lee, 2001, p. xii).

Discussions about language and grammar instruction continue, as does the growth of the related literature. The current educational debate appears to be centering more on the socio-political implications of language, especially regarding learners of English as a second language, as the population of American schools grows ever more linguistically and culturally diverse. As participants in the study undertaken here, English/language arts teachers in Parker County have had the opportunity to consider their own attitudes and practices, as well as to add their voices to the ongoing academic exchange.

Chapter Three: Methodology

Surveying teachers about their classroom practices has historically provided insight into trends and methodologies in classrooms across the country. “Epitomized by the publication of *The National Interest and the Teaching of English*” (Squires and Applebee, 1968, p. 1), close investigation of teachers’ actual classroom activities “reflected the belief that only frank, public assessment of the current state of English programs . . . would stimulate widespread curriculum reform” (p. 1). Their own report, *High School English Instruction Today* (1968), used surveys as a major component of their report on all aspects of the English curriculum in the most successful American schools in the mid-to-late 1960s.²

More recently (and alluded to in Chapter One), the Conference on College Composition and Communication and the Research Foundation of the National Council of Teachers of English conducted a nationwide survey of its members who teach in secondary schools or in colleges to ascertain whether there exist any “significant gaps in academic training about language concepts and issues among professionals in secondary and college composition classes” and “the source of such professionals’ knowledge and attitudes about language and diversity” (Smitherman, et al., 2000, p. 6). Based on the results of that survey, the committee was able to submit eight recommendations to the

² Their work closed with “Recommendations for Better English Teaching” (pp. 245-264).

This proposed study undertakes no such endeavor; it will instead describe what is currently taking place in Parker County secondary schools with regard to grammar instruction, assuming an interconnectedness between that and teacher attitudes toward language and grammar.

constituency concerning such issues as better dissemination of organizational information to classroom teachers and course content for pre-service teachers.

Also cited in the CCCC report are other examples of teacher surveys being used to glean needed information about a wide range of English/language arts pedagogical issues, such as Taylor (1973), Williams (1970), Williams & Whitehead (1973), Bowie (1994), and Byrnes & Kiger (1994). Clearly, surveying teachers is a demonstrated method of gaining insight into educational issues. Fabiano (1999) submits, "Survey questionnaires provide the most common and cost-effective way of collecting nationally representative data on teachers...from the self-reports of individuals who are considering teaching, studying to be teachers, currently teaching, or have previously taught" (p. 6) and concludes, "Self-reports are the most efficient and cost-effective way to collect complete and reliable data..." (p. 10).

Concerns about the reliability of self-reported survey data in educational and other social science research, such as those expressed by Hook and Rosenshine (1979), are worthy of note here, especially considering how frequently such data are "used as measures of classroom behaviors in studies of teacher effectiveness and other research topics that have important educational implications" (Newland, 1980). Their conclusions have been questioned and disputed in subsequent investigations, and certain design principles, such as "present[ing] a particular teacher with a small number of items that refer to specific behavior, to be described during a limited time period" (Newland, 1980) were shown to increase the likelihood of obtaining accurate data. Newland's summary, that "the studies reviewed by Hook and Rosenshine cast some doubt on the accuracy of teacher self-reports, but don't seem to support the complete abandonment of this

technique, which Hook and Rosenshine suggest” (p. 79), is confirmed by Burns (1984), who notes that Hook and Rosenshine *also* acknowledge among their findings that “...teacher reports ...appear to be trustworthy” (10). She disputes the conclusions often cited of their work that teacher reports on specific behaviors cannot be assumed to represent actual practice, suggesting instead they “...could have better served their readers had they concluded that research on the question of accuracy of teacher self-reports presented findings which were contradictory” (p. 5). Newland, too, recommends “continued inquiry into conditions that influence accuracy rather than abandoning the use of teacher self-reports of specific classroom behaviors” (p. 78). And Tobin, who also addresses the reliability of teacher self-reports in her 1988 doctoral dissertation, concludes that “concerning specific behaviors and covering a limited period of time, ...accurate data may be obtained” (p. 39) through surveying teachers. In the present study I acknowledge the principles that have shown to lend to accuracy, specifically in questioning teachers about specific behaviors and covering a limited period of time; I have also questioned them about their language ideologies (which admittedly moves beyond specific behaviors).

Procedure

In November 2008, I sent an on-line survey prepared through Survey Monkey (a web-based survey service) to secondary English/language arts teachers working at the time in Parker County Public Schools. The school system’s website provided the names and schools of these teachers; the list I initially compiled included 618 names of teachers in 56 secondary schools, teaching grades from 6-12, although email addresses were provided for only 405 of them. County approval to conduct the survey was contingent upon

my using only those addresses I could find on the schools' respective websites; if the system were to provide me with all names and addresses, I would have had to secure written permission from all participants before beginning. That necessity was precluded by my using only publicly-available addresses. Since several of the schools' websites did not include email addresses, I was limited in the number of surveys I sent. (Special educators, reading/literacy specialists, and those teaching at alternative academies were not contacted for participation.)

Prior to sending the survey, I received approval for the study from the University of Maryland Institutional Review Board (copy attached, Appendix A) and, as previously noted, from the Parker County Board of Education (originally contingent upon approval of the project from my dissertation committee, and a copy of which is attached, Appendix B). As the survey was designed to question teachers about their practices over the first quarter of the school year, I waited until the close of that quarter (in late October) before sending it. On Monday, November 10, 2008, I sent an introductory email message to each of the teachers for whom I had an address. Three days later, on Thursday, November 13, 2008, at 7:00 a.m., the survey itself went out. The entire population of teachers whose addresses I had received it, regardless of any demographic, social, or economic criterion. Indeed, I had no way of knowing any of that information, nor would it have had any bearing on the study as prepared. The University's required consent form accompanied the survey, providing a place for respondents to indicate they had read and understood the implications of participating. Once they agreed, they could then respond. (A copy of the introductory letter, the consent form, and the survey document are attached as

Appendices C, D, and E, respectively.) Voluntary completion of the one-time survey should have taken no longer than 12-15 minutes.

The survey included questions about teachers' attitudes and practices with regard to English language/grammar instruction for a class of their choosing over the first quarter of the 2008-2009 school year. I adapted the instrument from two sources: the Conference on College Composition and Communication's Language Knowledge and Awareness Survey (Smitherman, et al., 2000) and the Mechanics, Usage, Grammar segment of English Inventories (Koziol 1986). The former was especially useful because it was designed in part to uncover teachers' "knowledge and attitudes about language and language diversity" (pg. 6), a key question in my investigation here, as well. From Part I of the Smitherman (used with permission from CCCC), I incorporated five (of seven) items into *Part 8, Attitudes* on my own survey, changing the wording only slightly in some cases. Answers to these shed light on teachers' ideologies on topics ranging from students' needing to master standard English to acceptance of non-standard dialects in classrooms.

I also drew from the Mechanics, Usage, Grammar segment of English Inventories (Koziol, 1986), selecting items from it that spoke directly to teachers' practices regarding specific instruction in grammar and language. It was especially appropriate to this work in that it held to the principles recommended for accuracy of teacher reporting: choosing from among specific behaviors and covering a limited period of time. In addition, it included a "Context of Instruction" category which helped to situate "the organization, time allocation and goals for [grammar/language] instruction" (p. 52) that were also of critical importance to me in my study – and ultimately used as cross-tab items with

survey questions on *Attitude* drawn from Smitherman, as teachers' decisions about the time and attention they give to grammar could be influenced by their attitudes toward it, also a key question in my investigation. Plus, the Koziol instrument provided lists of a wide variety of classroom practices, carefully selected from "many variations to individual types of activities and techniques used in [grammar/language] instruction . . . to represent a selective list of those many variations" and assuming "no a priori right and wrong responses to specific items" (p. 54). Some of these have waned in popularity over the years (teacher dictation as students write, sentence diagramming, for example), but including others as well, such as sentence combining and personal writing conferences, that have become part of classroom routine. It offered a wide range of specific activities that an English/LA teacher would be likely to include in a classroom today, and so was particularly applicable to my investigation here. (See Appendix E for the complete survey used.)

Responses provide a descriptive overview of grammar instructional practices in the county at that time -- and of teachers' attitudes toward grammar instruction in general. I was specifically interested in the influence, if any, that teachers' attitudes might have on their practices, in keeping with an underlying assumption of this investigation: the attitudes and beliefs about language that teachers bring into their classrooms, though difficult to quantify, nonetheless have a direct influence on their pedagogy and practice with grammar and language.

I began my analysis of the data by seeking specific answers to my six research questions, which are these: 1) What are teachers' self-reported attitudes toward English language/grammar instruction? 2) What language ideology do teachers report as driving

or prompting that English language/grammar instruction? 3) From teachers' reports, what do they perceive as the desired end of the English language/grammar instruction carried out in their classrooms? 4) How much English language/grammar instruction is taking place in a given teacher's Parker County English/language arts classroom, according to their self-reports? 5) What specific practices do teachers report they carry out in English language/grammar instruction? and 6) Do teachers' reported attitudes toward English language/grammar instruction influence how much it is taught in their classrooms, according to those reports?

To accomplish this, I first identified key survey items that directly address attitudes and practices, to be used in considering and analyzing teachers' specific language ideologies. Part 8, "Attitudes toward Language Instruction," for example, deals entirely with teachers' attitudes, and I used it in addressing Research Question 1. Then, through asking *why* teachers included language and grammar study (Part 4, Question 5, "Why did you include language study in your curriculum?"), I gleaned the data used in addressing Research Question 2; the selected answers reveal much about what the teacher *believes* the study of language and grammar can do: might it, for instance, engender self confidence and good study habits or develop good reading or writing skills? Teachers who so believe are expressing a different ideology from those who are including the study simply because it is required by the county. Or, when it comes to teachers' *goals* in carrying out language and grammar instruction (Part 4, Question 7, "What is your major goal in teaching language?" used in addressing Survey Question 3), are they simply hoping for an improvement in students' standardized test scores by including it, or are they seeking to broaden their students' respect for diverse dialects? In isolating specific questions from

the survey for consideration in the analysis, I gave much thought and care to selecting items that directly address particular language ideologies, either through attitude or practice, including those mentioned above, as well as the following key items:

* Part 3, Question 1: “Did you regularly incorporate specific language study into the curriculum for the most recent quarter of the school year?” Possible responses: “Yes” and “No.” This first item had a major impact on the remaining analyses; if none of the teachers, for example, included language/grammar instruction and answered “No” here, further analysis would have been unnecessary, of course. Many teachers did indicate that they address grammar, however, so I was able to proceed with the analysis. This addresses *practices* at the most basic level.

* Part 5, First Item (not numbered): “As part of the way I taught grammar, usage, and mechanics, I emphasized standard edited American English.” Possible responses: “Often,” “Sometimes,” “Rarely,” and “Never.” Although this item addresses both attitude and practice, I applied it as addressing *practices*. It accounts for ideology in that teachers tend to emphasize the current standard dialect when they see it as valuable and necessary.

* Part 5, Ninth Item (not numbered): “As part of the way I taught grammar, usage, and mechanics, I acknowledged all students’ dialects/language to be as valid and welcome as standard edited American English.” Possible responses: “Often,” “Sometimes,” “Rarely,” and “Never.” This item addresses *attitudes*.

* Part 6, Twelfth Item (not numbered): “When I assigned work in grammar, usage, and mechanics, I had the students identify and correct standard English errors in their own or other students’ writing.” Possible responses: “Often,”

“Sometimes,” “Rarely,” and “Never.” This item addresses *practices*, and accounts for ideology in teachers’ seeing the need to “correct” or “fix” dialect patterns that do not align with those of the current standard.

* Part 8, Second Item (not numbered): “Please indicate the appropriate response to the following statement: Students need to master standard English.” Possible responses: “Agree,” “Neutral,” “Disagree,” and “Undecided.” This item addresses *attitudes*.

* Part 8, Fifth Item (not numbered): “Please indicate the appropriate response to the following statement: There are no valid educational reasons for using non-standard English dialects in school.” Possible responses: “Agree,” “Neutral,” “Disagree,” and “Undecided.” This item addresses *attitudes*.

In the following chapter, I report the answers to each of my six research questions as indicated by teachers’ responses to the various survey items.

My next task with the data was to cross-tab four specific items from the Part 8, “Attitudes toward Language” section of the survey with three of the “General Information” items in Part 2 regarding how language/grammar instruction is carried out in teachers’ classrooms, including the number of days per week it is attended and the percentage of class-time typically devoted to it, for the specific purpose of seeking an answer to Research Question 6 and whether teachers’ attitudes show an influence on the practices they carry out. This report, too, can be found in Chapter 4.

In early December of 2008, I first checked the status of responses through my Survey Monkey account. At that time I learned that 23 of my original 405 surveys sent had “bounced back” because the email addresses were no longer valid. On the chance

that I may have misspelled or mis-entered the addresses, I re-sent them, only to have them all bounce again. That left me with only 382 actually sent. Of those, 13 respondents selected the “opt out” choice offered by Survey Monkey, asking not to receive any more surveys through the system and thereby refusing participation in mine. While that was a response in itself, it is not one I could use in my data set. Therefore, a total of 369 secondary E/LA teachers initially received my survey.

At my first review of responses, only 66 teachers had completed the survey. On December 4, 2008, I sent those teachers the following message, also via Survey Monkey.

Subject: Grammar Survey – THANK YOU!

Body: I can’t fully express how grateful I am for your response to my grammar and language survey! It has helped more than you know, and I am eager to get started on reviewing the results. I’ll let you know what I find. The system has alerted me that some of you have started the survey but haven’t submitted it in finished form. If that’s true for you, please take a minute to send it on. And forgive me for bugging you about it. Again, thank you – most sincerely!

Peggy

To the teachers who had not responded to the survey, but who also had not “opted out” or whose addresses had not bounced back, I re-sent the initial survey, changed only in the “subject” line: “Grammar Survey Closing Date – December 15th!” Then I waited, hoping for the best. By the close, 91 teachers had agreed to take the survey.

One unexpected result of having sent the survey was getting personal responses from many of the teachers who took it. I responded promptly to all persons who contact-

ed me, thanking each and indicating my sincere interest in discussing the survey (and the grammar question in general) with them further, but letting them know, too, that until I had finished collecting, analyzing, and reporting the data, I was not at liberty to do so. Most of the 22 who sent me notes in addition to completing the survey simply registered agreement to complete the instrument and/or wished me well in my research. I intend ultimately to follow up with each person who submitted the survey, upon the completion of my dissertation defense.

It was nearly 10 months before I opened the survey data. From the closing date on the survey (December 15, 2008) until October 6, 2009, I was working with my advisor in revising and editing the first chapters of this dissertation and felt it important to wait until those were fully approved before looking at the survey results. With assistance from my friend and colleague, Dr. Julia Bryan, I have reviewed and analyzed the data, including the cross-tabs of the items indicated. Results are delineated in the following chapter.

Risks and Benefits

There are no known risks associated with participating in this research project. While the research is not designed to help participants personally, it can nonetheless provide an opportunity for the responding teachers to reflect on their own practices with grammar and to consider their own attitudes toward it, prompting meaningful negotiation of their course content, personal practices, and pedagogy. I hope, as well, that others may ultimately benefit from this study through improved understanding of grammar instruction in secondary classrooms.

Confidentiality

Much care has been taken to keep respondents' personal information confidential. No names have been used anywhere on the survey document, and a pseudonym has been used for the school system. I assigned a code number to each recipient as the survey went out, and only that provides identification of a respondent. Only the research team (Joseph McCaleb and I) have access to those name and code number correlations, and only we have the password into the computer-based data. Surveys are anonymous and do not contain any information that might identify a respondent. I will use only aggregate data in any report or article prepared to present the results of the survey, and I will continue to protect individuals' identities to the maximum extent possible. Through the consent form, I made prospective participants aware of their right to ask questions of me at any time, to stop responding at any time, and/or to choose not to participate. On Thursday, March 4, 2010, I submitted the closure form to the University's IRB.

Chapter Four: Results

Description of Respondents and their Selected Classes

Ultimately, 91 teachers agreed to participate in, then actually submitted my survey, or 24.66% of the 369 who received it, although just 84 of them fully completed the document, for a more accurate overall response rate of 22.76%. [Note: Even among the number who finished and submitted the survey, not all responded to every question, as will be seen in the reported results. The N for each item is shown on the tables, with corresponding percentage.]

While this is not nearly as high a return as I had hoped, many published articles and reports, such as Applebee, Auten & Lehr at 28% (1981) and Patterson & Duer at 20% (2006), are based on admittedly low rates of response. However, as Thompson (2000) states, "...it is critical that our sample is *representative* [emphasis added], if we want our characterization of population perceptions to be accurate." In the report presented here, the responses are, indeed, representative, as each is from my selected target audience. I make the same case as Smitherman, et al (2000) for the validity of their survey despite low response rate, in noting that my "population was neither the general public nor [even] teachers in general, but language arts educators" themselves (p. 7), and in the case at hand, *secondary* English/language arts educators specifically, and that they answered "self-reflective questions about [their] own language experiences and about their classroom practices" (p. 8). Jon A. Krosnick, who studies surveys and does survey research at Ohio State University, claims, "Clearly, the prevailing wisdom that high response rates are necessary for sample representativeness is being challenged. ...[I]t is no longer sensible to presume that lower response rates necessarily signal lower

representativeness (1999, p. 541). Following a description of his extensive investigation of this phenomenon, he concludes, “Remarkably, recent research has shown that surveys with very low response rates can be more accurate than surveys with much higher response rates” (1999, p. 540), as long as the respondents are fully representative of the population they depict. Thompson (2000) concurs, claiming “Size doesn’t matter much...but representativeness is critical.” (p. 5). The survey data reported here are indeed representative of the secondary English/language arts teachers in Parker County.

Sixty-two of those reporting teach at high school and 22 at middle school. The majority of them selected a ninth or tenth grade class to consider for this report (23 and 24, respectively), with those reporting on a seventh grade class ranking next, with 12 teachers. Just 3 teachers who responded worked with sixth graders and 3 with 12th graders (those students at the two extremes of the secondary spectrum) for this report, but every secondary grade, 6-12, is represented in the data set.

Table 4.1

Grade Levels Reported in Survey (N = 83)

<u>Grade</u>	<u>6</u>	<u>7</u>	<u>8</u>	<u>9</u>	<u>10</u>	<u>11</u>	<u>12</u>
No. of Teachers	3	12	9	23	24	9	3
(percentage)	(3.61)	(14.5)	(10.8)	(27.7)	(28.9)	(10.8)	(3.61)

There is quite a spread in the number of years these teachers have been in the classroom, from a high of 40 years, and including five teachers for whom this is their first year. Their average time in the classroom is 10.48 years; in computing this average, I counted one year for the first-year teachers. Regarding their own levels of education,

most respondents claim to hold a master's degree (35 of them), 23 a bachelor's; two report they have earned a doctorate, and the remainder of the 84 who answered this question have either a bachelor's-plus or a master's-plus.

Table 4.2

Respondents' Years of Teaching (N = 84)

No. of Years	<u>First</u>	<u>2-5</u>	<u>6-10</u>	<u>11-15</u>	<u>16-20</u>	<u>21-25</u>	<u>26-30</u>	<u>31-35</u>	<u>36-40</u>
No. of Teachers	5	32	22	5	5	4	6	4	1
(percentage)	(5.95)	(38.1)	(26.2)	(5.95)	(5.95)	(4.76)	(7.14)	(4.76)	(1.19)

Table 4.3

Respondents' Level of Education (N = 84)

Highest Degree Earned	<u>Bachelor's</u>	<u>Master's</u>	<u>Doctorate</u>
No. of Teachers	42	40	2
(and percentage)	(50.02)	(47.63)	(2.38)

Teachers were asked to select one of the classes they taught over the first quarter of the 2008-09 school year and to describe 1) the grammar instruction they carried out with that class, 2) their reasons for doing it, and 3) their attitude toward it. In the classes

they selected, a wide majority of the 84 respondents, 44 (52.38%) meet for 90 minutes daily, 24 (28.57%) meet for 72 minutes, 8 (9.52%) meet for 80 minutes, and 6 (7.14%) for 45 minutes. There were 2 outliers who reported meeting for 105 and 120 minutes.

While equal numbers of respondents report teaching a below-grade-level, on-grade-level, or above-grade-level class (12 each), the majority, 48 teachers, reported on a class that is some combination of these levels. The average number of students in a class is 28.12, including as few as 6 and as many as 58. Although I question the accuracy of these extremes, I included it in averaging. Even dropping these two outliers, though, I found the average remains remarkably close, at 27.95 students. The low number of students per class in *this* calculation is 8; the high is 40.

Table 4.4

Size of Classes Reported (N = 84)

<u>Number of Students</u>	<u>1-15</u>	<u>16-25</u>	<u>26-35</u>	<u>36-40</u>	<u>41 or more</u>
No. of Teachers	7	23	41	11	2
(and percentage)	(8.33)	(27.38)	(48.81)	(13.1)	(2.38)

Of the 84 teachers who responded to the questions about English language learners in their classrooms, most chose to report on a class that is made up predominantly of native speakers of English. Indeed, 45 (53.6%) of them indicate that “none” or “less than 1%” of the students in that class speak a first language other than English. One of the 84 chose a class of *all* English language learners on which to report, one chose a class of

80% ELLs, one a class of 75%, one a class of 60%, one of 50%, and one of 40%. The remainder of teachers (26) report on classes comprised of 2% - 25% of students whose first language is *not* English. Nearly $\frac{3}{4}$ of respondents have 1-10% ELLs in class.

Table 4.5

Percentage of English Language Learners in Reported Class (N = 84)

	<u>0-1%</u>	<u>2-10%</u>	<u>11- 20%</u>	<u>21- 30%</u>	<u>31- 40%</u>	<u>41- 60%</u>	<u>61- 80%</u>	<u>81- 100%</u>
No. of								
Teachers	47	25	4	1	2	2	2	1
(percentage)	(55.95)	(29.76)	(4.76)	(1.19)	(2.38)	(2.38)	(2.38)	(1.19)

With this information as an overview of the respondents themselves and the classes they chose to describe, I will now report the data that address the six research questions as set forth in this report. I encourage you to keep in mind that these data represent teacher self-reports, completed after the close of the period on which they are reporting; I did not contact teachers about the survey until after the quarter ended, so all responses are retrospective; teachers did not know beforehand that they would be asked to report their instructional activities or their attitudes. The first quarter of the 2008-09 school year in Parker County ended during the first week of November. As noted in chapter 3, I sent the introductory message to respondents on November 10, 2008, and the survey itself went out on November 13, 2008. I first checked responses on December 4, to find 66 surveys had been completed. Later that day I sent a thank-you message to

teachers who had completed it and a reminder message to those who had not, indicating this time that the closing date for the survey was to be December 15, 2008. I recorded responses as indicated in the table below. Only those who completed and submitted the survey are included as responses – 84 of the 369 sent, or 22.76%. One final response was submitted two days past the official closing. I accepted it.

Table 4.6

Time of Receipt of Surveys (N = 84)

	<u>November 13-20</u>	<u>November 21-30</u>	<u>December 1-17</u>
Responses Received	60	1	23

The Six Research Questions

In this chapter, I am reporting the data I received through the survey. Each question is reported individually. Commentary, recommendations, discussion, and personal interpretation are reserved for the following chapter.

Research Question 1: What are teachers' self-reported attitudes toward English language/grammar instruction?

One full category of questions on the survey was devoted to teachers' attitudes regarding grammar: Part 8, entitled "Attitudes toward Language Instruction," which consisted of seven specific questions about their beliefs and dispositions on the subject: their language ideology. More respondents skipped this part than any other component of the survey; 72 of 84 completers responded to it. Two of the items in this category each showed an overwhelming 94.4% agreement (67 responses) among respondents: first, that students need to master standard English, and second, that doing so will improve their

ability to understand and communicate concepts and information. Two other items showed strong agreement, as well: 73.6% of teachers (53) believe students who primarily use non-standard dialects should nonetheless be required to use standard English at school, and 72.2% (52) believe students who have not gained proficiency in standard English will not have an equal opportunity for success in higher education and/or the workplace as those students who have. However, nearly half (47.2%, or 34 respondents) disagreed with the statement that there are no valid educational reasons for using non-standard English dialects at school, while 22.2% (16) agreed. The following table shows all data regarding teachers' attitudes toward English language/grammar issues. Instructions for this item stated, "Please indicate the appropriate response to the following statements." [Note: The second item on the table shows a total of 71 instead of 72 because one respondent left the item blank.]

Table 4.7

Attitudes Toward Language Instruction (N = 72)

	<u>Agree</u>	<u>Neutral</u>	<u>Disagree</u>	<u>Undecided</u>	<u>Totals</u>
A student whose primary language is not English should nonetheless be taught solely in English.	18.1%	33.3%	36.1%	12.5%	
	(13)	(24)	(26)	(9)	(72)
Students need to master standard English.	94.4%	4.2%	1.4%	0%	
	(67)	(3)	(1)	(0)	(71)
At school, students should be exposed to standard English only, unless in foreign language classes.	43.1%	12.5%	37.5%	6.9%	
	(31)	(9)	(27)	(5)	(72)
Students who primarily use non-standard dialects should nonetheless be required to use standard English at school.	73.6%	16.7%	8.3%	1.4%	
	(53)	(12)	(6)	(1)	(72)
There are no valid educational reasons for using non-standard English dialects in school.	22.2%	23.6%	47.2%	6.9%	
	(16)	(17)	(34)	(5)	(72)
Students should learn standard English to improve their ability to understand and communicate concepts and information.	94.4%	2.8%	2.8%	0.0%	
	(68)	(2)	(2)	(0)	(72)
Students who have not gained proficiency in standard English will not have an equal opportunity for success in higher education and/or the workplace as those students who have.	72.2%	8.3%	15.3%	4.2%	
	(52)	(6)	(11)	(3)	(72)

Research Question 2: What language ideology do teachers report as driving or prompting that English language/grammar instruction?

To address this question, I chose three specific survey questions that attend to teachers' language ideologies, those assumptions about language use, language diversity, and the pedagogy surrounding them that are evident in classrooms, both overt and implied, as described under *Conceptual Framework* in Chapter One. While the word *ideology* does not appear in the questions I have chosen (indeed, does not appear in any item on the survey), teachers' assumptions about grammar and language diversity are evident in their responses to the following survey items, ones that address *why* teachers teach it – and their emphasis in doing so. Each of these uncovers a language ideology, which I explain further in each description below.

The first, Part 4, Question 5, which speaks to the motivation behind teachers' decisions to include language/grammar study (their belief in what it does), asks simply, "Why did you include language study into your curriculum?" [Note: The instrument allowed teachers to select more than one item in response to the question, and 35 of them did so – up to all four available options, in some cases. This accounts for the 131 total responses on the table below, despite the N of 78 respondents; figures on the table are based on the number of responses to each item.] While 28.2 % (22) do it simply because it is required by the county curriculum, 79.5% (62) report believing that it "develops necessary skills for reading and writing." Twelve respondents (15.4%) believe it helps students develop self-confidence and good study habits, while 35 (44.9%) believe it develops knowledge and skills important for success in other school and work activities.

Table 4.8

Why did you include language study into your curriculum? (N = 78, with 131 responses)

It helps students develop self-confidence and good study habits.	15.4%
	(12)
It develops necessary skills for reading and writing.	79.5%
	(62)
It develops knowledge and skills important for success in other school and work activities.	44.9%
	(35)
It is required by the county.	28.2%
	(22)

In Part 5 of the survey, two items specifically address teachers' emphases in their grammar instruction: "As part of the way I taught grammar, usage, and/or mechanics, I emphasized standard edited American English," and the next, "I acknowledged all students' dialects to be as valid and welcome as standard edited American English." (Response choices were "Often," "Sometimes," "Rarely," and "Never," and respondents could select only one of these four.) For these two items from Part 5 chosen as indicative of teachers' attitudes, there is an N of 76 respondents for the former and an N of 75 for the latter. When it comes to emphasizing standard English, fully all of the 76 (100%) respondents indicate that they "often" or "sometimes" do so. In acknowledging and welcoming all students' dialects, a majority report they "often" do, but that includes just 36% (27) of them. The rest are fairly evenly divided among "sometimes," "rarely," and "never," at 24% (18 responses), 22.7% (17), and 17.3% (13) respectively.

Table 4.9

As part of the way I taught grammar, usage and mechanics, I...

	<u>Often</u>	<u>Sometimes</u>	<u>Rarely</u>	<u>Never</u>
...emphasized standard edited American Edited American English (N = 76)	76.3% (58)	23.7% (18)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)
...acknowledged all students' dialects/ language to be as valid and welcome as standard edited American English (N = 75)	36.0% (27)	24.0% (18)	22.7% (17)	17.3% (13)

Taken together, these three items provide perspective on teachers' beliefs and ideologies about what language and grammar instruction can do for students.

Research Question 3: From teachers' reports, what do they perceive as the desired end of the English language/grammar instruction carried out in their classrooms?

Part 4, Question 7, addresses teachers' desired student outcomes or "ends" from language/grammar instruction, also a key component in language ideology: "What is your major goal in teaching language? [Note: For this item, again, 78 of the 84 respondents answered the question, but were not limited to choosing just one of the four responses provided. In all, 136 responses were provided by the 78 who answered it.] A strong majority of the responses, 56 (70.9%), indicate a goal is to have students demonstrate proficiency in Standard English in both oral and written communication; 37 (46.8%) of the responses are in favor of students' recognizing the appropriateness of different language for different contexts; 32 (40.5%) hope their instruction will allow students to perform well on the language portion of standardized tests; and 11 (14.1%) would like their students to acknowledge and respect language diversity.

Table 4.10

What is your major goal in teaching language? (N = 78, with 136 responses)

Students will perform well on the language portions of county, state, and/or national standardized tests.	40.5% (32)
Students will demonstrate proficiency in standard English in their oral communication and in their writing.	70.9% (56)
Students will recognize the appropriateness of using different language in different situations or contexts.	46.8% (37)
Students will acknowledge and respect language diversity.	14.1% (11)

Research Question 4: How much English language/grammar instruction is taking place in a given teacher's Parker County E/LA classroom, according to their self-reports?

The opening survey question (following the agreement to participate and the general information about the respondent) asks pointedly whether the teacher "incorporated specific language study into [your] curriculum for the class and quarter specified," and the responses to choose were "yes" or "no." Those who answered "no" were asked to stop at that point, and I thanked them for their participation. While 15.3% (13 of 85) indicated "no," the other 84.7% (72) indicated "yes" and continued the survey.

The next three items addressed the time and focus devoted to teaching language and grammar. The first of these, "How did you organize and present your language study?" yielded these results: 29.5% (23) claimed they presented it "in concentrated units;" the majority, 42.3% (33), admitted to teaching it "on a regular schedule (e.g., "once per week" or "Tuesday/Thursday")," and the remainder, 34.6% (27), indicated they

addressed the subject “whenever there was time.” Five teachers selected more than one item.

Table 4.11

How did you organize and present your language study? (N = 78)

In concentrated units	29.5%
	(23)
On a regular schedule (e.g. “once per week” or “Tuesday/Thursday,” etc.)	42.3%
	(33)
Whenever there was time	34.6%
	(27)

For the second item, “How many days per week did you include language study?” the majority, 60.3% (47 respondents), report 1-2 days per week, 17.9% (14) report 3-4 days per week, while 25.6% (20) report addressing language and grammar 5 days per week.

[Note: I did not include “0” days as an option, as only those teachers who report that they *do* teach language/grammar continued the survey.]

Table 4.12

Average Days/Week Devoted to Language Study (N = 78)

1-2 Days per Week	60.3%
	(46)
3-4 Days per Week	17.9%
	(13)
5 Days per Week	25.6%
	(19)

For the third item, regarding how much clock-time is devoted to it, the majority, 50% (39), claim to teach it 0-25% of class time, 24.4% (19) teach it 26-50% of class, 10.3% (8) do so 51-75% of class, and 16.7% (13) address it for 76-100% of their time together. An important consideration in examining class time is the average length of classes, which (from an open-ended question early in the survey), ranged from a low of 45 minutes to a high of 120 minutes. The overall average time from the 84 respondents is 81.26 minutes for English/language arts classes.

Table 4.13
Amount of Class time Devoted to Language Study (N = 79)

0-25% of Class time	50%
Range of .812 – 20.32 min.	(39)
26-50% of Class time	24.4%
Range of 21.13 – 40.63 min.	(19)
51-75% of Class time	10.3%
Range of 41.44 – 60.95 min.	(8)
76-100% of Class time	16.7%
Range of 61.76 – 81.26 min.	(13)

Taken together, the data on the three preceding tables, along with the opening question about whether or not teachers address it at all, provide an encapsulation of how much language instruction is taking place in Parker County schools. The indicators suggest that nearly 85% of Parker County English/language arts teachers are indeed including grammar and language study into their curricula – and about half of them are doing so with intention (“on a regular schedule”). Just over 60% include it one or two days per week, and half of them give it less than one-quarter of their (average) 81-minute period.

Another interesting finding: The “newer” teachers, those having taught for fewer than 10 years, responded in greater number to my survey and appear more apt than those with more years of teaching to include grammar and language into their classroom routine. Of the 27 respondents who have been teaching 3 years or fewer, just one claimed to devote *no* time to issues of grammar and language. Of the 16 who have been teaching

4-6 years, only 2 responded “no” to the question about whether they include grammar and language. And while every respondent teaching 12 or more years claims to address language and grammar, far fewer of them responded at all, (27, versus 58 with fewer than 12 years in teaching), so it is hard to discern.

Research Question 5: What specific practices do teachers report they carry out in English language/grammar instruction?

On the survey, I broke this question into three distinct sections: how grammar and language were taught (“Part 5, Language Instruction”), what work in grammar and language was assigned (“Part 6, Assigned Work in Language”), and how student progress in grammar and language was assessed (Part 7, Assessment, Evaluation, and Grading”). These sections contained nine items, twelve items, and twelve items, respectively, and for each, teachers were asked to indicate whether they often, sometimes, rarely, or never incorporated a specific practice. The tables below, by section, list those items that at least half of responding teachers say they carry out “often” or “sometimes” in their classrooms in addressing grammar and language. For contrast, I have also listed those few items that at least one-third of responding teachers say they “*never*” do. [Note: Because the number of respondents who answered each item shown on the following three tables was inconsistent, I have provided both the number of responses received and the number of respondents.]

Table 4.14

*Practices in “the way I taught grammar” and language**(at least 50% of responding teachers say “often” or “sometimes”)*

	Percentage (and Number) of Teachers who do this “Often” or “Sometimes”
Emphasized standard American English	76.3% “often” (58 of 76 responses)
Explained terms and rules in class	81.7% “often” (58 of 71 responses)
Used visual aids to explain terms or to review examples	60.8% “often” (48 of 74 responses)
Had students complete practice exercises from texts, workbooks, or worksheets	62.7% “often” (47 of 75 responses)
Reviewed standard English answers on homework and classwork	52.6% “often” (40 of 76 responses)

Table 4.15

*Practices in “assigned work in grammar” and language**(the 5 highest-scoring items in this section)*

	Percentage (and number) of Teachers Who do them
1) (tie) Have students do language exercises orally in class	48.6 “often” (36 of 74 responses)
1) (tie) Have students do sentence combining, expanding, or transforming sentences	48.6 “sometimes” (36 of 74 responses)
2) Have students do language exercises for homework	43.1% “often” (31 of 72 responses)
3) (tie) Have students collaborate in reviewing each other’s homework and class work	40.5% “sometimes” (30 of 74 responses)
3) (tie) Have students identify and correct standard English errors in their own or other students’ writing	40.5% “sometimes” (30 of 74 responses)
4) Have students create sentences or stories using specific terms, rules, or sentence patterns	38.4% “sometimes” (28 of 73 responses)
5) Have students identify and correct standard English errors in anonymous writing samples	35.1% “sometimes” (26 of 74 responses)

Under practices in “assigned work,” three items that a large percentage of teachers indicated they “never” have students do are sentence diagramming (54.1%, or 40 of 74 responses), writing sentences correctly as the teacher dictates (43.8%, or 32 of 73 responses), and playing language games or doing puzzles (35.7%, or 25 of 70 responses).

Table 4.16

*Practices in “assessing student progress” in grammar and language
(the five highest-scoring items in this section)*

	Percentage (and number) of Teachers who do Them
1) Students select the correct word/form to complete a sentence in standard English	52.8% “sometimes” (38 of 72 responses)
2) Students take tests I design myself	47.9% “sometimes” (35 of 73 responses)
3) Students insert a correct word/form to complete a sentence in standard English	45.2% “sometimes” (33 of 73 responses)
4) (tie) Students take published tests (i.e., from texts or workbooks)	43.8% “sometimes” (32 of 73 responses)
4) (tie) Students identify examples of language terms or rules in specific sentences	43.8% “often” (32 of 73 responses)
5) Students identify and correct standard English errors in anonymous writing samples	42.5% “sometimes” (31 of 73 responses)

Additionally, under “assessing student progress,” one-third or more of teachers say they “never” play language games or do puzzles (36.1%, or 26 of 72 responses), or meet with students for one-on-one or small group writing interviews (32.9%, or 24 of 73 responses).

Research Question 6: Do teachers’ reported attitudes toward language/grammar influence how much it is taught in their classrooms?

This question, more than any other, prompted this research. I set up and analyzed cross-tabs of four specific *attitude* items from “Part 8, Attitudes toward Language Instruction” (“Students need to master standard English,” “Students who primarily use nonstandard dialects should nonetheless be required to use standard English at school,” “There are no valid educational reasons for using non-standard English dialects in school,” and “Students who have not gained proficiency in standard English will not have an equal opportunity for success in higher education and/or the workplace as those students who have”) with three “General Information” questions from Part 2 of the survey (“How do you organize and present your language study?” “About how many days per week did you include language study?” and “About what percentage of class time did you devote to language study?”). On the surface, I found no apparent indication of association among any of them, although deeper investigation among selected sub-groups uncovered interesting connections. Several of the findings prompt serious questions for further investigation. Data on the following tables 4.17 provide a general snapshot of how teachers’ attitudes appear to influence practice with regard to grammar and language instruction. Data from several selected cells beg closer scrutiny in my search for answers to this final research question. [Note: To simplify the presentation, I have included only numbers of responses on the cross tab tables, no percentages.]

Table 4.17.1

*Crosstabs of Relationship Between “Time and Focus on Grammar” and
“Students need to master standard English” (N = 72)*

Students need to master standard English	Time and Focus on Grammar:				Totals
	Percentage of Class time				
	0-25%	26-50%	51-75%	76-100%	
Agree	34	16	7	11	68
Neutral	2	0	0	1	3
Disagree	1	0	0	0	1
Undecided	0	0	0	0	0
Totals	37 of 72	16 of 72	7 of 72	12 of 72	72

Table 4.17.2

*Crosstabs of Relationship Between “Time and Focus on Grammar” and
 “Students who primarily use non-standard dialects should nonetheless be required
 to use standard English at school” (N = 73)*

Should be required to use standard English at school	Time and Focus on Grammar:				Total
	Percentage of Class time				
	0-25%	26-50%	51-75%	76-100%	
Agree	27	14	4	9	54
Neutral	6	1	4	1	12
Disagree	3	1	0	2	6
Undecided	1	0	0	0	1
Totals	37 of 73	16 of 73	8 of 73	12 of 73	73

Table 4.17.3

*Crosstabs of Relationship Between “Time and Focus on Grammar” and
 “There are no valid educational reasons for using non-standard English dialects
 at school.”(N = 73)*

No valid reasons for non- standard English	Time and Focus on Grammar:				Total
	Percentage of Class time				
	0-25%	26-50%	51-75%	76-100%	
Agree	10	4	0	2	16
Neutral	11	4	3	0	18
Disagree	15	6	5	8	34
Undecided	1	2	0	2	5
Totals	37 of 73	16 of 73	8 of 73	12 of 73	73

Table 4.17.4

Crosstabs of Relationship Between “Time and Focus on Grammar” and “Students who have not gained proficiency in standard English will not have an equal opportunity for success in higher ed and/or work as those who have.” (N = 73)

Students will not have equal opportunity	Time and Focus on Grammar: Percentage of Class time				Total
	0-25%	26-50%	51-75%	76-100%	
Agree	27	11	5	10	53
Neutral	4	2	0	0	6
Disagree	3	3	3	2	11
Undecided	3	0	0	0	3
Totals	37 of 73	16 of 73	8 of 73	12 of 73	73

Table 4.17.5

Crosstabs of Relationship Between “Number of days per week that included language/grammar study” and “Students need to master standard English.” (N = 74)

Students need to Master Standard English	Number of Days per Week that Include Grammar Study			Totals
	5	3-4	1-2	
Agree	17	13	39	69
Neutral	1	0	3	4
Disagree	0	0	1	1
Undecided	0	0	0	0
Totals	18 of 74	13 of 74	43 of 74	74

Table 4.17.6

Crosstabs of Relationship Between “Number of days per week that included language/grammar study” and “Students who primarily use non-standard dialects should nonetheless be required to use standard English at school” (N = 75)

Should be required to use standard English at school	Number of Days per Week that Included Grammar			Totals
	5	3-4	1-2	
Agree	12	10	32	54
Neutral	5	2	7	14
Disagree	2	1	3	6
Undecided	0	0	1	1
Totals	19 of 75	13 of 75	43 of 75	75

Table 4.17.7

Crosstabs of Relationship Between “Number of days per week that included language/grammar study” and “There are no valid educational reasons for using non-standard English dialects in school.” (N = 75)

No valid reasons for non-standard English	Number of Days per Week that Included Grammar			Totals
	5	3-4	1-2	
Agree	6	3	7	16
Neutral	3	3	11	17
Disagree	8	7	22	37
Undecided	2	0	3	5
Totals	19 of 75	13 of 75	43 of 75	75

Table 4.17.8

Crosstabs of Relationship Between “Number of days per week that included language/grammar study” and “Students who have not gained proficiency in standard English will not have an equal opportunity for success in higher education or the workplace as those students who have.” (N = 75)

Students will not have equal opportunity	Number of Days per Week that Included Grammar			Totals
	5	3-4	1-2	
Agree	14	9	32	55
Neutral	3	0	3	6
Disagree	2	3	6	11
Undecided	0	1	2	3
Totals	19 of 75	13 of 75	43 of 75	75

Table 4.17.9

Crosstabs of Relationship Between “How teachers organized and presented language and grammar study” and “Students need to master standard English.” (N = 76)

Students need to master standard English	How teachers Organize and Present Language Study			Totals
	In Concentrated Units	On a regular schedule	Whenever there was time	
Agree	21	30	21	72
Neutral	1	0	2	3
Disagree	0	0	1	1
Undecided	0	0	0	0
Totals	22 of 76	30 of 76	24 of 76	76

Table 4.17.10

Crosstabs of Relationship Between “How teachers organized and presented language and grammar study” and “Students who primarily use non-standard dialects should nonetheless be required to use standard English at school.” (N = 77)

Should be required to use standard English at school	How teachers Organize and Present Language Study			Totals
	In Concentrated Units	On a regular schedule	Whenever there was time	
Agree	14	24	18	56
Neutral	5	5	3	13
Disagree	4	1	2	7
Undecided	0	0	1	1
Totals	23 of 77	30 of 77	24 of 77	77

Table 4.17.11

Crosstabs of Relationship Between “How teachers organized and presented language and grammar study” and “There are no valid educational reasons for using non-standard English dialects in school.” (N =77)

No valid reasons for non-standard English	How teachers Organize and Present Language Study			Totals
	In Concentrated Units	On a regular schedule	Whenever there was time	
Agree	6	8	4	18
Neutral	8	2	8	18
Disagree	8	16	12	36
Undecided	1	4	0	5
Totals	23 of 77	30 of 77	24 of 77	77

Table 4.17.12

Crosstabs of Relationship Between “How teachers organized and presented language and grammar study” and “Students who have not gained proficiency in standard English will not have equal opportunity for success in higher education and/or the workplace as those students who have.” (N = 77)

Students will not have equal opportunity	How teachers Organize and Present Language Study			Totals
	In Concentrated Units	On a regular schedule	Whenever there was time	
Agree	20	17	19	56
Neutral	1	3	2	6
Disagree	2	9	1	12
Undecided	0	1	2	3
Totals	23 of 77	30 of 77	24 of 77	77/77

Crosstabs 4.17.1 through 4.17.4, all four of which deal with how much class time respondents devote to language and grammar study, reveal that regardless of how much time is involved, they show consistent agreement of attitude. They believe students need to master standard English (68 of 72 respondents, or 94.4%; see Table 4.17.1) and will have greater educational and employment opportunity for having done so (53 of 73 respondents, or 72.6%; see Table 4.17.4), across items. And while they believe all students, regardless of first language or dialect, should be required to use standard English at school (54 of 73 respondents, or 73.9%; see Table 4.17.2), nearly half of them nonetheless feel there *are* valid educational reasons for using non-standard dialects at

school (34 of 73 respondents, or 46.58%; see Table 4.17.3). This first set of four crosstabs also provides the first indication of little-to-no association or influence between attitude and practice. If there *were* an association, for instance, those teachers who devote smaller percentages of class time to language and grammar should more likely have attitudes that differed greatly from those who devote a great percentage of class time to it, which was not the case.

This conclusion becomes more complicated in acknowledging that teachers might spend equal amounts of time in language and grammar study doing many different things for very different purposes – true enough, I would submit, but difficult to determine conclusively from the survey data. I have had to check myself for taking a narrow view that when teachers are addressing language and grammar in their classes, they are doing so only as a means of having students master standard English; it is entirely possible that some might choose to include them as a way of supporting students with other dialects without being prejudicial. For instance, in Table 4.17.2, only three of the 73 respondents admit they *disagree* that students should be required to use standard English at school, and these same three indicate also that they focus on grammar for less than 25% of class time...congruent if the teachers believe that grammar instruction tends to require students to use standard English. However, this same table shows the teachers who *agree* that students should be required to use standard English (27 of the 73) *also* do not teach much grammar (“0-25% of class time). Would they not be more apt to give it a greater percentage of attention, given the importance they believe it carries? From this it does not appear that the amount of time reported in language instruction relates to reported attitude about whether standard English should or should not be required.

A similar indication is evident from an examination of crosstabs 4.17.5 through 4.17.8, which also work as a unit regarding days per week devoted to grammar and language study. Regardless of how many days teachers devote to it, they consistently agree that students need to master standard English, for without doing so, they will have lesser opportunity in education or career – and that while there *are* valid educational reasons to use non-standard dialects at school, all students, regardless of home dialect, should be required to use standard English there, as well. This, too, is puzzling. Logically, smaller numbers and percentages of days per week devoted to language and grammar would align with attitudes indicating no need for students to master standard English, no lessening of opportunity for those who haven't mastered standard, et cetera. Again, however, the responses did not bear this out. But again, a deeper look brings out interesting connections.

For example, in probing further into Tables 4.17.5 – 4.17.8, the unit of four that addresses number of days per week language and grammar are taught, I discovered that 20 of them report doing so 5 days per week. Of that group, there are four who report teaching it for at least 50% of each class period. I could not help but investigate further for similarities among these who apparently do little else besides grammar in their classes. Three of the four teach 90 minute classes each day (all at a high school), while the fourth sees middle school students for 50 minutes daily. Their students are all on- or below-grade-level, with only 1 reported ESOL student among all of their classes. (Apparently, English as L2 is *not* a driving force behind this preponderance of language study, as I had anticipated I would find.) Two of the teachers hold master's degrees; two hold a BA. They have been teaching for 1 year, 5 years, 11 years, and 30 years – so no consistency there.

Regarding their attitude responses, two agreed that “Students should master standard English,” and two were neutral. Three were neutral about students being required to use standard English at school, while one agreed. Three disagreed that there are no valid reasons for using a non-standard dialect at school (one neutral), and on the question of equal educational and workplace opportunity, three agreed and one disagreed.

Crosstabs 4.17.9 through 4.17.12, the final cluster of four centering on how teachers organize and present language and grammar to their students, again show consensus of attitude and language ideology among teachers, regardless of how they chose to do so, which, again, does not hold with the assumption that teachers’ attitudes influence their practices. They all appear to believe in the value of language and grammar instruction, even though some of them address it with considered forethought, and some appear to fit it in if they get the chance.

Yet, it was in this final set of four crosstabs that I at last could see clear indications of an association between attitude and practice, beginning with one cell of Table 4.17.12, the last of the crosstabs. Nine teachers who *disagree* that students who do not master standard English will not have an equal opportunity for academic or workplace success nonetheless indicate they teach grammar and language on a regular basis. I wanted to see if their responses to other attitude items showed a similar thread. With few exceptions, their responses were identical to one another. For “Students need to master standard English,” all nine agreed. For “Students who primarily use non-standard dialects should nonetheless be required to use standard English at school,” seven of the nine agreed, one disagreed, and one remained neutral. For “There are no valid reasons for using non-standard English dialects at school,” seven disagreed, with one undecided and

one neutral. And for the item that prompted my second look in the first place, “Students who have not gained proficiency in standard English will not have equal opportunity for success in higher education and/or the workplace as students who have,” all nine disagreed. Only four responses of the 36 from these nine across the four stated language ideologies varied from the others, and three of those were neutral or undecided, indicating that the respondents are still giving thought and consideration to these matters.

There is a good deal of consistency among them from the general information they provided about themselves and their selected classes as well, with but a few marked differences. All nine teach at a high school, and eight of them have 90-minute classes. (One reports a 70-minute class, also more than an hour a day, interestingly.) Six of them hold graduate degrees (one Ph.D.). Their years of teaching are widely spread, however: 3, 3, 5, 6, 6, 8, 11, 21, and 30. Eight report having groups with very few ESOL (ranging from 0 to 8% of the class), while one reports a class of 50% ESOL students.

Encouraged by what I found in this particular comparison, I probed a bit further on others, as well. None of them provided as clear-cut an indication as the one just described, but there were subtle implications, nonetheless. For instance, in isolating the two (only two, I am glad to report) respondents from Table 4.17.3 who say they teach grammar 76-100% of their class time and *agree* that there are no valid educational reasons for using non-standard dialects in school, these two also claim they *never* acknowledge all students’ dialects or languages to be as valid and welcome as standard English. This presents an unexpected alignment of attitude with practice, a sobering combination of extensive attention to grammar with a rigid, unwelcoming attitude toward those students whose dialects are other than standard. From that same table, there are eight other teachers who say they teach grammar 76-100% of their class time as well, but

who *disagree* that there are no valid educational reasons for using non-standard dialects in school. Among these eight, two also claim they *never* acknowledge all students' dialects as valid and welcome; two say they *sometimes* do, and the other four say they *often* do. This did not show the same level of attitude similarity found in my examination of respondents from Table 4.17.12, but it does appear to move in that direction.

I also cross-tabbed selected *Attitude* items with other *Attitude* items and *Practice* with *Practice* as a further validity check, which served to confirm the implications shown previously. For instance, in crossing two specific items from the *Attitude* question, "What is your major goal in teaching language?" with two specific attitude items from "Part 8, Attitudes toward Language," consistent agreement can be seen among respondents, as shown in the table on the following page. In both cases, the clear majority of respondents agreed ideologically.

Table 4.18

Crosstabs of Selected “Attitudes” with “Attitudes”

		Students will recognize the appropriateness of using different language in different situations or contexts. (N = 34)	Students will acknowledge and respect language diversity. (N = 11)
Students need to master standard English.	Agree	94.1% (32)	81.8% (9)
	Neutral	5.9% (2)	18.2% (2)
	Disagree	0%	0%
	Undecided	0%	0%
No valid reasons for non-standard English	Agree	17.6% (6)	36.4% (4)
	Neutral	20.6% (7)	18.2% (2)
	Disagree	50.0% (17)	45.5% (5)
	Undecided	11.8% (4)	0.0% (0)

Similarly, when I crosstab two *Practices* items from “Part 5, Language Instruction,” the majority percentages and numbers again surface in consistent rows on the chart. Although the percentages and numbers are spread much more evenly, there is still a majority of responses to show that those who “Often” or “Sometimes” emphasize standard American English also “Often” or “Sometimes” recognize all dialects or languages to be as valid and welcome as standard American English. See the following table for these data.

Table 4.19

Crosstabs of Practices “As Part of the Way I Taught Grammar, Usage, and/or Mechanics...”

I emphasized standard American English.

		Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
...I	Often	19	8	0	0
acknowledged	Sometimes	14	4	0	0
all dialects to	Rarely	14	3	0	0
be as valid	Never	10	3	0	0
and welcome					
as standard					
American					
English.					
(N=75)					

Another interesting exercise with the survey data was in disaggregating selected items to get a clearer description of the respondents themselves on those items. I was especially intrigued by those who admitted they “Never” acknowledged students’ alternative dialects/languages as valid and welcome in their classrooms, in Part 5, Question 1. Thirteen claim never to do so; of that group, 2 teach in middle school, 11 in high school. Seven hold a master’s degree, and 4 hold a bachelor’s, while 1 holds a master’s-plus, and 1 holds a bachelor’s-plus. Their years in the classroom break down thus: 1, 2, 2, 2, 5, 5, 5, 8, 9, 9, 14, 16, 30, with no real preponderance in one direction or the other. The mean number of years of teaching for them is 7.31. No other distinguishing personal questions were asked of respondents.

Of the 17 who say they “Rarely” acknowledge alternative dialects or languages, 3 teach in middle school and 14 in high school. Only 5 of this group hold a master’s (none a master’s-plus), while 7 hold a bachelor’s (and 5 a bachelor’s-plus). Years in the classroom for them showed a considerable spread, as well: 1, 1, 1, 2, 3, 3, 4, 4, 5, 6, 6, 7, 7, 9, 16, 32, 34, with a mean of 8.29 years. From these data, it is difficult to discern a clear picture of the type (or age or educational level) of the teachers who do not see all dialects and languages as welcome in the classroom. The preponderance, however, do teach in high school, rather than in middle school.

I also wanted to look more closely at those who claim to find there are no valid educational reasons for non-standard English dialects at school. (Rather, they selected “Agree” to the statement that there are none.) This group numbered 16, and they, too, showed a wide range of years in the classroom: 2, 4, 5, 5, 6, 7, 8, 8, 8, 9, 9, 16, 21, 24, 29, 32 (a mean of 12.06 years). Their degrees included 3 bachelor’s (and 2 bachelor’s-plus),

8 master's (with 2 master's-plus), and 1 Ph.D. Again, more of these taught high school than middle school: 13, as opposed to 3.

A large number of respondents, 37, claim they want their students to recognize the value of different language for different contexts. How can these teachers be described? They are mostly high school teachers, again: 30, versus 7 who teach in middle school. Of these, nine hold a bachelor's degree (10 a bachelor's-plus), 15 hold a master's (and one a master's-plus), while two hold a doctorate. Their years of teaching, again, provide an impressive spread, but no immediate indication of a pattern: 1, 1, 1, 2, 2, 2, 2, 2, 2, 3, 3, 3, 3, 4, 5, 5, 5, 5, 6, 7, 8, 8, 8, 8, 10, 11, 12, 16, 16, 17, 28, 29, 30, 30, 30, 32, 34. The mean in this case is 10.57 years.

Only two respondents indicated they acknowledge all dialects and languages as valid in their classroom *and* that they want their students to recognize the appropriateness of using different language for different situations or contexts *and* that they want their students to acknowledge and respect language diversity *and* that they emphasize the social aspects of language when attending to it in class – yet, they both selected “Agree” to the statement that there are NO valid educational reasons for non-standard English dialects to be used in school. I found this perplexing, so decided to look a little further at their profiles, as well. Both teach in high school, while one holds a master's, the other a master's plus. One has been teaching for eight years, the other for 29.

Although I was expecting to find more consistency or perhaps some pattern among respondents with regard to these selected “attitude” items, I admit I was unable to find either. Nonetheless, troublesome questions arose for me as I analyzed and reported my data, questions centering on issues of inclusion and equity for students whose home language or dialect may not be standard edited American English. In many instances, the

data appear to present an unsettling disconnect – such as, while over 84% of teachers admit to addressing issues of grammar and language in their classrooms, less than half of them claim to be welcoming of non-standard dialects among their students or (to an even lesser extent) to value students’ home dialects in studying standard English – perceptions Nieto (2010) describes thus: “...more consequential than language itself are questions of how language diversity and language use are perceived by schools...” (p. 118). According to Nieto, “...the language dominance of students is not the real issue; rather, the way in which teachers and schools view students’ language may have an even greater influence on their achievement” (p. 118). Although this idea is appearing regularly in the professional literature today (see Gay, 2010 and Cochran-Smith, 2000, for example), I was disconcerted, though frankly, not surprised to see evidence of it on a number of the attitude items on my survey as well. I submit that enough evidence exists in my findings – in the lack of purposeful, consistent grammar and language instruction, in the apparent inconsistencies evident in the data regarding attitude and practice, in the problematic attitudes among some who see students’ home language or dialect as a deficit – to warrant further investigation of the reasons behind the subtle, covert, or even unconscious instructional decisions teachers make (or fail to make) based on what they believe grammar and language study can or cannot do. This, in itself, tells us much about the direction English educators and classroom teachers should be taking in addressing this increasingly critical aspect of our work with the diverse learners in our care. I discuss this in the next chapter.

Chapter Five: Conclusions – and Recommendations for the Classroom

In the April 2011 issue of *English Education*, Smagorinsky posits, “Even with the case against discrete grammar instruction seemingly closed, teachers nonetheless face requirements to teach grammar, often in the isolation that has proven so counterproductive” (p. 265). His assumption that the issue is “seemingly closed” remains bothersome to me, but my literature review in Chapter 2 serves to confirm his claim: indeed, the preponderance of literature from over 100 years presumes that specific instruction in grammar and language holds little value for students, at least in regard to improving student writing. While I submit this conclusion to be flawed, at least, given the inconclusive nature of much research that is cited as conclusive, the assumption has nonetheless held sway in English/language arts classrooms for many decades. As Hillocks reported nearly 30 years ago in his meta-analysis of the extant research on the teaching of writing at the time, “None of the studies reviewed for the present report provides any support for teaching grammar...” (1986, p. 138). Even in Applebee and Langer’s much more recent report on teaching writing using NAEP data from the most recent 30 years, just *one* reference to grammar is included, and that in the context of proofreading (2009). Clearly, the study of grammar and language study has been given little attention for at least the past 30 years.

Despite the wide range of comparisons I ran of *attitude* and *practice* items on my survey, I saw no simple direct relationship between teachers’ attitudes toward language and grammar instruction and the practices they carry out with it in their classrooms; it is somehow more complicated. Their language ideologies are evident, although teachers may not know just how to proceed when it comes to teaching grammar and language. Current literature suggests that language ideologies *do* indeed influence not only the way teachers view their students, but also the expectations they hold for them. Skutnabb-

Kangas (1988) calls this phenomenon *linguicism*, defining it as the “ideologies and structures that are used to legitimate, effectuate, and reproduce an unequal division of power and resources (both material and nonmaterial) between groups that are defined on the basis of language” (p. 13).

Data from Table 4.11 in Chapter 4 show consistent agreement of attitude (among 100% of respondents, in some cases) aligned with specific foci and/or classroom practices regarding grammar and language study. For example, whether they devote a small or a larger portion of time to it, whether they do it daily or once per week, whether they present the material in concentrated units on a regular schedule or whenever there is time, teachers all agree that students need to master standard English, that they are better-prepared for opportunity in education and work by mastering standard English, and that they should be required to use standard English at school. This alignment corroborates Godley and Carpenter’s assertion that “...language ideologies expressed through particular approaches to grammar instruction can reveal the explicit and implicit assumptions about language that teachers and students hold and the literacy learning opportunities such assumptions provide or constrain” (2007, p. 103). We should not underestimate the power of language ideology on the practices carried out in English/language arts classrooms. Important for teachers, as Gay (2010) claims, is “to realize that invariably personal beliefs are embedded in analytical thought, empirical research, and *instructional practices*” (p. 147, emphasis added).

NCTE standards charge that English/language arts teachers will not only “know and respect diversity in language use, patterns, and dialects across cultures, ethnic groups, geographic regions and social roles and show attention to accommodating such diversity in their teaching” (Std. 3.1), *but also* “use their knowledge of English grammars, semantics, syntax ... in

teaching students both oral and written forms of the language. *Both* are critical to the E/LA classroom. Thus, a problem arises when teachers are attending to one but not the other – when, for instance, as my survey data indicate, a wide majority of teachers declare their belief in the educational benefit of proficiency in standard English, but only a small percentage welcome all dialects and languages in their classrooms. The issue is further compounded when nearly all teachers say students need to master standard English, but only a small number want students to acknowledge and respect language diversity. Recurring mismatches such as these, where one standard holds sway but the other is not given the same attention, should give pause to those of us in the field of English and language arts at the very least.

Of equal importance, then, is the issue raised in Smagorinsky’s *second* assertion cited in the opening sentence of this chapter: “...teachers nonetheless face requirements to teach grammar” (2011, p. 264). They *do*. Or they will soon. And they should be, according to state and national standards in place and forthcoming. National Common Core Standards are set to take effect in Maryland in 2012, with grammatical and language skills holding a key position in the English/language arts segment. The following table, taken from the Common Core Standards website, delineates the grammar skills required of students as they progress through school (<http://www.corestandards.org>, 2011).

L.3.1f. Ensure subject-verb and pronoun-antecedent agreement	Grades 3-12
L.3.3a. Choose words and phrases for effect	Grades 3-12
L.4.1f. Produce complete sentences, recognizing and correcting inappropriate fragments and run-ons	Grades 4-12
L.4.1g. Correctly use frequently confused words (e.g., to/too/two; there/their)	Grades 4-12
L.4.3a. Choose words and phrases to convey ideas precisely	Grades 4-12
L.4.3b. Choose punctuation for effect	Grades 4-12
L.5.1d. Recognize and correct inappropriate shifts in verb tense	Grades 5-12
L.5.2a. Use punctuation to separate items in a series	Grades 5-12

L.6.1c. Recognize and correct inappropriate shifts in pronoun number and person	Grades 6-12
L.6.1d. Recognize and correct vague pronouns (i.e., ones with unclear or ambiguous antecedents)	Grades 6-12
L.6.1e. Recognize variations from standard English in their own and others' writing and speaking, and identify and use strategies to improve expression in conventional language.	Grades 6-12
L.6.2a. Use punctuation (commas, parentheses, dashes) to set off nonrestrictive/parenthetical elements	Grades 6-12
L.6.3a. Vary sentence patterns for meaning, reader/listener interest, and style	Grades 6-12
L.6.3b. Maintain consistency in style and tone	Grades 6-12
L.7.1c. Place phrases and clauses within a sentence, recognizing and correcting misplaced and dangling modifiers	Grades 7-12
L.7.3a. Choose language that expresses ideas precisely and concisely, Recognizing and eliminating wordiness and redundancy	Grades 7-12
L.8.1d. Recognize and correct inappropriate shifts in verb voice and mood	Grades 8-12
L.9-10.1a. Use parallel structure	Grades 9-12

Maryland State Department of Education Core Learning Goals for English currently in effect address grammar and language knowledge as well, under “Goal 3: Controlling Language.” Included in these standards are expectations that students know such basic grammatical concepts as parts of speech, verbs and verb phrases, sentences (simple, complex, compound, and compound/complex), mechanics, usage, and spelling, all under the overarching “goal” that “The student will demonstrate understanding of the nature and structure of language, including grammar concepts and skills, to strengthen control of oral and written language” (<http://mdk12.org/instruction/clg/english/goal3.html>). These core learning goals are no longer “voluntary,” as they were when initially adopted; they are mandatory and are to be addressed consistently in all Maryland public schools; they incorporate NCTE language

issues under Standard 6: “Students apply knowledge of language structure, language conventions (e.g., spelling and punctuation), media techniques, figurative language, and genre to create, critique, and discuss print and non-print texts” and Standard 9: “Students develop an understanding of and respect for diversity in language use, patterns, and dialects across cultures, ethnic groups, geographic regions, and social roles” (Maryland State Department of Education, 2011).

With all these standards at play in a given E/LA teacher’s classroom, I am perplexed by the inconsistencies in teachers’ practices and attitudes that surfaced in my investigation. From my findings, it seems that teachers often do not appear to know what to do with or about grammar and language, even as they overwhelmingly agree that students need to master standard English. In the end, I am left with more questions than answers. Logically, there *is* a relationship between attitude and practice: attitude naturally implies a predisposition to act. And certainly, much of the literature on the implications of teachers’ attitudes as discussed in the Rationale section of Chapter One emphasizes the connection. Perhaps English education is not very successful in connecting respect for language with the importance of effective language instruction in our pre-service candidates, ergo, in our practicing teachers as well – which invites several recommendations for classrooms, both at the teacher-preparation level and in secondary public schools.

Recommendation 1: English educators should be addressing language and grammar in coursework for pre-service teachers *and* for classroom teachers, as articulated in NCTE standards. As an initial step, professional development educators and schools of education should take seriously the charge of preparing English and language arts teachers for the linguistic diversity they will encounter in today’s class-

rooms, beginning with basic socio-linguistic tenets: that one dialect is not inherently “better” than any other; that a standard or socially acceptable dialect is arbitrary and subject to change; that most everyone uses language differently in different contexts; that there are political and power implications underlying any study of language. An understanding of these concepts will go a long way in preparing teachers to present them to students. We should also be encouraging in-service English/language arts teachers to reflect on these issues, to examine their own assumptions and beliefs about students’ dialects and language. Schubert & Ayers (1992) call for teachers as “conscientious professionals” to “tune in carefully to the ways their assumptions both guide and are created by practice” (p. ix). As attitudes guide practice, it behooves us to make sure the attitudes are moving practice in a positive direction for student learning. Carpenter and Minnici (2006) note a wide variety of opinions about language diversity among pre-service teachers, but encourage debate and exchange; their work shows that the conversation moves these candidates toward an acceptance of all students’ dialects.

While nearly half of the teachers responding to my survey indicated that they want students to know that different contexts call for different language or register, that number is at the same time disheartening, for it shows that at least half of teachers do *not* consider that to be an important end of their grammar and language lessons. Most troubling in the responses from this set of secondary teachers, however, is how few teachers hope their students will learn to acknowledge and respect language diversity through their grammar and language study. If we believe that education provides an avenue for positive social change, respect for the linguistic diversity of the students in our care is not an option. Not only should teachers encourage children to acknowledge and respect language diversity, they should acknowledge and respect it *themselves*, even as

they endeavor to move students toward proficiency in the standard dialect. “This means developing an awareness that privilege, ethnocentrism, and racism are at the core of policies and practices that limit the use of languages other than officially recognized high-status languages allowed in schools and in the society in general. When particular languages are prohibited or denigrated, the voices of those who speak them are silenced and rejected as well” (Nieto, 2010, 114).

I believe most teachers are sincere in wanting to do what is best for children. Nieto (2010) would agree, stating, “When teachers and schools disregard language minority students’ native languages and cultures, it is generally for what they believe to be good reasons. Schools often link students’ English-language proficiency with their prospective economic and social mobility” (p. 114). But the best of intentions cannot justify the lasting effects that such ideologies can have; “...the negative impact. . .on language minority students,” Nieto concludes, “is incalculable” (2010, p. 117). It is time for all teachers to begin seeing language and dialect diversity as an asset to students and classrooms, not a liability, in all aspects of the E/LA curriculum: language instruction, literature, and writing.

Recommendation Two: We should capitalize on the language students bring into the classroom, using it as an asset and resource in inculcating the standard English dialect teachers believe to be so important to their students’ education and success. According to survey results, teachers indicate that students need good language skills for overall success, both at their present stage of life and in the future. I believe this shows them to be motivated to include grammar in their curricula more by the best interests of their students than from an attitude that “mine is best, yours is deficient in some way, so learn mine or else.” If teachers can be shown the value in applying

students' natural L1 strengths with language and dialect into their instruction, they will more likely see greater success among students for whom standard English would be a positive supplemental dialect. (See Odlin, 1989, and Wheeler & Swords, 2006). Above all, again, teachers' attitudes are key: [W]hile learning new approaches and techniques may be very helpful, *teaching language minority students successfully means above all changing one's attitudes towards the students, their languages and cultures, and their communities* [Cummins 1996; Nieto 1999]" (Nieto, 2010, p. 124).

"Children develop the language that is used in their home environment, and they bring it to the classroom. This rich knowledge provides the basis for further language development, the means for acquiring concepts, and an important aspect of their identities" (Prater, 2009, p. 21). Much of the literature on culturally responsive teaching provides examples of activities and practices that attend to this; also, Benjamin & Oliva (2007), Wheeler & Swords (2006), and Delpit (1995) offer suggestions for effective ways to accomplish it. Teachers bear a great responsibility to nurture students' linguistic talents, to build upon them in the process of working to inculcate another dialect or language, a new or unfamiliar academic register. Dyson (2010) calls for a "participatory culture" in classrooms, "where there is not a linguistically proper 'us' and an improper 'them' to be fixed. Rather, there is a "we" that embodies distinctive linguistic and sociocultural histories that intersect to open a classroom world to the larger society. Such a classroom requires a particular ideological foundation" (p. 314).

To this end, Geneva Gay (2010) encourages activities that "begin the process of translating general beliefs [of teachers] into specific instructional behaviors; to see that beliefs and behaviors are interconnected; and to give practical meaning to the theoretical idea of incorporating cultural diversity into other areas of teaching and learning" (p. 149).

Aligning these to optimize academic achievement for *all* students, including those whose dialect or language is other than mainstream, I submit, is among the greatest challenges we face in American education in the 21st century.

Recommendation Three: Beyond the basic linguistic tenets cited in Recommendation One above, a course in (or review of) traditional “grammar school” grammar and terminology might benefit those who intend to teach English.

How teachers go about incorporating grammar study into their routine is important. NCTE recommends that it be conducted in context of student need or interest, not in isolated units that decontextualize it from other aspects of the curriculum. Data from the survey indicate that teachers are often unsure of how to address grammar and language in their classrooms. As language itself informs and is the medium through which literature and writing are studied, it only makes sense to include it as a natural part of the reading and writing students are doing. If it is being taught by teachers who lack confidence with it or who see it as “better” than non-standard dialects or home languages other than English, the very fact that they’re “teaching” it may be doing more harm than good. Knowing the basic terminology of the language they are teaching is key. And probably most important in considering specific classroom practice with grammar and language is incorporating activities that capitalize on the linguistic strengths students bring with them to class.

Chapter 6: Questions for Further Research and General Discussion

For each of the six research questions addressed in this investigation, I now offer questions for further research and/or ideas for general discussion. I continue the chapter with a discussion of implications for the secondary E/LA classroom, the study's limitations, then a personal conclusion.

Research Question 1: What are teachers' self-reported attitudes toward English language/grammar instruction?

Nearly all teachers responding to this question (94.4%) agree that students need to master standard English, as it will improve their ability to understand and communicate concepts and information. Nearly three-fourths of them (over 72%) agree that all students should be required to use standard English at school and that students who have not gained proficiency in standard English will not have an equal opportunity for success in higher education or the workplace as those who have. Nearly half, however (47.2%), believe there are valid reasons for using non-standard dialects in school, and more than one-third (36.1%) believe that learners of English need not be taught solely in English.

Questions for Further Research or Investigation: 1) How have teachers come to believe so strongly that proficiency in standard English is of such benefit to students, especially in light of much research (see Chapter 2) that would discredit its value in writing and reading? 2) What do teachers see, or what are they using, as the "valid educational reasons for using non-standard dialects in school"? 3) If shown to be valuable, how can those "valid educational practices" be disseminated among other teachers in schools throughout the jurisdiction?

Research Question 2: What language ideology do teachers report as driving or prompting that English language/grammar instruction?

Teachers' language ideologies, or their beliefs about what language and grammar study can do, can be seen in their motivation behind including it in their curriculum and by the things they emphasize or consider when they address it. From their responses, nearly 80% of them (62 of 78) believe it "develops necessary skills for reading and writing." With that as their primary motivation, nearly as many of them (58 of 76) *Often* "emphasize standard edited American English" in their teaching of grammar, while only 36% (27 of 75) *Often* "acknowledge all students' dialects/language to be as valid and welcome as standard edited American English." Nearly 30% (22 of 78) report they include language and grammar only because the county requires it, and just 35 of 78 (about 45%) believe studying it will "develop knowledge and skills for success in other school and work activities."

For the two response options under *why* teachers include grammar and language study that deal with "developing skills," I am intrigued by the wide discrepancy of responses between developing skills for reading and writing (79.5%), and for developing skills for other school and work activities (just 44.9%). These two items, I submit, are more intertwined than the responses suggest, given that reading and writing skill should augment most other school and work activities – and assuming grammar study indeed contributes to the development of reading and writing skill, which remains unresolved.

While it does not appear to be a major motivation, grammar and language study is now required by the county; 22 respondents (28.2%) cited that as the reason they include it in their curricula. When I was a middle school teacher, as noted in the introductory pages of this paper, the study was not only *not* required by the county, it was earnestly discouraged. This is a major change over the 5 -7 years since I have left the classroom. Too, I understand from my current university work in local counties that

grammar/composition books are now a staple of every English and language arts classroom – another big change. To confirm my impressions on this, I decided it would be helpful to speak with someone directly involved. It had to be an informal, unofficial interview, however, because nothing like this was included on my IRB approval from the university or in my approval from the county.

For these reasons, I contacted a colleague who now teaches in Parker County, who has been working there for many years and is quite familiar with its curriculum and practice. We met for dinner one night to discuss my project. She confirmed my understanding that grammar/comp books are now in every classroom (“The books are in the classroom, but the time schedule really does not allow us to include it [grammar] as we should.”) and that while the curriculum does address grammar, it is not given a priority by the E/LA teachers with whom she works. She left me with two ideas for bringing life to language and grammar study in our classrooms: 1) “It would be great to ask children from other cultures about that grammar piece” and how it figured in their earlier educational experience, and 2) “Empower the parents.” She repeated this last several times during our conversation, emphasizing that parents are often the most interested, but least included, stake-holders in their children’s linguistic education. Together, these two recommendations align nicely with Souto-Manning’s (2010) charge: “By paying close attention to children’s speech events and learning from their cultural and linguistic resources [including parents], teachers can open doors to the opportunities provided by multiple languages and cultural practices” (p. 258).

Questions for Further Research or Investigation: 1) How can we ensure that teachers are using students’ home dialect or language to best advantage in instructing them in the current standard? 2) What are the best ways of bringing students’ own

cultures (and parental influence) into our E/LA classrooms? 3) How much do teachers' ideologies or language preferences actually *interfere* with students' learning the current standard rather than assist in the process? 4) What are the best ways of broadening teachers' beliefs about making the best use of the dialects students bring to the classroom?

Research Question 3: From teachers' reports, what do they perceive as the desired end of the English language/grammar instruction carried out in their classroom?

The goal teachers indicate they seek most for their students is "proficiency in standard English in their oral communication and in their writing" – 70.9% of them say so. Closely aligned with this is their desire to have students "perform well on the language portions of county, state, and/or national standardized tests." Close to half of them, 46.8%, hope their students will "recognize the appropriateness of using different language in different situations or contexts," but a mere 15.2% claim they would like to see their students "acknowledge and respect language diversity."

It is likely safe to assume that students who show proficiency in standard English will also perform well on language portions of tests, although one does not necessarily imply the other. Without a clear definition of *proficiency*, however, I am left wondering whether teachers mean by it eliminating errors, manipulating sentences, or just what. If simple "communication" is indeed the desired end, adherence to every arbitrary grammatical rule, of course, is not necessary. And the "right" answers on standardized tests are often open to argument, even among scholars, and subject to change over time.

Questions for Further Research or Investigation: 1) What do we mean by "proficiency" in standard English, and how is it communicated in speaking and writing?

What does proficiency look like? 2) How can teacher education and in-service professional development be utilized in broadening teachers' own perspectives about language? Does standardized testing, at any level, supplement or inhibit the inculcation of standard English usage among students whose L1 is not standard English?

Research Question 4: How much English language/grammar instruction is taking place in a given teacher's Parker County E/LA classroom, according to their self-reports?

Nearly 85% of respondents indicate they do "incorporate specific language study into [their] curriculum," and over 42% claim to do so "on a regular schedule," indicating a purposeful plan in carrying it out. A strong majority (60.3%) address grammar and language just one or two days per week, although more than one quarter of them (25.6%) actually attend to it at least a bit every day. An even 50% of teachers allow one quarter or less of class time for grammar. "Newer" teachers, those with 5 years or fewer in the classroom, appear to be teaching grammar in great number. Of real importance is that teachers be provided the *time* necessary for incorporating grammar and language into their day. Teachers whose classes were 70 minutes or long in duration were more likely to address these critical issues.

Questions for Further Research or Investigation: 1) Do teachers integrate language and grammar discussions seamlessly into the other areas of the English and language arts curriculum, or do they tend to "isolate" grammar as something disjointed from literature and writing? 2) How "comfortable" do teachers feel in addressing issues of grammar and language with their students? Would they appreciate and attend workshops or seminars in grammar and/or in the best ways of teaching it naturally to students? 3) Do students who have had specific instruction in grammar and usage

manipulate it to their advantage in writing better than students who have not, given a case in which both groups are strong readers and writers at the outset? In other words, is there any value for student writing from their having a working knowledge of grammatical terms and/or a good understanding of the political and arbitrary assignation of “standard” English? 4) Are teachers who support language diversity likely to be teaching language or not? 5) Have English educators been able to help teachers know how to support language variation in their instruction? 6) Do teachers continue to ignore language instruction, just hoping students who are not proficient in standard English use will somehow “catch it” by osmosis?

Research Question 5: What specific practices do teachers report they carry out in English language/grammar instruction?

Underlying teachers’ practices is an “emphasis on standard American English,” even as they “explain terms and rules,” “review examples,” have students “complete exercises from texts and worksheets,” and assign/review homework in grammar. There is some sentence combining and transformation (48.6% of teachers admit to doing this), and 40.5% of teachers *Sometimes* use students’ own writing as a source for material to review and/or edit. They have students identify examples of language terms or rules, identify and correct standard English errors in anonymous writing samples, and take tests on grammar that teachers either design themselves or take from published texts.

There is no consistency or consensus among teachers in what they do with instruction in grammar and language or how they do it. Only one item, in fact, having students select the correct word or form to complete a sentence in standard English, drew more than 50% of responses, and that was just 52.8% of teachers who report they only do it *Sometimes*. Also, the one activity all teachers say they never do is diagram sentences,

which seems strange to me, given the abundance of research on the benefit of graphic organizers in clarifying information for students. (See Marzano, Pickering, and Pollack, 2001, Chapter 2.) Sentence diagrams are likely one of the simplest, most straightforward means of showing students how various components of a sentence work together, complement each other, and can be manipulated for rhetorical effect in their writing. But it is one of those “old school” strategies that has not been done with any regularity for a long time, and many would likely agree there is no reason to resurrect the practice. Perhaps it would be beneficial to call it something else and appreciate it with new eyes.

Questions for Further Research or Investigation: 1) What practices and strategies are most relevant and beneficial for students in moving them toward an understanding of this language they so naturally use to communicate? 2) What is the best way to present these strategies? 3) Why would teachers continue to do things that have not been shown to have any value in improving student communication? 4) Which practices can be dropped, and which should be implemented to give students a real understanding of their language and how it is used? 5) How do other jurisdictions approach this issue, and what results in student achievement have been seen in those jurisdictions?

Research Question 6: Do teachers' reported attitudes toward language/grammar instruction influence how much it is taught in their classrooms, according to their reports?

Questions for Further Research or Investigation: 1) How much coursework or continuing education have teachers experienced regarding their personal language ideologies? 2) Are teachers cognizant of their biases against highly-stigmatized American dialects, such as AAVE, Appalachian English, and others, if, as some researchers claim (see Bowie & Bond, 1994; Cazden, 2001; Ferguson, 1998), those biases do exist?

Implications for Classroom Teachers

If teachers' attitudes toward grammar instruction and toward students' own language usage and proficiency are indeed linked to what they do and say about grammar and language in their classrooms – and if attitudes influence how teachers go about teaching and how they respond to those students and their dialects (“attitudes and beliefs are paramount in determining instructional behaviors”[Dyson, 2010, p. 150]), I submit that this issue of grammar and language instruction (or lack thereof) merits considerably more attention than it has received over the past two or three decades. “Never in the history of education in the United States has there been a more urgent need for educators to ... create literacy classrooms that meet the needs of linguistically and culturally diverse learners” (Boyd, et al., 2006, p. 329). Admittedly, the pendulum has likely begun to swing from the complete avoidance of grammar I saw during my years in the classroom to a greater acceptance of it as a natural extension of the curriculum, as shown in survey responses here. This is good, so long as teachers are truly embracing the wide variety of dialect and language their students bring to class, are creating a welcoming and safe environment for students to explore their own and others' dialects and language, and are using students' considerable innate skill with language to introduce and encourage this “other” dialect of schooling, standard English (Schleppegrell, 2004). It is possible – and necessary – to do so, as Delpit & Dowdy (2002) urge. “To protect diverse students from cultural domination, absorption, and social marginalization, such instruction [in standard English grammar and usage] is not optional” (p. 301). Dyson (2010) also acknowledges the “schools' responsibility to stretch children's language repertoire to include a standardized English, [...especially] necessary given the dominant society's centripetal or homogenizing forces” (p. 314).

A consistent curricular design, including scope and sequence, would be helpful in ensuring all students are given the benefit of exposure to these topics. And teachers should know the basic terminology and nomenclature of the grammar of English. Math teachers make no apologies for requiring students to know a triangle from a trapezoid. Science teachers make sure students can distinguish a protozoan from a primate. English teachers need to know a verb from a preposition in order to convey that grammatical concept to their students. It will not be enough to hand teachers an inclusive grammar curriculum if those teachers personally do not feel adequately prepared to discuss or teach the material. In my university work in our partnering counties near the university, I am hearing from interns that they are required to “teach grammar,” but they often feel unprepared to do so, having had very little specific instruction in it over the years. As English majors, they usually feel competent in their own use of grammar and language, but they often are not knowledgeable enough about grammatical terminology to discuss it with students or to instruct them in its use.

Both new and practicing teachers would benefit from bringing consistency and design to grammar and language instruction, from elementary school through high school. Continuing education and/or in-service programs addressing grammar and language would be invaluable. Many teachers would welcome them, especially if taught by someone who not only knows the material, but knows (and can demonstrate) *how to teach it*.

Limitations of the Study

1. Reliance on the self-report survey alone

Even the most carefully constructed survey has limitations when it is the sole source of data. I recognize my study would have been enhanced had I supplemented it with other

data sources as well, such as close classroom observations of teacher practices and/or interviews with selected teacher respondents or their students, as Burns did in her 1984 dissertation study. Not only could these have provided substantiation for the teachers' reports, they could also have provided a much clearer look into attitudes and practices, as well as a richer examination of students' classroom experience with language in general and grammar specifically.

2. Reliability

Results would have been more reliable had a larger number of teachers chosen to respond to my survey. Then too, many of the schools' websites either did not include teachers' email addresses or contained outdated information, which severely limited the number of surveys that went out. Dependent as I was upon publically available contact information, this greatly limited the number of survey requests I was able to send. Too, given teachers' myriad obligations and tight schedules, many who did receive the survey may have been unwilling or unable to participate because of serious time constraints. While some of my concerns on response rate were reduced by the research shown in Chapter 3, Methodology, the study would be more robust if there had been a higher rate of response.

3. Respondent bias

In addition, given the subject matter of the survey, those who chose to respond may have been only those who were predisposed to emphasize grammar instruction in their classes anyway, as opposed to those who tend to avoid it – which could have skewed the results.

4. Instrument validity

One very real limitation may be in the validity of the teachers' retrospective self-reports. Because the study asked teachers to recall their activities without benefit of prior notification to keep a record of those activities, there is an assumption that the details

they relate are accurate, which may or may not be true. Fabiano (1999) warns, “The level of detail, sensitivity to an issue, and the respondent’s ability to accurately recall affect the quality of data gathered from teacher self-reports” (p. 7). Also, because there are grammar pieces now required by the Parker County curriculum, some teachers may have unintentionally indicated they did more to fulfill it than they actually did.

5. Instrument format

Several segments of the survey itself could have been better constructed. For instance, when instructions for a question indicated that respondents should select just one best answer, I could have programmed the system to prevent more than one answer from being recorded. Some respondents selected more than one answer to those items, despite the instructions. Another issue was the wording on some of the individual items; a negatively-phrased item on a positively-phrased list, when answered with “Disagree,” could cause unnecessary confusion in reporting the responses.

6. Sequencing of selections

One last observation here: As teachers moved through the survey, the number of items they skipped ranged from 6 or 7 in the early questions to progressively more as they got toward the end. The attitudes section was last on the survey, and more respondents (18 of them) skipped it than any other. I might have received a better return on this critical section by having placed it earlier in the instrument.

Closing Thought

I taught middle school during the MSPAP years, and all teachers were then required on testing days to hang a huge poster featuring an icon of a hand holding a pencil. The caption read: “This symbol beside a question means your response will be graded for grammar, punctuation, usage and mechanics. Proofread your answer

carefully.” – or language closely akin to that. I reviewed the poster with my students early in the year, surprised to find that “punctuation” was the only term they appeared to understand. As I have mentioned before, however, I was not allowed to work with them on grammar, usage, and mechanics; it was not part of the curriculum, and it wasted time they could be using to write. Why then, I begged, would they be held to a standard they had not been taught? Leaving writing completely out of the equation, how could we justify testing students on “grammar, punctuation, usage, and mechanics,” concepts that meant little to them and on which they had had no specific instruction, concepts we *hoped – but cannot assume* they had picked up, somehow, through their own reading and writing? Studies from the twentieth century and into the present era (see Chapter 2) have not shown absolutely that grammar instruction has or has not provided measurable benefit to students, either in their writing or in other aspects of schooling, despite how often claims to that effect are made. My own students, about 90% minority speakers of dialects other than “standard” English, were nonetheless to be scored and compared on the MSPAP tests to students across the state for whom “standard” *was* the primary dialect or for whom county curricula promoted grammar and usage instruction. As expected, my county’s students often fared poorly on such tests, in such comparisons. Admittedly, many other variables contributed to their performance. But I knew how I would feel if I found myself tested on material I had never been taught – yet having that test *matter*. My indignation at the unfairness of it all was the catalyst for my returning to UM, to study this mystifying phenomenon and ultimately, to propose this study of teachers’ attitudes and practices regarding grammar and language. The findings of my study have served to strengthen and support my conviction that issues of grammar and language instruction are timely and expedient – are, indeed, issues of equity and justice.

One's zip code, socio-economic status, dialect of birth, first language, race, ethnicity, religion, or any other factor should not stand in the way of educational opportunity in this country. *Not* to give every child (especially those who might come to school without the advantages of their more privileged peers) access to the current power language is, at best, an egregious omission and, at worst, a reprehensible intention to maintain the status quo. Giving every child access to the power language requires no less than diligent, persistent attention to it, including its political underside.

We might agree that gatekeeping tests and standards are unfair, but they are in place nonetheless, as entrenched as "standard" English is as the power language of academia and enterprise. That is unlikely to change anytime soon. Even here at the University of Maryland, grade-point averages and entrance essays are critical to admission. Certification to teach depends upon test scores and writing ability. How can we think it acceptable to hold students to a standard we are not willing to divulge to them? We here have the linguistic edge. We can keep it to ourselves. But we do so at our peril.

This is where attitudes and practices regarding grammar and language are critical and where my study is of real benefit. What teachers are teaching about grammar and language *does* matter. What they *think* of their students' language, conscious or not, expressed or not, matters, too. We need to be precise about what we are thinking and doing *now* so we can improve what we are thinking and doing in the days and years ahead.

Exposure to and skill with the grammar of our language can enable students to feel comfortable and confident with their own dialect; to see the beauty and validity of all dialects; to move with aplomb through situations requiring a variety of dialect; to

recognize the arbitrary “standard” as just that, but also to become adept at manipulating that dialect as necessary to accomplish their goals and dreams. I am convinced that moving students toward skill with language is enhanced greatly by specific grammar instruction over a period of years, with a sequenced curriculum appropriate to students’ age and familiarity with the standard, and I stand ready to begin research on some of the questions raised by my current study. As we continue the pursuit of quality education for all, we must give issues of language and grammar a more significant – even central – role in the English/language arts curriculum at all levels. There is much to learn – and much work to be done.

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