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Eighth Graders' Approaches to Reading Analysis as Compared with the PSSA's Application of
Common Core Standards

A Dissertation

Presented to the Faculty of the
College of Education and Social Work

West Chester University

West Chester, PA

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the

Degree of

Doctor of Education

By

John M. Phillips

April 2023

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to Anna and Nathan. May mermaids and dragons always be real, and may you never lose your love of stories.

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This dissertation would not have been possible without the dedication, commitment, and assistance of so many others. First, my family. Kiera, I could not have completed this work without your support and encouragement. You were there to tell me when to take a break, support me when I struggled, and celebrate with me when I met goals. Thank you for all the sacrifices you made so I could pursue this dream. Anna and Nathan, thank you for always reminding me to never take things too seriously and for all the hugs when I needed them most. I cannot believe how much you two have grown.

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Abstract

States administer standardized tests such as the PSSAs to students each year to assess student mastery of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS). Many argued the CCSS and close reading are reincarnations of new criticism (Tampio, 2018), but CCSS creators did not cite empirical research showing students approached literary analysis through close reading or new criticism (Dewitz & Graves, 2021; Hinchman & Moore, 2013). In opposition of new criticism, Rosenblatt (1978) argued for transactional reading with her reader response theory. In order to examine how students make meaning of texts, this study used a simultaneous mixed-methods QUAL-QUAL design (Morse, 2010) to examine the research question, *How does the literary analysis approach of eighth-grade students compare to the reading paradigm utilized on the (PSSA)?* The first qualitative component was a document analysis of PSSA released items from 2015, 2021, and 2022 to examine the question, *What reading paradigm do the text-dependent analysis questions align with on the eighth-grade PSSA?* The second qualitative component was a case study of nine eighth-grade students attending a suburban middle school reading and responding to texts from the 2021 PSSA released items to examine the question, *How do eighth-grade students in a Pennsylvania middle school approach literary analysis?* I concluded the PSSA text dependent analysis questions do not directly align with new criticism but approach analysis as task driven and text-based, while students begin their analysis with concrete text references but later shift to transactional analysis.

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Chapter I: Introduction

Normally Mr. Marshall's 8th-grade language arts class is abuzz with discussion, but this week it is full of stress, anxiety, and tests. These standardized testing days look very different from a typical school day. The low hum of the air conditioner and the scribbling of pencils provide ambient noise in an otherwise silent classroom. Every now and then, the rubbing of an eraser adds to the noise, "No talking permitted!"

A student, Max, who normally participates in class with insightful world views and unique experiences, raises his hand. Mr. Marshall walks through the spaced rows of desks slowly, knowing that Max's question would probably not be one Mr. Marshall is allowed to answer. Nervous energy erupts in Mr. Marshall because Max surely has a question about the content of the test and testing security and conduct, if broken, comes with heavy ramifications. When Mr. Marshall arrives, Max whispers, "Does this question want me to talk about human nature or nature, like in, nature?" Instructed only to answer questions that clarify directions, Mr. Marshall sighs, "I cannot answer that, just try your best." Max's face drops.

What is "right" when responding to literature? As he walked away, Mr. Marshall hopes Max chooses the answer aligned with what the test scorers expected but wishes he could have opened Max's question up to the class for discussion, because Max's insightful question would have led to his peers sharing thoughtful insights. Instead of discussing Max's question as a class, Mr. Marshall's students sit quietly for three hours, three days in a row, having signed a document stating they would not discuss the test with anyone. They read multiple texts in a sitting, answer a few questions about each (with no discussion), and move on. His students write two essays in two days with no time to process, revise, or gain feedback from peers or instructors. Someone created each of the questions on the test, and Mr. Marshall will never have that person in his

classroom. Unlike the typical school days of discussion, feedback, revising, and learning, this day – a Pennsylvania State Standards Assessment (PSSA) testing day – led to a room of silent students passively answering questions rather than connecting their reading to themselves, their peers, and their world.

In preparation for these three testing days, Mr. Marshall spent countless hours in meetings about student data from past tests, discussions of standard-aligned interventions for struggling students, and curriculum meetings where he helped isolate each reading standard making sure he taught all of them. Mr. Marshall's overall mission is to help students learn to use both text features and the text itself to make meaning. In one of these meetings, Mr. Marshall sat and considered why he became an English teacher since the reading instruction aligned to the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) does not align with his beliefs about literature and its power.

Mr. Marshall's story is not unique to this one classroom. Instead, this experience exists in classrooms all over America. With states' adoptions of the CCSS, literature seems to be taught as a puzzle to solve with an answer to find instead of a piece of art for students to appreciate, consider, discuss, and create. In this dissertation, I challenge the existing paradigm of teaching literary analysis by examining both the CCSS and eighth graders' approaches to literary analysis. Schools teaching the close reading approach within the CCSS remove the student from the act of reading and focus reading instruction on building knowledge. While reading does help add to a student's knowledge base, the focus on gaining knowledge seemingly limits the purpose of reading literature to a monolithic outcome.

I propose language art classes return to the humanity of literature. In my view, once a student can read fluently enough to appreciate the art of literature, teachers should give the

meaning-making process needed to the students. Art is meant to evoke thought and emotion, not dictate thought and emotion. By recognizing art evokes something in us, we can allow ourselves to be transported into other worlds or other lives through art (Greene, 1987). Art expands our experiences, connects our differences, widens our worldview, and helps us “...learn to learn” (Greene, 1987, p. 20). What an individual sees in art is personal; when art is discussed and debated, it is transformative, and when teachers boil art down to one correct answer, it is meaningless. My view of literature, however, begs the question, what do students find meaningful in literature?

In this dissertation, I will examine how the meaning making process of eighth graders compares to the Pennsylvania Department of Education's (PDE) application of the CCSS on the PSSA. Throughout this chapter, I will explore the current standardized testing culture and how that culture led to the virtually nationwide implementation of the CCSS. Next, I will discuss how corporations, businesses, and real estate entities hold a stake in both the CCSS and standardized testing. Then, I will discuss my positionality and views of reading instruction. After, I will detail the current problem of how the close reading paradigm, where students extract meaning from the text itself, has pushed teachers to teach monolithic reading instruction and may be partially responsible for stagnant test scores. Overall, I will detail my research purpose, rationale, questions, design, and limitations. I will provide a definition of the terms at the end of the chapter. Overall, in this chapter and throughout this dissertation, I will examine both how students make meaning of texts and how that process aligns with the expected outcomes of standardized testing.

Standardized Testing and the CCSS

In the early 1990s individual states had their own set of standards and standardized testing to determine the proficiency of their students in reading and math among other topics (Common Core Standards Initiative, 2022). In order to create commonality in educational outcomes among states, governors, corporations, and state school officials worked together on a state-led initiative to create the CCSS (Common Core Standards Initiative, 2022). Along with these stakeholders, Coleman and Pimental (2011), the lead “architects” of the CCSS, created standards to address (a) the educational deficit America saw when compared to the educational outcomes of other developed countries, and (b) the problem of students leaving public education ill-prepared for college or a future career (Common Core Standards Initiative, 2022). To address the deficit, the group created the standards in two phases. First, state governors and school officials determined what it meant for students to be college and career ready. Then, the group determined expectations of skills students at each grade level should know in order to work towards college and career readiness (Common Core Standards Initiative, 2022).

While the standards themselves seem commendable, standards lead to standardized testing and accountability measures (Shanahan, 2015; Thomas, 2014). The history of standardized testing is wrought with systemic power dynamics primarily connecting to class and race (Cunningham, 2019). Modern standardized testing carried out under the CCSS’s predecessor, the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), had important success in illuminating the achievement gap (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.); but since uncovering the gap, scores have remained the same, or in some cases, declined (Wexler, 2019). In the standardized testing era of public schools, multiple decisions about children stemmed not from the children in our school

systems, but from what those school systems and standardized testing could achieve for big business (Carillo, 2019; Delevingne, 2015; Endacott & Goering, 2014).

Business of Testing

At the inception of the CCSS, many business leaders were in full support of the adaptation of the standards (Elkind, 2015). For instance, Bill Gates provided large funds for the creation of the standards and garnered the political support needed for the standards creation and adoption (Elkind, 2015). In addition, an ExxonMobil executive wrote a letter in 2014 to the Pennsylvania governor, Tom Corbett, encouraging him to adopt the standards for Pennsylvania, all while highlighting the amount of business ExxonMobil does in Pennsylvania (Elkind, 2015). Business leaders seemingly saw the CCSS as a means to achieve a way to influence content taught in school to better align with business ideas and values.

Standardized testing connects to multiple areas of business and financial gain. Real estate markets fluctuate greatly based on school district standardized test scores as property values rise and decline depending on the standardized test results of schools in the area (Schneider, 2017). Many parents view test scores as a determining factor in a good school versus a bad school, and middle to upper-class parents have the means to buy houses in districts with high test scores (Hasan & Kumar, 2019; Nguyen-Hoang & Yinger, 2011; Schneider, 2017). School funding is predicated on property tax, so higher home prices mean more school funding, and more school funding means higher test scores (Nguyen-Hoang & Yinger, 2011; Schneider, 2017). Student economic status determines test scores more than any other factor, so standardized testing perpetuates class segregation between and even within school districts (Schneider, 2017).

Colleges have used test scores to determine entrance criteria, and tests such as the SATs and ACTs are created by large companies such as Pearson (creators of standardized tests and

publishers of test prep materials), College Board (publishers of the SATs), and ACT Inc. (publishers of the ACT). These companies also own multiple curriculum programs, test prep programs, and diagnostic tests to help determine how students will perform in relation to college entrance tests, so these companies can sell educational materials to help students pass the for-profit tests. States have also given millions of dollars to companies like Pearson, Houghton Mifflin Holt, and Apple in order to develop CCSS-aligned products (Delevingne, 2015).

Developing the standards for businesses was seemingly a high priority for those creating the standards as phase one of the standards creation consisted of the state officials deciding college and career readiness standards (Common Core Standards Initiative, 2022). In theory, college entrance exams demonstrate a student's ability and aptitude in college readiness, so it stands to reason the standards are based on helping students achieve high scores on the entrance exams and K-12 state exams, such as Pennsylvania's PSSA, predict a student's progress towards success on future exams. However, many have challenged the practice of standardized testing stating the outcomes are steeped in inequities in both race and class (Cunningham, 2019; Knoester & Au, 2019; Petts & Garza, 2021).

Multiple factors converged to create the testing climate found in schools today. In this case, politics, businesses, colleges, and public education created the CCSS, but the federal government left the states in charge of standard implementation (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2022), and Pennsylvania left schools in charge of aligning public education curriculum frameworks to standards in order to garner success on standards-based assessments.

Pennsylvania provided support to schools through PDE Standards Aligned System (Standards Aligned System 2022), but Pennsylvania has not implemented a state-wide curriculum or provided an in-depth description of how to successfully teach each standard. I see reading

curricula and expectations as a casualty of this top-down approach from big business and politics to public schools. State's implementation of the CCSS perpetuated a business of testing and has potentially led to close reading practices with an eye to improving business outcomes rather than reading outcomes.

While conducting this research study I took a reflexive stance and examined my own beliefs as I considered what reading outcomes and purposes schools should pursue. My beliefs center around my school experience with literature both as a teacher and student. I entered school in 1995 when the PSSAs were an established part of Pennsylvania's public education, so I have experienced the testing era as both a student and a teacher. In this next section, I will detail my experiences with literature as both a teacher and student by examining my positionality and views surrounding the purpose of reading.

Positionality

I became an English teacher because of my personal experiences with literature. One of my favorite childhood memories is of my mom reading to me every night before I went to sleep. I remember *Where the Wild Things Are* (Sendak, 1963) above most other picture books, and I am not sure why, but as I think about it now, I think it is the idea of a wild world outside of the real one that a child can access. After the lights were out and my mom left my room, I remember journeying out of my bed and into a world fueled by the story. In the book, the main character Max's room transforms into a new wild world, and my room would, too. The best part about the world in my room is it could be whatever I wanted.

I have a four-year-old daughter and a one-year-old son, and their bedtime ritual is like mine as a child. My son sits on my lap giggling and smiling at the colorful images in his books and reaches out as if he is trying to grab the pictures off the page. My daughter and I read, I say

goodnight, and her room transforms into a world of her own. I stand outside her door, and I hear her making elaborate games stemming from the characters and events of the story we read.

I believe this idea is central to Rosenblatt's (1978) reader-response theory. I (and my children) had an emotional experience related to the reading of texts, yet I fear the CCSS and the emphasis on new critical (text-dependent) responses pushes emotional responses out of the language arts classroom and instead centers responses on the text itself and not the student in tandem with the text. Because of this fear, I find exploring students' analytical approaches important. I wonder, are students making transactional connections to texts?

As I grew up, picture books turned into chapter books. I laid in my bed and listened to my mom read *Harry Potter* (Rowling, 1997). I marveled again at the magic world the book created and the main character, close to my age, having the trust of the adults, the answers to the problems, and the friends to support him. I grew as the *Harry Potter* books came out, attended midnight release parties at bookstores, and imagined what life would be like at Hogwarts. Something changed, though. I no longer went to Hogwarts as I went to the world in *Where the Wild Things Are*. This change probably happens to most people. People grow up and stop pretending. People live in the real world; the real world, in this case, was middle school followed by high school.

I stopped reading much in middle school because I stopped caring about books and stopped seeking out the magical worlds they could create. Reading became a chore because it was no longer about what I took from the book or where the book took my imagination, but about what my teachers wanted me to find in the book. This very issue is what I find to be the root of the problem in modern education surrounding reading instruction. Education seems to

care a lot more about generating a number or level at which a child can read instead of exploring what that child does because they read.

Because I read, I played, I thought, I imagined, I wondered. However, while following the CCSS, teachers ask students to find text evidence to support the author's main idea instead of connecting to the book and considering the new perspectives and outlooks the book might present to the students. In my opinion, language arts class no longer centers around the experiences books create but heavily focuses on predetermined outcomes a small excerpt or passage of a book offers. The students write essays on topics they did not choose and fill out multiple-choice questions about the text. These students are then assessed on their reading ability through high-stakes CCSS-aligned state testing.

When I stopped reading, I was placed in the "lowest" language arts class, and I started to hate reading. My disdain for reading continued through tenth grade. During high school, I was met with multiple obstacles in life. I experienced my parents getting a divorce, clinical depression and anxiety, death and tragedy as a volunteer fight-fighter EMT, post-traumatic stress disorder from my volunteer work, and multiple other challenges teenagers face as they come of age. Fortunately, in eleventh grade, I met Holden Caulfield (Salinger, 1951). This character embodied teenage angst and hated everything about the system and the phonies, and I saw myself in him. Holden and I faced different obstacles, but he helped me rationalize my emotions. I was so mesmerized by his vision of being a catcher in the rye field.

As I think back on Holden's rye field now, middle school (the age group I teach) is when most people fall off the cliff Holden is working so hard to protect. We start to see the evil in the world and lose our innocence and sense of trust in humanity. I connected with Salinger's (1951)

metaphorical cliff a great deal. *Catcher in the Rye* (Salinger, 1951) was the first book that made me question life, question my goals, and question my morals.

The best thing that happened in my eleventh-grade English class was not Holden, though, it was what my class did when we met Holden. We talked about *Catcher in the Rye* (Salinger, 1951) with no test hanging over our heads. The classroom was conversation-based, dominated by ideas, experiences, and inquiry where there was no right or wrong answer. My love of reading was restored in this classroom, and I eventually pursued a career as an English teacher. These literary characters and the discussions surrounding those characters in language arts class allowed me to overcome many of the obstacles I faced in my teenage years.

My everyday struggle as an eighth-grade language arts teacher is how I am made to present reading to students as a result of the CCSS and the high-stakes state tests attached to them. Every year, my students take three school-based standardized reading tests throughout the year, in addition to the PSSAs, to inform instruction and predict how the students will achieve on the state test. I use the data generated from these assessments to target student reading needs and plan for the year. If the data says the students need more informational reading, informational reading instruction heads to the top of the priority list. However, I do not ever get to see exactly what topic the informational readings on the test covered, so I can never truly be sure if the test assessed a student deficit in reading, or a student deficit in knowledge. Because the standards are aligned to a set of skills students need, I am forced to treat the test outcomes as student deficits in reading.

In *Catcher in the Rye* (Salinger, 1951), Holden's dream was to catch children before falling off a metaphorical cliff into adulthood. As a teacher, I feel like I am throwing the students off the cliff, demanding they do better, answer correctly, and raise their scores. I am not

advocating for an education system where teachers do not teach students how to read or help the students who literally cannot read the words on the page. I am advocating for a re-adjustment of the purpose of reading instruction and why we read because reading is not a puzzle to be solved with a right or wrong answer. Instead, reading is an interaction with art. My class, and the standards to which it aligns, is ironically called language arts, and I believe art is not meant to be universally understood but individually experienced.

Current Problem

All eighth-grade students in Pennsylvania currently take the PSSAs to identify their reading proficiency and growth. Students are assigned a score of below basic, basic, proficient, or advanced based on their multiple-choice and open-ended responses on this test. In Pennsylvania, reading scores dropped from 58.8% of students reading at a proficient or advanced level in 2019 to 52.6% after school closures and online learning related to the pandemic. Since 2015, eighth-graders in Pennsylvania have hovered around 40% of students scoring basic or below in reading and writing (Pennsylvania Department of Education, n.d.). Across the United States, eighth-graders' reading scores for multiple years have shown that 64% of students read at a basic level or below (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.); this metric has remained stagnant (Elleman & Oslund, 2019). These scores demonstrate how the implementation of the CCSS has not led to improvements in standardized test scores possibly as a result of state-level implementation of the standards, classroom-level implementation of the standards, standardized test design, or the reading paradigm the standards utilize.

The reading paradigm in the CCSS aligned with close reading, a reading theory stemming from new criticism (Bindewald, 2021; Del Nero, 2017; Fisher & Frey, 2014; Park, 2012; Pennell, 2014). Close reading calls for efferent reading where the text has information to give the

passive reader. However, starting in the 1930s and spanning throughout her life, Rosenblatt argued directly against new criticism with her reader-response theory, where the reader creates meaning by transacting with the text (Connell, 2000, 2008). Within reader response, reading is a transactional experience where all readers take away something different based on their individual background experiences brought to the text.

Many researchers viewed close reading instructions to be a flawed method, and many interpret the standards as contradictory to reading research (Brewer, 2019; Dewitz & Graves, 2021; Thomas, 2014). Primarily, the CCSS architects claimed that readers find all the knowledge they need within the text, and stated background knowledge can play a role in reading but is not nearly as important as extracting needed knowledge from the text (Coleman & Pimentel, 2011). Even though background knowledge is a key aspect of reading comprehension (Kintsch, 1998), Coleman and Pimentel (2011) minimized the role of background knowledge during reading, and the CCSS instead detailed how students should build background knowledge about a topic through reading (Common Core Standards Initiative, 2022). They wrote, “By reading texts in history/social studies, science, and other disciplines, students build a foundation of knowledge in these fields that will also give them the background to be better readers in all content areas.” (Common Core State Standards Initiative, n.d., p.10) Common Core Standards Initiative (n.d.) not only placed this excerpt as a side note in their document detailing the English language arts standards, but also made it seem as though students build background primarily through reading, rather than direct teaching of the content in social studies and science. This notion has led many schools to interpret the CCSS as saying that pre-reading activities which engage background knowledge are not important in the reading process (Shanahan, 2012). Further, my own experiences with the PSSAs have shown teachers are not allowed to know which topics students

will read about during the test, so it is impossible to ensure students have background knowledge about a topic prior to reading. Despite background knowledge being a key component of reading comprehension, standardized testing under the CCSS minimizes the importance of background knowledge demonstrated through both the CCSS creators' discussion of extracting needed knowledge from the text over the necessity of background knowledge (Dewitz & Graves, 2021) and PDE withholding the topics in which students will read about on the PSSAs.

Given that reading scores have remained stagnant in America for years (Elleman & Oslund, 2019; Wexler, 2019), and significantly dropped nationwide after the pandemic (Associated Press, 2022), policymakers and researchers might want to consider what type of reading instruction teachers implement in American public schools and why current approaches to reading instruction are not leading to quantifiable results. Specifically, the reading instruction taking place in individual classrooms leading to a lack of improvement in test scores could be a result of teacher fidelity to the CCSS, political entities impacting school curriculums, or a lack of school funding. However, in this dissertation, I will focus on the possibility that the stagnant reading scores may be a result of the CCSS leading schools to teach literary analysis through a close reading approach (focusing on the text itself) even though students may be making meaning of texts using personal experiences, biases, and emotions outside of the text.

Many scholars have argued the CCSS are a reincarnation of new criticism, where all needed information to create meaning comes within the four corners of the text (Brewer, 2019; Gangi & Reilly, 2013; Tampio, 2018; Thomas, 2014/2018). Developers of standardized tests necessitate fixed responses in order to quantify reading, so it makes sense for developers to use a new critical reading paradigm because Richards built new criticism as a positivist approach to reading criticism, thus new criticism works well as a reading paradigm in the age of standardized

testing (North, 2013; Wilson, 2021). Richards had a fairly dominant following of new critics, and these literary critics were giving almost total authority to the author in making meaning of a text (Wilson, 2021). Rosenblatt rejected the idea that a text has a fixed meaning and argued for transactional reading, where the text and the reader both created meaning (Wilson, 2020). Rosenblatt (1978) rejected new criticism with her reader response theory primarily because the new critical practice removed the reader from the act of reading, and Rosenblatt (1978), argued meaning in a text could not occur without a reading event between the text and the reader. The tension between the positivist new critical theories used to implement standardized tests and constructivist reader response theories raises a question of how students make meaning of a text. The students might turn to the author and the text itself to locate a fixed meaning, or they might utilize their experiences to transact with the text and create meaning.

Students and teachers may struggle to improve standardized test scores because students may make meaning of a text through their own experiences even when attempting to use only the text itself. As a result, reading researchers and school practitioners could both benefit from exploring adolescent reading qualitatively to gain further insight into how teenage readers approach and make meaning from a text.

In this study, I explored eighth-grade students' meaning-making process when reading literature. I then compared the eighth graders' meaning-making process to the narrative fiction text-dependent analysis (TDA) items on Pennsylvania's standardized test, the PSSAs. The purpose of this study was to understand more about how students make meaning of a text and how that meaning-making process aligns with the reading views of the CCSS. This study used a simultaneous mixed-methods QUAL-QUAL design (Morse, 2010) combining case study and document analysis. In the results, the mixing of these methods allowed me to compare the

themes to examine where the PSSA's analysis of texts converges or diverges from that of students.

Purpose of Study

In this study, I aimed to explore the analytical approach of eighth-grade students and compare that approach to the reading approach used to score the TDA sections of the PSSA. Multiple scholars cited the publisher's criteria for the English language arts (ELA) standards (Coleman & Pimental, 2011), and agreed that the CCSS publisher's criteria promoted views of the new critical reading approach (Brewer, 2019; Gangi & Reilly, 2013; Tampio, 2018; Thomas, 2014/2018). Close reading is a reading approach where readers can understand a text at a deep level by paying close attention to the form, structure, literary devices, and features of the text itself (Fang & Pace, 2013; Hinchman & Moore, 2013). Within a close reading paradigm, the reader does not need information outside of the text, such as context, background knowledge, and personal experiences to fully understand the text (Coleman, 2011; Ferguson, 2013). When the group of state representatives and corporations wrote the CCSS they primarily used research from colleges as well as business demands and expectations. However, they did not use empirical research showing evidence that K-12 students engaged in close reading to make meaning of texts or that close reading instruction garnered favorable results (Dewitz & Graves, 2021; Hinchman & Moore, 2013). Further, the reading interventions implemented under close reading have never demonstrated generalizable positive results (Shanahan, 2014).

Reading scores on the National Assessment of Educational Progress have declined steadily since implementing the CCSS (Rebarber, 2020); these outcomes may be a result of the CCSS not only being unresearched before implementation but also educator's interpretation and implementation of the standards leading to instruction straying from sound reading research,

school funding, political influence on the school curriculum, or flaws in test creation (Dewitz & Graves, 2021). Although there are multiple factors potentially leading to stagnant test scores, I chose to focus on the possibility the reading paradigm behind the standards could be a key factor in standardized reading outcomes. In order to challenge the new critical reading approach in the CCSS, I recentered reader response theory, a framework connected to classroom practices and aligning more with the meaning-making process students might undertake while reading (Davis, 1992; Sheridan, 1991; Sulzer, 2014).

The CCSS have minimal empirical evidence supporting they are a successful set of standards to guide reading instruction (Dewitz & Graves, 2021; Rebarber, 2020; Tienkein & Orlich, 2013). Instead of continuing to use the minimally-researched CCSS, researchers may consider studying how students approach reading analysis and meaning-making before creating the next set of standards or new curriculum (Thein, 2009). Researchers have conducted multiple studies demonstrating students' abilities to engage in transactional readings and make meaning of texts by focusing on student experiences and how those experiences help the reader co-create meaning with the text (Del Nero, 2017; Park, 2012; Pennell, 2014; Spring, 2016), but no studies I have uncovered examined how students organically made meaning of texts outside of a particular framework or paradigm.

Research Purpose

This mixed methods study explored the question, *how does the literary analysis approach of eighth-grade students compare to the reading paradigm utilized on the PSSA?*

Educators in the United States have failed to positively impact reading scores over the last decade despite countless attempts highlighted in the arguments emerging from “the reading wars” (Castles et al., 2018; Wexler, 2019). Most states implemented reading curricula and

assessments centered around the CCSS— standards based on the theory of new criticism (Brewer, 2019; Gangi & Reilly, 2013; Thomas, 2014). New critics viewed reading as an isolated task where readers find all information or meaning directly from the text. Under new critical reading paradigms, the reader should not need the context of reading, nor should other information impact the reader's comprehension or their response to literature (Brewer, 2019; Gangi & Reilly, 2013; Thomas, 2014).

The creators of the CCSS claimed the standards are steeped in research. The Common Core State Standard Initiative (2022) stated the research is based in:

... what skills are required of students entering college and workforce training programs, assessment data identifying college and career-ready performance, and comparisons to standards from high-performing states and nations. In English language arts, the standards build on the firm foundation of the National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP) frameworks in reading and writing... (n.p.)

The Common Core State Standards Initiative (2022) omits stating the CCSS creators based the standards on research surrounding the way students read, and instead aligned the standards with research in assessment and future training needs. Writers of the CCSS did not use empirical research centered around school-age students in the creation of the reading standards (Dewitz & Graves, 2021; Hinchman & Moore, 2013), and in advocating for a single correct answer to a text, current literary practices removed the reader from the act of reading (Sulzer, 2014), failed to improve quantitative reading ability (Dewitz & Graves, 2021; Rebarber, 2020; Wexler, 2019), and perpetuated school segregation and the achievement gap (Cunningham, 2019; Dewitz & Graves, 2021; Knoester & Au, 2019).

Because there has been no empirical study detailing if students read in a new critical fashion (Dewitz & Graves, 2021; Hinchman & Moore, 2013), there is a need to compare organic student responses to the new critical responses advocated for in standardized testing. For researchers to advise teachers on the best way to approach reading instruction, Thein (2009) claimed researchers must understand how students respond to reading, but no recent literature I have uncovered explored reading without also providing the students a reading paradigm to work within. As such, I designed this study to allow students to make both new critical and reader-response responses to literature. In understanding how students respond to texts, as Thein (2009) called for, practitioners can base future reading instruction, curriculums, and standards centered around student approaches.

Rationale for Study

Many researchers claimed the lead architects of the CCSS, Coleman and Pimental, used new criticism as the primary reading paradigm because of a focus on the text itself and minimization of the role the reader plays in the meaning-making process to allow for a pragmatic way for states to assess and rank student reading ability (Bindewald, 2021; Del Nero, 2017; Fisher & Frey, 2014; Park, 2012; Pennell, 2014). They attempted to create text-centered questions providing key details, specific text evidence, and text-dependent responses to promote in-depth and accurate readings of texts, creating outcomes states could quantitatively use to show reading progress (Coleman & Pimentel, 2011; Sulzer, 2014). While new critical approaches lend to a pragmatic way to quantify reading ability (Connell, 2008; Sulzer, 2014; Thomas, 2018), researchers using reader response approaches in classrooms have demonstrated positive results for potential classroom use (Del Nero, 2017; Park, 2012; Pennell, 2014; Spring, 2016).

I chose to utilize a reader response framework to conduct this study because of the seemingly ineffective outcomes of the CCSS's business-driven approach achieved through the new critical paradigms detailed above. While multiple studies have utilized reader response approaches (Del Nero, 2017; Park, 2012; Pennell, 2014; Spring, 2016), none I have uncovered have studied students' natural meaning-making approaches when reading. Thein (2009) said, "Researchers must study how readers respond to texts by employing similar socially and culturally constructed processes and practices that transfer across their interpretations of both lived and text-worlds" (p. 278). Sulzer (2014) stated educators using new critical approaches de-center the student and focus on the future rather than the present student. Instead, educators can embrace Rosenblatt's reader response theory to center student emotions and experiences (Sulzer, 2014). I intend to examine if present eighth-grade students naturally favor a new critical or reader response approach when making meaning of literature.

Significance of Study

The 20 year stagnation in reading scores (Wexler, 2019), an arguable decline in reading scores since the implementation of the CCSS (Rebarber, 2020), and a significant drop in nationwide reading scores post-pandemic (Associated Press, 2022) have created a need for more exploration into the meaning-making process of students. Kintsch (1998) claimed people understand through their morals, values, knowledge, and experiences; however, the CCSS situated reading in a new critical framework ignoring Kintsch's (1998) claims. This study explored Thein's (2009) call to gain more understanding of how students respond to texts and embraced successful classroom practices in helping students generate high-level analytical responses to texts. Students often interpret texts using their socio-cultural views and backgrounds, and individual student views do not always align with others perceived to be in a

child's socio-cultural group (Brooks, 2006). By gaining an understanding of how students make meaning of texts based on the student's social ideologies and experiences, teachers and curriculum writers can better understand the analytical process of students, and design school reading materials around the student's process (Brooks, 2006). The results of this study help inform the ideas of Brooks (2006) and Thein (2009) and future reading curricula, standards, and instruction designed around student processes instead of business needs.

Research Questions

This present mixed methods study explored the question:

How does the literary analysis approach of eighth-grade students compare to the reading paradigm utilized on the (PSSA)?

Two research sub-questions guided this study:

1. *What reading paradigm do the text-dependent analysis questions align with on the eighth-grade PSSA?*
2. *How do eighth-grade students in a Pennsylvania middle school approach literary analysis?*

In this present study, I examined the main research question through a QUAL-QUAL simultaneous study drawing on document analysis and Stake's (1995) approach to a case study. To answer the first sub-question, I examined the analytical approach of the CCSS through a document analysis of the narrative fiction TDA released items from the PSSA (a standardized test aligned to the CCSS) using deductive coding. Then, I conducted a case study within my eighth-grade classroom to answer the second sub-question.

In the case study, I first had students respond in writing to a PSSA-released myth and poem about Icarus by answering a question designed to garner both efferent and aesthetic

responses. Next, I had students discuss the two pieces (the myth and the poem), as well as their own writing in small groups with prompts I created to help further understand their meaning-making approach. Finally, I selected four students based on divergences in responses to interview in order to gain an in-depth understanding of each of the four students' individual meaning-making approaches. I analyzed student data using in-vivo coding generated from student responses. I then answered the main research question by comparing the data sets and identifying convergences and divergences in the analytical approach between the PSSA-released items and student responses.

Rationale for Methods

Creswell and Clark (2017) stated a mixed methods design combines qualitative and quantitative methods when one or the other is insufficient. Researchers use a convergent design when they collect both qualitative and quantitative data in two separate databases, then combine or compare the data in order to analyze convergences and divergences between the two sets (Creswell & Clark, 2017). In convergent design, neither data set must come before the other (Creswell & Clark, 2017).

This present study utilized two separate databases for gathering qualitative data. Morse (2010) claimed a simultaneous design of two qualitative methods is mixed methods research; however, Morse (2010) only provided examples where one data set is a core component, while the other data set is a supplementary component. While Creswell and Clark (2017) provided convergent design examples using QUAL-quant, QUAN-qual, or QUAL-QUAN, Morse (2010) only provided a QUAL-qual design. In this present study, neither data set is impacted by or needed to come before the other. Further, each data set played an equal role in the study to make meaning of the research question. In order to explore how the expected PSSA literary

interpretations compared to the literary interpretations of eighth-grade students, both data sets needed to be present in the analysis. Overall, I informed my QUAL-QUAL simultaneous design by utilizing both Creswell and Clark's (2017) convergent design and Morse's (2010) simultaneous design.

In this present study, I gained an understanding of the research questions by conducting a mixed methods case study and document analysis. Methodologists disagreed on the exact implementation of a case study (Yazan, 2015). Creswell and Clark (2007) and Yin (2002) viewed a case study as a mixed method where qualitative and quantitative data are mixed. However, Stake (1995) and Merriam (1998) asserted case studies could center around qualitative data only. The present design followed Stake's (1995) ideology around a case study where the researcher conducts a literature review, constructs a theoretical framework, identifies a research problem, crafts research questions, and purposefully selects a sample.

In this present study, I first completed a document analysis of the PSSAs to explore the literary interpretations on the test, then completed a case study within an eighth-grade middle school classroom to examine how eighth-grade students approach literary interpretations and meaning-making. While one data collection occurred before the other, the order I collected the data did not matter. After collecting each data set, I compared the thematic findings of the two sets. For the document analysis, I used a deductive code list I created from ideas in both reader response and in new criticism, the CCSS, and PDE's TDA rubric (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2022, pp. 28-29). Deductive coding is appropriate in this data set because there is a strong theoretical connection between the CCSS and new criticism (Hsieh and Shannon, 2005).

For the case study, I collected writing samples, small group discussions, and semi-structured interviews. I utilized inductive coding to create a codebook based on the participants'

responses. It is appropriate to utilize inductive coding for this data set because I wanted to center student responses to understand their process (Creswell & Clark, 2017). By having students respond to literature in multiple ways, through writing, group discussion, and one-on-one interviews, I was able to see the students' meaning-making process unfold as their responses changed from their individual written responses to their group discussed responses, and I was able to ask students about the ways I perceived their meaning-making process during the one-on-one interviews.

Limitations

This mixed method case study and document analysis had multiple limitations. First, in the case study phase, I had a small sample size of nine students. However, Stake (1995) stated, "Case study research is not sampling research" (p. 4), and "... opportunity to learn [through case study] is of primary importance" (p. 6) My sample size consisted of one full class period of students I teach and allowed me to learn about the way in which this specific case makes meaning of literature to help inform my instruction. While I am not able to generalize the results of this study, case studies can help refine understandings (Stake, 1995). This study can help refine educators, practitioners, and researchers' understanding of how students make meaning of a text.

The document analysis phase of this study also had a small sample of texts. In this study, I focused on students' meaning-making process when reading narrative fiction. As such, I performed a document analysis on each narrative fiction released PSSA TDA item (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2015, 2021, 2022). Since 2015, PDE has released only three eighth-grade text-dependent analysis narrative fiction items: (a) a story titled "Joe's Reward" (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2015, pp 6-9), (b) a paired myth and poem both about

Icarus and Daedalus (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2021, pp. 20-22), and (c) a story titled “The Penguin Whisperer” (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2022, pp. 20-23).

While the sample is small, it is a fully inclusive sample of text-dependent analysis narrative fiction items the PDE released for Pennsylvania teachers to use to inform instruction.

A final limitation of this study is my clear bias toward reader response reading approaches. Because I align with the constructivist views of reader response, I approached the coding within the document analysis using a more positivist deductive coding process. When using deductive coding the researcher creates a start list from an established theoretical framework (Miles et al., 2018). I created a start list of codes using a new critical framework (see Chapter II) and the PDE TDA guidelines (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2022). By using the framework and guidelines, I addressed my biases during the document analysis because I utilized a code list generated from sources aligning with new criticism and the CCSS. I also acknowledge my constructivist worldview leads to my biased axiology (Creswell & Clark, 2017). However, constructivist worldviews where the researchers acknowledge their biases are appropriate for qualitative designs (Creswell & Clark, 2017).

Definition of Terms

In this section, I will define the terms I used throughout this dissertation.

Aesthetic readings focus on the reader’s lived experience while reading and encompass the reader's thoughts, emotions, and connections during the act of reading (Rosenblatt, 1978). When responding to a text aesthetically, readers use their own background to fill gaps within the text (Iser, 1980).

Efferent readings focus on what information the reader gains or takes away after reading a text (Wilson, 2020).

The transactional theory is Rosenblatt's (1978) theory where readers make meaning by transacting with a text. Both the reader and the text co-create meaning within the transaction.

Close reading is a reading practice where readers view texts as self-contained entities and the reader can find meaning by paying close attention to text features such as structure, main idea, and figurative language (Di Leo, 2020; Coleman, 2016).

The act of reading happens during the reading process. Rosenblatt (1978) saw reading as an event happening in time and therefore determined reading is an act carried out by both the reader and the text. Because Rosenblatt (1978) saw reading as an act, the act varies not only between readers but also within the same reader at different points in time.

Interpretive communities are Fish's (1976) explanation of how groups of people come to similar interpretations of texts. Groups with similar belief structures, ideologies, or experiences can come to a mutual and agreed-upon meaning of a text, and that agreed-upon meaning will represent the group's values.

Monolithic reading outcomes occur when readers view the form and content of a text as one unified whole and the text holds one correct meaning (Di Leo, 2020)

Dualistic reading outcomes occur when readers view the form of the text separately from the context and the readers can view the form in different ways but the content remains consistent no matter the reader (Di Leo, 2020).

Pluralistic reading outcomes occur when readers view the form and content of a text as separate and readers can have various interpretations of both form and content (Di Leo, 2020).

Text dependent analysis (TDA) is an open-ended writing prompt where students respond to a text to demonstrate their reading and writing ability on the PSSA and other standardized tests.

Summary

The CCSS promoted new critical reading approaches in the classroom. These approaches may not be the best way for teachers to structure reading instruction or states to assess reading ability as students may read in more transactional fashions relying on their experiences to help create the meaning of a text. In this study, I examined the question: How does the literary analysis approach of eighth-grade students compare to the reading paradigm utilized on the PSSA? In this chapter, I first discussed the standardized tests connected to the CCSS and how multiple businesses have advocated for the standards and how standardized testing outcomes have many financial implications. I then discussed my positionality and views on the purpose of reading. Next, I detailed the current problems within current reading instructional practices and testing and identified the purpose of this study as to compare the analytical approach of eighth graders to the analytical approaches test creators expect on the PSSA. I detailed the QUAL-QUAL simultaneous design of my case study and document analysis. I ended the chapter with the limitations of the study and the definition of terms I used throughout the dissertation.

Chapter II: Literature Review

This study utilized a reader response framework to explore how eighth-grade students approached literary analysis. This framework is directly juxtaposed with new criticism, the theory the CCSS creators arguably used to create their reading standards. Rosenblatt (1978) argued against the way new critics eliminated the importance of the reader in the meaning-making process. The purpose of this chapter is to detail the tensions between new critical and reader response approaches. I will first provide a theoretical framework through which I interpreted the data and findings in this present study. I then will examine the literature surrounding standardized reading assessments, approaches to reading instruction, outcomes of new critical reading paradigms, approaches to the meaning-making process, and a potential shift to reader response paradigms.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical frame I used in this study closely ties to Rosenblatt's (1978) reader response theory, and I viewed reading as a transactional event where readers make meaning through their participation in the act of reading. However, the CCSS creators advocated for a new critical approach to reading (Brewer, 2019; Fang & Pace, 2013; Gangi & Reilly, 2013; Thomas, 2014; Thomas, 2018). Because my view of reading contradicts the reading processes outlined in the CCSS, I examined both new criticism and reader response theory. While my own views align with reader response theory, I found it necessary to include new criticism as the CCSS heavily mirrors new criticism. In the following section, I will first discuss new criticism's history and modern use. Then, I will discuss the history of reader response theory and how I used reader response theory as a theoretical framework in this present study.

New Criticism

This section discusses a brief history of new criticism, and how the new critical paradigm exists in the modern CCSS.

Background of New Criticism. New criticism may have racist origins, as many literary critics credited its inception to a group of southern segregationists in the 1930s whose goal was to uphold the stature of southern men (Di Leo, 2020). Scholars often credit I.A. Richards with the inception of new criticism, but many new critics rejected his views (Wellek, 1978). For instance, Wellek (1978) expressed concern that the disagreement amongst new critics themselves regarding the nature of new criticism led to multiple false renderings of the new critical theory. Despite disagreement in origin and practice, views of a text being a unified whole and rejecting the importance of context connected new critics (Di Leo, 2020; Wellek, 1978). Although Wellek (1978) would most likely contest the views of modern scholars on the definition of new criticism, I favored Di Leo's (2020) definition of new criticism where a text is "...a coherent, unified, organic whole" (p. 137). Di Leo (2020) claimed in new criticism the text is self-contained and does not carry a message from the author. The text utilizes structure and literary devices to create one uniform meaning, and there is no need for the reader to know the context of a text (Di Leo, 2020).

New Criticism's Modern Use. When states first presented the CCSS to educators, Fang and Pace (2013) saw new criticism as the primary reading paradigm the group of state representatives and corporations used to create the CCSS. Under the CCSS, many educators viewed reading and responding to reading as an act each student could do unbiasedly; readers would come to the same conclusion about the meaning of a text by paying attention to the author's purpose, key details, main ideas, and literary devices used within the text (Brewer,

2019; Gangi & Reilly, 2013; Thomas, 2014; Thomas, 2018). These scholars rooted their stance in Coleman and Pimentel's (2011) publishers' criteria for the CCSS. The publishers' criteria is a document that helps publishers of educational materials understand the goals and implementations of the reading standards, and in the document the lead architects of the CCSS stated that students should read self-contained texts and focus on "...what lies within the four corners of the text" (Coleman & Pimental, 2011, p. 4).

Within the CCSS, texts allow students to build knowledge and compare new information to what they already know. However, the close examination of a particular text is paramount, and the previous knowledge from other texts should not hinder a student from attention to the text at hand (Coleman & Pimentel, 2011). Instead of viewing background knowledge as a key component, Coleman and Pimentel (2011) stated, "Student background knowledge and experiences can illuminate the reading but should not replace attention to the text itself" (p. 15). Coleman and Pimentel (2011) promoted that readers should generate all knowledge, ideas, and discussions directly from the text and focus heavily on extracting knowledge.

Reader Response Theory

Many scholars viewed the CCSS standards as a reincarnation of new criticism (Cunningham, 2019; Hinchman & Moore, 2013; North, 2013; Shanahan, 2015; Sulzer, 2014; Thomas, 2018), and Rosenblatt (1978) challenged the ideas of new criticism with her reader response theory. I used an opposing view to new criticism (reader response) to provide a binary for a basis of criticism between the two reading paradigms. In this section, I will discuss a brief history of reader response theory and multiple views and iterations of reader response theory. I will then explain the reader response framework I utilized in this present study.

Background of Reader Response Theory. Reader response theory functioned under the idea that the reader and the text work together to make meaning and that meaning will differ based on the cultural and background experiences of the reader (Rosenblatt, 1978). Many theorists have contributed to reader response; however, this study focused primarily on Rosenblatt's (1978) transactional theory while also utilizing ideas from Fish's (1976) interpretive communities, Iser's (1980) aesthetic response, and Brewer's (2019) genre analysis.

In reader response theory, reading is an event rather than an action, and both the text and the reader shape the event's outcome (Rosenblatt, 1978). Individual readers locate meaning somewhere between two poles: the artistic (the author or artist) and the aesthetic (the reader) (Iser, 1980). In Iser's (1980) vision of reading, there was the ideal reader, who situated themselves close to the artistic pole in understood meaning, and the actual reader who landed and interpreted the text somewhere between the two poles. In any reading event, the text had no meaning until the reader experienced the text (Iser, 1980; Rosenblatt, 1978).

While Iser (1980) and Rosenblatt (1978) saw the act of reading as something in which an individual reader participated, Fish (1976) viewed reading as something in which a community participated. A group of people sharing common values (e.g., those from the same religion attending the same church or a classroom of students) often come to a similar reading of a text aligning with their belief structure (Fish, 1976). Moreover, a group finds their moral values within a text even if the author did not intend them to be there (Fish, 1976). Fish (1976) argued interpretive communities formed a value and belief-based reading of a text when the group agreed on the meaning.

Other scholars contributed to reader response as well. Jauss (1984) stated that a text's meaning changed depending on when in history the reading is occurring. Instead of the historical

time period, Bleich (1979) argued that readers do not find meaning within the text but in their responses; however, this view insinuated that readers do not necessarily need to align their responses to the text, and Rosenblatt (1978) argued readers must connect their meaning-making responses to both themselves and the text. Holland (1975) stated that readers would find exactly what they were looking for in the text, and readers generated all responses aligning with their identity. Because some theories within reader response contradict or impede on others, I chose the ideas of Rosenblatt (1978), Fish (1976), Iser (1980), and Brewer (2019) to inform my theoretical framework within this present study.

Present Study's Framework

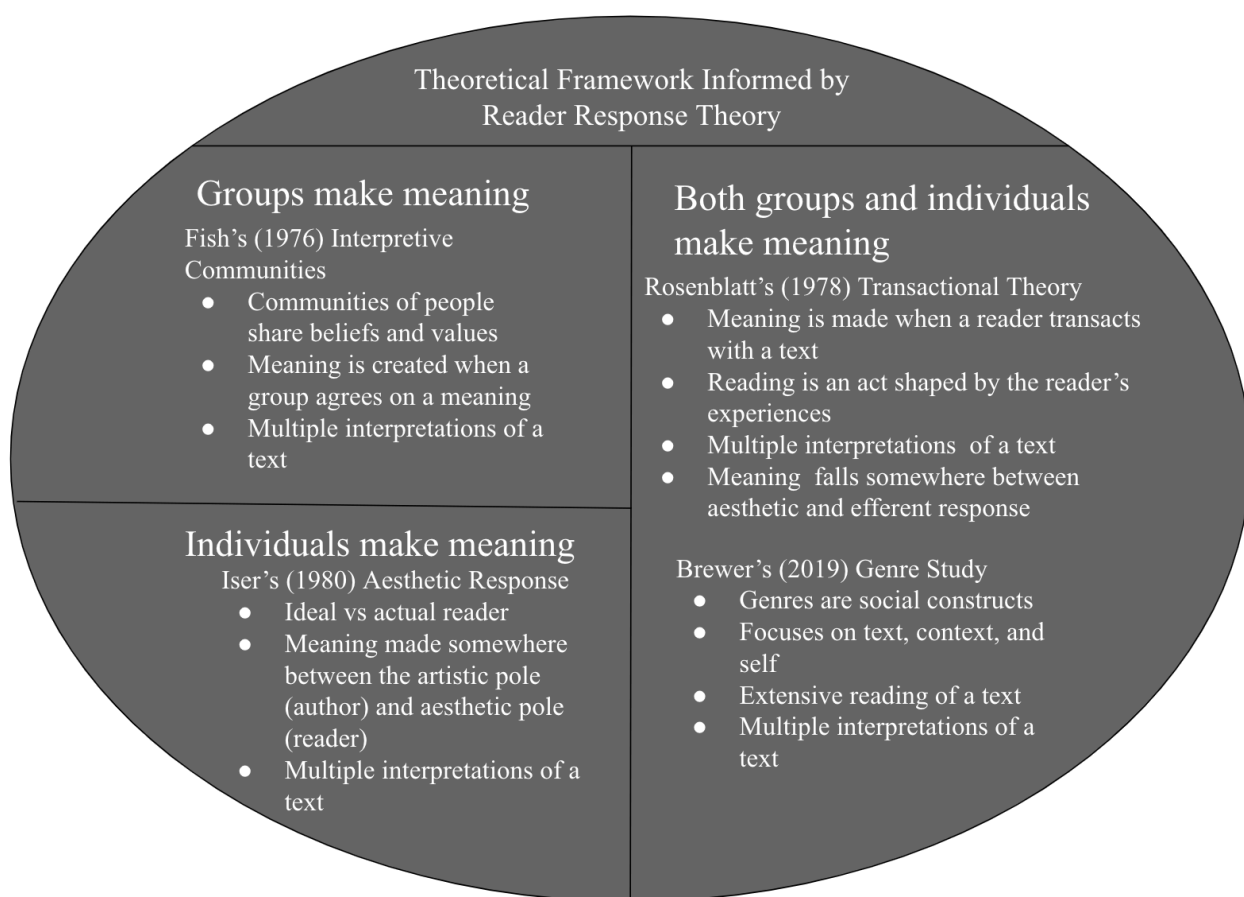
Brewer (2019) argued for a more recent iteration of reader response theory with genre analysis. In genre analysis, readers create genres through social constructs, and genres can change from reader to reader (Brewer, 2019). In genre analysis, Brewer (2019) called for a pedagogical shift in reading instruction and viewed reading as a multi-purpose act where different outcomes could occur with different mindsets. Readers could aim to read in an efferent or an aesthetic fashion (Rosenblatt, 1978), but current reading pedagogy focuses primarily on efferent responses causing readers to view the text as a static item with consistent information to dispense (Hinchman & Moore, 2013). Efferent reading focuses on the information the reader gained from the text and what the reader is left with after reading the text, while aesthetic reading is the reader's lived experience during the text (Wilson, 2021). Brewer (2019) aligned with Fish (1976), Iser (1980), and Rosenblatt (1978), with all scholars agreeing that the reader can experience a text differently when their life experiences or purpose for reading change.

In this present study, I viewed reading as an event where readers co-construct meaning with the text (Rosenblatt, 1978), meaning is found somewhere between the author's intent and

the reader's background (Iser, 1980), and groups of readers belonging to the same interpretive community can come to similar and agreed upon interpretations of a text (Fish, 1976). This study also embraced Brewer's (2019) call for a shift to genre study where teachers emphasize the multiple purposes and approaches of reading. The graphic below (see Figure 1) summarizes this theoretical framework, sorting the ideologies into reading as individually-based or group-based, with bullet highlights from each theoretical approach.

Figure 1

Theoretical Framework



Note: A diagram of the theoretical framework used in this present study.

The above framework details both new criticism and reader response theory.

Understanding both paradigms allow educators and researchers to understand the paradigm

behind the CCSS and the paradigm that may better align with how students read and make meaning of a text. In the following literature review I examined standardized testing made possible by new criticism, how standards-based methods have failed, and the potential cultural and social reasons for the failure. The section then concludes with how reader response theory could function in the classroom to promote reading and analysis.

The New Critical Era and Standardized Testing

Educators could benefit from understanding the basis of new critical approaches. Richards (2017) built the new critical theory as a pragmatic way to turn reading and analysis into a more positivist practice to allow researchers to study reading scientifically. The CCSS promoted close reading, a rebranding of new criticism (Cunningham, 2019; Hinchman & Moore, 2013; North, 2013; Shanahan, 2015; Sulzer, 2014; Thomas, 2018). Close reading, a positivist paradigm, allowed the United States Department of Education to compare reading scores of students and hold schools accountable for student learning (Sulzer, 2014; Thomas, 2018).

Understanding a text within a new critical reading paradigm heavily focuses on features such as figurative language, key details, organization, and viewing the text as an individual entity separate from anything else (Wellek, 1978). Schools and states tried to score reading ability within the new critical framework by focusing reading instruction on the text itself and using static pieces of the text such as figurative language (Sulzer, 2014). To achieve this, readers need to read self-contained texts and focus on “...what lies within the four corners of the text” (Coleman & Pimentel, 2011, p. 4). In a research report on the TDA section of the PSSAs conducted by PDE and Center for Assessment, Thompson and Lyons defined analysis as “a detailed examination of the elements or structure of text, by breaking it into its component parts to uncover interrelationships in order to draw a conclusion” (2017, p. 4). This definition focuses

on readers using both the text itself and text structure to conduct analysis further tying close reading and modern assessments to new criticism. Much like under Di Leo's (2020) definition of new criticism where the text is a unified whole, the CCSS lead architects said the knowledge a text presents is static and identical for each reader and therefore allows the reader to extract knowledge from self-contained entities of the text (Coleman & Pimentel, 2011). Viewing a text as a self-contained entity where students should have similar learning outcomes allowed for the quantification of reading ability, but it is possible the quantifiable result generated from a standardized test created under a new critical paradigm does not actually assess reading ability (Shanahan, 2014). Nevertheless, new critical paradigms began to dominate literary instruction.

New Criticism in Schools

Thomas (2012) claimed new criticism rose in the classroom when states sought a way to quantify reading ability in response to the accountability era that started in the 1980s. One of the key factors in states using the new critical CCSS is the ability to quantify reading proficiency and place values on certain standards (North, 2013); thus, standardized testing created from new critical reading practices allowed states to quantify reading ability and uncover the achievement gap (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.). However, reading instruction in the United States has potentially contributed to stagnant reading scores for over twenty years, meaning educators have made no progress in closing the gap (Elleman & Oslund, 2019; Wexler, 2019). New critical approaches to reading instruction and assessment may be one cause of these stagnating test scores.

When state educational entities as well as corporations created the CCSS, no empirical studies existed showing students read in a new critical fashion or that close reading approaches led to stronger reading (Dewitz & Graves, 2021; Hinchman & Moore, 2013). Further, the CCSS

authors used 138 citations in the standards creation, but only 4 were empirical studies (Tienkein & Orlich, 2013). The skill-based reading instruction teachers employ in response to the CCSS such as identifying text structure, focusing on key details, and using figurative language to help uncover the meaning of the text did not lead to reading improvement or achievement (Shanahan, 2015).

PDE adopted the CCSS and provided a webpage for educators to use to help create standard-aligned lessons (Standards Aligned System, 2022). On the webpage PDE provided essential questions and standards aligned with those questions. In Appendix A, I created a chart with PDE's essential questions, the standards aligned to each question, and my interpretation of each standard as it connected with Di Leo's (2020) definition of new criticism and diverged from reader response theory (see Appendix A).

Overall, the Pennsylvania standards (see Appendix A) demonstrate a need for teachers to focus reading instruction on the text itself using the text's form, features, and purpose to not only create meaning but also understand and develop vocabulary. The standards have no mention of the readers' culture, experiences, or values playing a role in any reading practice even with the standards related to the questions of how readers respond to or construct meaning of texts. These standards further enforce scholars' claims (Brewer, 2019; Gangi & Reilly, 2013; Thomas, 2014, 2018) that the standards connect to new critical reading paradigms.

While the standards do seem to encompass multiple elements of new criticism, Thomas (2012) argued that the spirit of new critical review failed as a result of poor classroom implementation causing the approach to become a formula rather than a way to look at a literary text as a nuanced entity separate from any other text. Instead of a formula to understand a text, the manifestation of new criticism in the classroom did not match the original purpose of the

critical framework where "... interpretation means discovering the objective meanings of a piece, determining the author's intended meaning, and reading and responding objectively to the place itself" (Brooks & Warren, 1976). New critical approaches replaced reader response approaches in the classroom as literary critics argued reader response approaches led to classrooms void of meaning and based on free expression (Thomas, 2012). It is plausible the classroom issues arising with teachers' use of new criticism or reader response may not have been a result of a flawed critical framework but in the implementation and purpose of the theories used within the classroom. While the teachers' classroom implementation of new criticism may be flawed, the standardized testing implementation may be problematic as well. The United States found a positivist reading approach like new criticism as a needed addition to the education system to help hold schools accountable for achievement (Thomas, 2012). However, the standardized tests made by companies may not assess exactly what the companies claim they assess.

What Standardized Tests Might Assess

In order to quantify reading ability, the PSSA writers separated questions into question types aligning with individual reading skills like finding the main idea, and as a result, many schools have focused reading instruction on teaching these reading skills (Shanahan, 2014). Approaching reading instruction and assessment with a focus on reading skills causes issues in interpreting the quantifiable outcomes of standardized testing.

While utilizing the CCSS many educators and curriculum writers viewed elements of reading such as finding the main idea, supporting claims with text evidence, and analyzing figurative language as static and unchanging, and standardized tests attempted to assess each skill individually rather than viewing reading as a complete act (Shanahan, 2014). Standardized

testing claims to test reading proficiency, but the test may instead be assessing background and vocabulary knowledge.

First, standardized test outcomes cannot truly assess individual reading skills like finding the main idea or making inferences (Shanahan, 2014). The ACT (2006) demonstrated question types (such as a question prompting a student to find the main idea) did not differentiate levels of readers. However, the CCSS placed heavy emphasis on text features and differentiating question types so far that the publishers of the PSSA released items connected each released question to a standard (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2022). Although the ACT (2006) data was available at the time, state agencies collaborated to create the CCSS, standardized tests such as the PSSA break standards down into question types.

Instead of instruction and emphasis on individual reading skills and question types, scholars have found that a student's background knowledge in a topic area led to stronger reading comprehension (Applegate et al., 2009; Radcliffe et al., 2008; Shanahan, 2015; Sibtain & Tehseem, 2008). Despite these findings, the lead architects of the CCSS said background knowledge does not play a large role in reading comprehension because students should be using reading strategies to locate any information needed for comprehension within the text (Coleman & Pimental, 2011; Dewitz & Graves, 2021). While utilizing the CCSS many educators and curriculum writers viewed elements of reading such as finding the main idea, supporting claims with text evidence, and analyzing figurative language as static and unchanging, and standardized tests attempted to assess each skill individually rather than viewing reading as a complete act (Shanahan, 2014). When educators view reading as a collection of skills rather than the employment of multiple skills simultaneously, the outcomes of the testing may show students cannot successfully complete a skill such as finding the main idea, but they may truly have

lacked the background knowledge to understand the text, even though they could fluently read all parts (Shanahan, 2014). Schools then use the flawed data to provide test prep practice, yet this form of practice has never shown positive increases in test scores (Shanahan, 2014). Instead of looking at individual question types to determine the reading ability of a specific student, overall text complexity was much more of a determining factor in student achievement (Nelson et al., 2012).

Along with background knowledge, The National Center for Education Statistics (2012) found vocabulary knowledge had a strong correlation to reading comprehension, and complex vocabulary in the text created the most difficulty for students in reading comprehension (Nelson et al., 2012). This reading metric might cause great concern when considering Hart and Risley's (2003) findings that students from low-income families heard about 30 million fewer words than their peers by age three. When considering vocabulary's role in comprehension, and the word deficit in lower-income students, using standardized testing to gauge reading ability becomes problematic. Vocabulary deficit leading to lower reading scores aligns with Schneider's (2017) claim that socioeconomic status had a high correlation with reading proficiency and impacted reading scores more than classroom instruction. Aukerman and Chambers Schuldt (2021) claimed the way in which states assess reading ability does not take into account social justice because the assessments assess reading ability as a concrete and universal outcome rather than recognize how a student's environment and cultural upbringing can change their perceptions of the meaning of words. The focus on proficiency levels in standardized testing may hide student strengths in reading and help accelerate the achievement gap (Aukerman & Chambers Schuldt, 2021).

While background knowledge and vocabulary play pivotal roles in reading comprehension, cultural ideology may also blur what standardized tests assess. Another potential reason states are not seeing reading improvement after the implementation of the CCSS might be due to Aukerman and Chambers Schuldt's (2021) claim that reading assessments are shaped by culture. Test-making companies often align American standardized tests with capitalist ideology (Cunningham, 2019; Ferguson, 2013; Knoester & Au, 2017). If American tests are aligned to capitalist ideology, testing students under the ideology that texts are self-contained with inherent meaning erases the epistemology and ideologies of students who do not align with capitalist ideology (Cunningham, 2019). Knoester and Au (2017) claimed the close reading new critical approach used as the primary reading paradigm in the CCSS, and therefore the basis of reading standardized tests, not only maintained the achievement gap but widened it.

Pandemic-related school closures further exacerbated the achievement gap as reading scores nationwide dropped an average of 5 points on the NAEP with the biggest declines in students from families in the lower socioeconomic classes (Associated Press, 2022) This drop in reading is the most significant drop in thirty years (Associated Press, 2022), and we do not know the full impact of the pandemic, so the drop in reading may continue to decline in the future. Overall students taking standardized tests to demonstrate their reading ability may actually be demonstrating their background knowledge (Shanahan, 2014), vocabulary (National Center for Education Statistics, 2012), cultural ideologies (Aukerman and Chambers Schuldt, 2021), or socioeconomic status (Schneider, 2017). Nevertheless, schools are putting a higher emphasis on using data from standardized testing to plan instruction and revise curricula (Bertrand & Marsh, 2021). While using the standardized data created from standardized testing schools can pull from a continuum of reading instruction approaches, but these approaches have seemingly led to

stagnant reading scores before the pandemic, and the post-pandemic score decline has left educators with the difficult task of raising reading scores. There are multiple perspectives on the most effective ways to improve standardized reading scores.

Attempted Approaches to Standardized Reading Improvement

In this dissertation I view five potential approaches to reading instruction: (a) the science of reading, (b) whole language, (c) a knowledge-based approach, (d) a strategy instruction approach, and (e) a socially just science of reading. In the graphic below, I start with the two poles of the reading wars (Castles et al., 2018), and work inward to what I saw as an approach in the middle of the reading instruction spectrum. The table below (See Table 1) depicts my interpretation of the continuum of reading instruction approaches. Whole language is on one side of the spectrum, and the science of reading is on the other. I placed strategy instruction, socially just science of reading, and building background knowledge between the two poles. This section will detail each approach.

Table 1*Five Reading Approaches*

Reading approach spectrum				
Whole language	Strategy instruction	Socially just science of reading	Building background	Science of reading
Students engage with multiple books and teachers model how good readers read (Calkins, 2004)	Teachers focus on teaching students reading strategies to comprehend a text (Brevik, 2019)	States revise the CCSS to account for cultural differences amongst students and researchers view qualitative study designs as scientific (Aukerman & Chambers Schuldt, 2021)	Teachers Systematically build a knowledge base to coincide with texts teachers will ask students to read (Shanahan, 2015)	Teachers provide systematic phonics instructions and embrace the simple view of reading (Hanford, 2018)
Utilizes discussion-based practices				

Note: This table depicts a spectrum of instructional approaches to reading and a brief description of each approach.

The Science of Reading

American schools and researchers often proposed different approaches to reading instruction and curriculum leading to the reading wars (Castles et al., 2018). In these wars, two sides debated the way to teach reading to impact standardized scores. One side supported the idea that the key to reading instruction is the systematic teaching of phonics and embracing the simple formula for reading (Gough & Tunmer, 1986). In alignment with this formula, Allington (2011) supported the idea that schools could impact reading performance by bolstering

vocabulary skills and teaching decoding far into middle school. Most schools stopped teaching phonics and vocabulary after fourth grade and rarely conducted decoding instruction at the middle-grade level (Allington 2011). Hanford (2018) claimed the simple formula of reading is often connected with an area of reading instruction approaches called the science of reading, and Yaden et al. (2021) said the science of reading often oversimplifies reading while Thomas (2023) state the science of reading is minimally based in actual science. Cervetti et al. (2020) claimed the simple view of reading has many strengths, but as students read more complex texts as they reach middle school, the two components of the simple view of reading do not take into account student knowledge, engagement, cognitive functioning, or working memory.

In the science of reading, researchers focus on empiralist approaches and experimental designs to identify “what works” for improving reading proficiency on standardized assessments (Aukerman & Chambers Schuldt, 2021; Yaden et al., 2021). The science of reading is “...an intensive focus on assessed reading proficiency as the primary goal of reading instruction” (Aukerman & Chambers Schuldt, 2021, p. S85). Reading researchers following the science of reading paradigm often claim victory in the reading wars (Yaden et al., 2021), but many claimed the science of reading is flawed because the approach is too narrow, does not take into account differences in brain function across the human population from environmental factors, only regards experimental designs as valid research, and finds other reading paradigms to be unscientific (Aukerman & Chambers Schuldt, 2021; Cervetti et al., 2020; Yaden et al., 2021).

Workshop Model

Yaden et al. (2021) stated the binary nature of the reading war is misleading as there are more reading approaches than two. However, in the binary on the other side of the war sits the whole language approach which educators have rebranded as a “workshop model” (Hanford,

2018). One reading curriculum embraced by many schools utilizing the workshop model is the Teachers College Units of Study (Calkins, 2004). In the Units of Study, a curriculum I have taught for nine years, students read books in book clubs, and the teacher models skills and strategies good readers employ when reading a text. The units suggest immersing kids in environments with multiple opportunities to encounter texts, reading with peers, guiding students in reading, and discussing reading with peers will bolster reading ability. However, this approach has demonstrated little evidence of impacting reading performance on standardized tests (Adams et al., 2020). In an examination of the Units of Study, Adams et al. (2020) found the units engaged students, respected the expertise of teachers, and helped foster community in the classroom, but did little to nothing to impact reading mainly as a result of the absence of phonics instruction. In the examination of the units, Adams et al. (2020) completed the examination of only the K-5 program even though there are Units of Study available for all middle school grades and beyond. Some claimed the program creators did not base the reading instruction on scientific research in reading and the skills learned would not transfer through middle school because the program fails to teach the fundamentals of reading (Adams et al., 2020; Hanford, 2018; Moats, 2007; Schwartz, 2019).

With Calkins (2004) (along with many school districts) supporting an immersion and community-based approach through reading workshops, and Adams et al. (2020), Moats (2007), Schwartz (2019), and Hanford (2018) supporting phonics-based instruction, practitioners may find it challenging to utilize literature surrounding reading instruction to help inform planning and implementation. Overall, neither of the approaches seemed to work in bettering standardized reading scores as evident in Adams' et al. (2020) examination of the workshop model, as well as Applegate et al., (2009) findings on how nearly a third of her top readers, in terms of fluency,

often could not comprehend a text as a result of a lack of background knowledge or the ability to understanding words in context.

Building Background

In between the two sides of the reading wars, other branches in pursuit of bettering reading achievement emerged. Shanahan (2015) proposed schools need to focus on building content knowledge before students are asked to read passages in order to increase reading scores. To comprehend, students need a strong background knowledge of what they are reading (Shanahan, 2015; Radcliffe et al., 2008; Sibtain & Tehseem, 2008). Shanahan (2015) claimed teaching the content surrounding what students will read will help increase reading scores. Davis et al. (2017, 2022) agreed finding content knowledge held the strongest correlation with comprehension. Sibtain and Tehseem (2008) supported using textbooks to teach genre-based literacy, and Radcliffe (2008) asserted teachers could help improve literacy in the science classroom by building content knowledge to strengthen comprehension. Kurcer (2016) also addressed the idea of content knowledge bolstering comprehension. Kurcer (2016), stated many readers who made reading fluency mistakes possessed the content knowledge to ensure the mistakes did not impact comprehension.

While teaching background knowledge to inform reading instruction seems like a promising approach, Coleman and Pimental (2011) did not view background knowledge as a necessary element in assessing reading comprehension as they advocated knowledge should be located in the text, and students can be trained to use strategies to extract the needed knowledge (Coleman & Pimentel, 2011). Davis et al. (2017, 2022) and Shanahan (2015) both advocated for a need to build background knowledge to improve reading comprehension. However, PDE does not provide teachers with the topics students will read on the PSSAs in advance, therefore,

teachers in Pennsylvania are not able to ensure students have the required background knowledge needed to comprehend items on the PSSA. As a result, teachers must turn to other instructional approaches to reading such as strategy instruction.

Strategy Instruction

Instead of utilizing background information, advocates of the CCSS promoted strategy instruction. Brevik (2019) stated background knowledge was important but claimed a need for increased strategy instruction where students learn strategies to identify the main idea, use context clues to define words, and use the text structure to help comprehend the text. However, others argued specific strategy instruction approaches have never shown meaningful increases in reading comprehension (Davis et al., 2017, 2022; Shanahan, 2015). Schools are utilizing data from standardized assessments to revise instruction to further impact test scores, especially for low-achieving students (Bertrand & Marsh, 2021). Often schools place low-achieving students into reading intervention programs where teachers re-teach reading strategies to improve reading scores, but these interventions have also shown little impact in improving standardized reading ability (Donegan & Wanzek, 2021; Connor et al., 2018; Roberts et al., 2018; Stevens et al., 2021; Wanzek & Roberts, 2012). Further, teaching strategies alone focuses on only the cognitive part of reading and neglects to acknowledge student growth in reading when students choose to read more challenging texts, read more frequently, and accept that they may struggle with a challenging text (Afflerbach et al., 2013). Teaching reading through strategies alone fails to acknowledge other factors at play when students struggle to read, because the students should be able to use strategies to overcome the struggles. Aukerman and Chambers Schuldt (2021) expanded on established reading instructional approaches through a socially-just science of reading framework.

Socially-Just Science of Reading

To consider more than just the cognitive functions of reading Aukerman and Chambers Schuldt (2021) advocated for a new framework for reading instruction that expands the science of reading to consider social justice. In their new framework they claimed the science of reading should be a subcategory in the science of literacy, and also include the meaning making process, take student culture and experience into account, expand through secondary grades (as most research takes place in primary grades), and utilize multiple methodologies in reading research (including controlled trials as well as case studies), view reading as a social and cultural practice instead of cognitive, and help create outcomes of education that are socially just, and therefore should not rely on empiricism alone. In order to achieve the new framework, Aukerman and Chambers Schuldt (2021) called for a revision of the CCSS which the federal government has not revised since the inception of the standards.

Summary of Approaches

To summarize, the five approaches researchers or practitioners are advocating for to improve reading scores include: (a) the science of reading, (b) whole language, (c) a knowledge-based approach, (d) a strategy instruction approach, and (e) a socially just science of reading. In the graphic at the start of this section I provided a continuum ordering these approaches in relation to the two poles of the reading war.

None of these approaches have emerged as a front runner as none seem to garner generalizable results in raising standardized reading scores aligning to the CCSS. Similarly Thomas (2023) claimed that no reading instruction approach has ever shown stronger achievement results of achievement than another, and detailed how reading instruction for nearly 80 years has garnered identical results. Aukerman and Chambers Schuldt (2021) called for the

United States to revise the CCSS, and states may also need to revise how state tests assesses reading, but another contributing factor to the stagnant scores may be the reading paradigm found in the CCSS potentially causing educators and educational companies who create standardized tests to ignore how people make meaning based on their individual experiences and culture. Aukerman and Chambers Schuldt (2021) called for researchers and educators to take meaning making and culture into account within a socially just science of reading.

Meaning Making

In this section I will examine how people make meaning of texts as well as events in their life. I will discuss how language, upbringing, culture, and communities help dictate a person's meaning making process.

Language

People must convey ideas through language, and language does not necessarily have inherent and indisputable meaning (Fish, 1970). Crosman (1980) demonstrated this notion with the sentence, "I keep my money in the bank" (p. 155). In this instance, many people gravitate to immediately connecting a bank with a building and a savings account. However, a person who lives isolated from society may read this as a riverbank. A child may interpret this as a piggy bank (Crosman, 1980). The term bank seems simple enough, but when culture and experience come into play, a simple word like bank becomes ambiguous. When this idea is transposed onto complete texts or real-world situations, determining what something means as a collective group may not be explicit because culture, experiences, and present context can change how one person perceives a shared event or text from another (Brown et al., 2008; Fish, 1970; Hakonen et al., 2020; Iser, 1980).

Some educators attempting to assess reading ability might think people who share the same language would most likely hear a story and reach a mutual consensus on the essential parts of the story and what the story means overall. In a quasi-experimental group comparison study, Hakonen et al. (2020) found two groups who speak the same language but come from different countries (Finland and Russia in this case) not only processed spoken information differently but also arrived at different conclusions regarding what they saw as meaningful information. Within the study, the more similar a person's cultural views were to another, the more likely the two people would come to similar conclusions, but no two conclusions were identical (Hakonen et al., 2020). Furthermore, people who spoke the same language falsely assumed that others understood spoken words in the same manner (Hakonen et al., 2020).

Brown et al. (2008) found similar accounts, although not regarding brain science, when conducting an interpretive narrative design longitudinal study observing the story behind how project teams reached agreements through sense-making. Within this study, all participants worked for the same company, thus creating a shared or similar culture. Still, when it came to the sense-making of situations and narratives arising in project development planning, there were many instances where the team had discrepancies in understanding (Brown et al., 2008). Although the team could always reach a final agreed-upon outcome, the outcome was full of disagreements or other interpretations (Brown et al., 2008).

In assessing how different cultures process spoken language differently (Hakonen et al., 2020) and how teams within the same company disagree on outcomes of projects (Brown et al., 2008), it stands to reason that sense-making (or meaning-making) is not an objective process, nor do people come to the same conclusion of the same text. Therefore, assessing reading through positivist reading approaches, such as close reading, could prove problematic. Daiute & Nelson

(1997) explained how people from different cultures might come to different interpretations of texts and events through their ideas on sense making scripts.

Sense Making Scripts

Daiute & Nelson (1997) may explain the phenomena of how people make meaning when they discussed social scripts. Toddlers create known scripts (instances people see as factual information within their lives or routines) of their world, and these scripts are centered around “me and not me” (Daiute & Nelson, 1997). Parents pass the knowledge of the script on to the toddler and teach the toddler routines, expectations, behavior norms, manners, and overall, what the toddler does versus what others do (Daiute & Nelson, 1997). Once the child can use verbal language and discuss outcomes of events, they begin to form scripts through cultural constructs (school, friends, work), and as long as “canonical” events happen (things a person expects within the script), no events challenged or changed scripts (Daiute & Nelson, 1997). But, when an instance arises where questions such as: “What is going on?”, “What will happen next?”, or “Where do I fit in?” manifest, a script is turned into a story (a way for people to process how they view an unknown or new event, or a known event with new variables), and it is through this story in which people made meaning (Daiute & Nelson, 1997). People then turn their story back into a script to present information to others (Daiute & Nelson, 1997).

In connecting Daiute and Nelson’s (1997) thought process with the work of Brown et al. (2008) and Hakonen et al. (2020), it is possible that differences in outcomes of sense-making events occur during what Daiute & Nelson (1997) attributed to the “story” phase of sense-making. A person making individual meaning, as in Hakonen et al. (2020), arrived at vastly different conclusions from people from other cultures as a result of differences in scripts and stories created throughout an individual’s life (Daiute & Nelson, 1997). Those functioning as a

team in a shared culture can come to a similar meaning of an event, much like Fish's (1976) interpretive communities, albeit with plenty of ambiguity and discrepancy (Brown et al., 2008).

In sum, meaning-making is rooted in the scripts an individual creates through society, the stories an individual uses to make sense of non-canonical events, and the new script an individual developed from the story (Daiute & Nelson, 1997). Because all experiences are different, people have slightly (or drastically) different interpretations of the same experienced event based on how much each person shares culturally and experientially with others (Hakonen et al., 2020). Groups who come to a consensus do so with ambiguity and discrepancy (Brown et al., 2008). Stanley Fish (1976) discussed group consensus with his theories on interpretive communities.

Interpretive Communities

Interpretive communities take place in cultural sharing groups (Fish, 1978) At the simplest level, Oyserman (2011) explained cultures as either individual or collective. When making meaning, someone from an individualistic cultural background (such as most capitalist ideologies) will focus on the actions, thoughts, and outcomes of the individual, but collective cultural backgrounds will focus on how the actions, thoughts, and outcomes impact the group (Oyserman, 2011). Oyserman's (2011) views of individual versus collective cultures and how individuals belonging to each culture make meaning could highlight a flaw in the new critical approach to reading. Oyserman (2011) claimed each culture would view a text differently, but new critics argued for one correct reading of a text unimpacted by the reader, time period, or context (Di Leo, 2020; Wellek, 1978). Cunningham (2019) claimed students of color often align with cultural views diverging from capitalist ideology, and these views may contribute to the achievement gap. Students who did not align with individualistic and capitalist views ran a much

higher risk of performing poorly on standardized tests (Knoester & Au, 2017). These claims about the way cultures make meaning and how some cultures may be at risk for lower performance on standardized tests may be explained through Fish's (1976) interpretive communities.

The idea of Fish's (1976) interpretive community asserted people within a group sharing values would be able to come to similar and agreed-upon conclusions about a text. Educators can view the group of people writing the test questions on a standardized test as an interpretive community. Fish's (1976) ideas on interpretive communities translates to a group like the creators of the CCSS or a particular standardized test as the group creating the standards or a test is arguably a value-sharing group and, therefore, under the idea of interpretive communities, will have similar readings of literary test items.

New critical approaches such as close reading viewed texts as self-contained with universal meaning (Di Leo, 2020). However, if our cultural scripts influence how we make meaning (Daiute & Nelson, 1997), and our culture influences how we process speech (Hakonen et al., 2020), universal meaning in written language is seemingly not possible. Bleich (1979) went as far as to claim there are no universal truths, but Fish (1976) argued readers could come to similar or agreed-upon interpretations of texts when they belonged to the same interpretive community or a group, such as religion, that shared similar beliefs. Interpretive communities (Fish, 1976) align with both Daiute and Nelson (1997) and Hakonen et al. (2020), as each of these scholars viewed meaning and interpretation as something influenced by culture and background.

Daiute and Nelson's (1997) interpretations of social scripts may also connect to Iser's (1980) iteration of reader response theory. Brown (2008) and Hakonen et al. (2020) each found

discrepancies within groups, and Daiute and Nelson (1997) claimed meaning making comes from individual scripts. The discrepancies within groups holding similar scripts may root in Iser's (1980) views of individual interpretation. Iser (1980) claimed a group can come to a commonality of understanding through discussion, but nobody can know precisely what another person thinks or feels, as no person can experience the subconscious of another. Within a text, there are four perspectives a reader must make meaning: the reader, the author, the character, and the plot. Because of these four areas, there is plenty of room for disagreement on actual meaning within gaps in the text (areas of missing information the reader fills) (Iser, 1980). On top of the gaps, people interpret words in different manners (Fish, 1970). Rosenblatt's (1978) reader response theory accepts multiple readings of a text as people come from vastly different backgrounds and see the world in different ways. No one interpretation holds more value than another, albeit a group of people can agree upon a single interpretation, that interpretation is not inherent truth as new criticism would support (Fish, 1976).

This section discussed the ways in which individuals and groups make meaning, and how individuals as well as groups could see each meaning making outcome in a different way. However, the CCSS detail static interpretations and the static interpretations may be a key issue within the United States' implementation of the CCSS.

Issues Perpetuated as a Result of a Positivist Reading Paradigm

The group creating the CCSS seemingly viewed reading interpretation as static and may have ignored the meaning making processes I described in the previous section. By viewing reading interpretation as static, states could quantify reading ability through standardized testing and hold schools accountable for students' reading growth (Thomas, 2018). No Child Left Behind (NCLB), a policy preceding the CCSS, demonstrated what the department of education

saw as positive outcomes of quantitatively assessing reading because the standardized testing mandated under the NCLB uncovered an achievement gap between both class and race (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.).

When new criticism gained traction in learning institutions, Crosman (1980) spoke out directly against the idea of intentionalism, or the idea that the author had an intent for writing something. Intentionalism and new criticism lead to only one interpretation of a text that the ruling class often determined (Gangi & Reilly, 2013). If a group of people were to come together to write standardized test items with an agreed upon interpretation, that group could be considered an interpretive community under Fish's (1976) definition. Any test taker with cultural scripts outside of the person or group making standardized test items may not view a text the same way as the test creators because they may belong to a different interpretive community than the test makers. Many of the reading items showing up on standardized tests are rooted in a reading of a text steeped in capitalist ideology (Gangi & Reilly, 2013). Suppose a person does not have a cultural background in capitalism or opposes the ideology of capitalism. In that case, they may not read the text the same as the mainstream interpretive community that created the reading comprehension tests (Gangi & Reilly, 2013). America risks assessing comprehension based on cultural affiliations rather than reading ability and creating or maintaining inequity (Gangi & Reilly, 2013; Thomas, 2014).

Systemic Inequities

Inequities of standardized testing are rooted in the Army's racially motivated purpose for creating standardized tests. In 1917 the Army created a test with "assumed objectivity" to validate racist claims that people with darker skin were less intelligent and concluded, "The darker the skin, the lower the intelligence" (Knoester & Au, 2017, p. 6). In history, these

“objective results” were used to justify a scientific racial order, and Knoester and Au (2017) claimed the racist history of testing remains in modern standardized test outcomes. For example, the SAT creators sculpt standardized testing questions through the responses of predominantly white test-takers (Rosner, 2003). Rosner (2003), an admissions test expert, said:

Each individual SAT question ETS chooses is required to parallel outcomes of the test overall. So, if high-scoring test-takers – who are more likely to be white – tend to answer the question correctly in [experimental] pretesting, it’s a worthy SAT question; if not, it’s thrown out. Race and ethnicity are not considered explicitly, but racially disparate scores drive question selection, which in turn reproduces racially disparate test results in an internally reinforcing cycle. (para. 7)

Petts and Garza (2021) echoed that SAT test question selection still used practices that favor high-scoring test takers, and because most SAT test-takers are white and play a significant role in determining which questions to keep or eliminate (Rosner, 2003), white students are likelier to do better on the test (Knoester & Au, 2017).

Because it appears standardized testing was designed for and is now driven by white test takers, Lewis Ellison (2019) found it important to explore the concept of standardization, specifically under the CCSS through counter stories. Lewis Ellison (2019) used counter stories of four African American mothers who lived in urban settings (each with different intersectionality) to explore the mothers’ views of the CCSS. Three of these mothers worked in education, and all four chose not to partake in opt-out movements that were, at the time of the study, prevalent in their neighborhoods (Lewis Ellison, 2019). Key concerns amongst the four were equity in opportunity created by the standards, the ethics of the standards, the validity of the standards, the limitation of creativity, and the implementation of the standards. The mothers encouraged the use

of standards as benchmarks instead of high-stakes assessments and as ways to open the door for more culturally relevant teaching (Lewis Ellison, 2019). However, the strengths stated by the mothers require educators to shift away from linking the CCSS with standardized testing, which, Thomas (2018) claimed is impossible; standards will always lead to standardized testing. Standardized testing is flawed due to its racist history and virtually unchanged implementation and outcomes (Knoester & Au, 2017). The outcomes of standardized test scores have led to real-world ramifications and are "... the fulcrum upon which education reforms pivot, and a tool for racializing decisions about children, schools, and communities" (Knoester & Au 2017, p. 5).

To make matters worse, states use standardized testing aligned with the CCSS to rank schools, which leads to "justified" segregation (Knoester & Au, 2017). When a school performs poorly on a standardized test, state departments of education determine the school to be a school "at-risk" (Knoester & Au, 2017). Most schools that perform poorly on CCSS standardized tests are in neighborhoods with populations predominantly of people of color. This allows for segregation of schools and curricula and gives parents seemingly non-racist language of the want to attend a "good" school, but when good and bad are based on test scores, a "good" school means a white school (Knoester & Au, 2017). Humber (2020) claimed the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) mandating states publish school data allowed real estate sites to embed race data in real estate listings and transactions without violating the Fair Housing Act (FHA). Further, strong test scores within a school district caused the housing prices in that district to increase while low scores caused the prices to decrease (Schneider, 2017). What's more, a family's home value is one of the number one predictors of standardized testing outcomes for the children in the family (Schneider, 2017). Tax revenue for schools is largely based on home

values in the district so the standardized scores create a cycle where high scores lead to high home prices which leads to more school funding (Schneider, 2017).

In addition to fueling segregation and inequities amongst school districts, utilizing a new critical approach in the creation and expectations of the CCSS, and the testing connected with them, the states' implementations of the CCSS created a level of inequity within reading instruction and assessment (Cunningham, 2019; Thomas, 2014). Cunningham (2019) argued that standardized testing, inseparable from the CCSS (Shanahan, 2015; Thomas, 2014), is created to fit the capitalist views of the ruling class. The one “correct reading,” argued against by Brewer (2019), Gangi and Reilly (2013), and Shanahan (2014), on assessments often centered around the capitalist ideologies of white suburban America (Cunningham, 2019). The standardized assessments erased any culture, community, or family that did not align with a capitalistic epistemology (Cunningham, 2019). To raise scores, the communities in question must either conform to the mainstream view and funds of knowledge, thus erasing their epistemology, or continue underperforming (Cunningham, 2019). Overall, the CCSS may be failing because it promotes teachers teaching new critical readings of texts through close reading (Brewer, 2019; Thomas, 2014) and ignores the funds of knowledge and epistemology of people of color, or anyone for that matter who does not align with the mainstream American culture (Cunningham, 2019).

Creating Reading Interpretations

If meaning is created and not static, then some group would need to come together to create a common reading interpretation for each test item on standardized tests. If standardized testing is aligned to a certain group's values (Cunningham, 2018), then teachers would need to teach curricula that instructs students how to think in ways that align with those values. This

ideology is problematic because it seemingly leads to groups creating interpretations on standardized assessments that everyone else must accept as true in order to answer the test questions correctly.

Thomas (2018) claimed the CCSS and its focus on close reading (a rebranding of new criticism) allowed the tests' creators, often for-profit companies with government connections, to control how students think about texts. Ferguson (2013) similarly argued when people create tests, those people create the universal correct answer advocated for in new criticism; however, the proposed correct answer will come from the experiences and values of the group designing the test and ultimately erase the values of anyone outside of the cultural construct used to create the meaning (Cunningham, 2019). Those who shared cultures and experiences with the test creators were most likely to be successful on the test (Cunningham, 2019; Knoester & Au, 2017). The CCSS architects advocated that teaching students to master close reading will allow any student to have success on standardized assessments (Coleman, 2016). However, some researchers had an issue with the implementation of close reading (Ferguson, 2013).

Teaching to the CCSS requires teachers to have an understanding of what close reading is and how to achieve it, so in 2011 Coleman produced a video demonstrating how to conduct a close reading (Coleman, 2016). Ferguson (2013) attacked close reading by using the video David Coleman created. In the video, Coleman (2016) showed how to teach close reading using Martin Luther King Jr's "Letter from a Birmingham Jail." Ferguson (2013) argued the close reading Coleman performed in the video did not consider any of the cultural context happening at the time Dr. King wrote the letter. Coleman's (2016) close reading also did not discuss how the letter functions in today's society and is merely Coleman's interpretation of the letter. Ferguson (2013) claimed Coleman can assert his close reading is correct because he is one of the lead architects of

the CCSS. Close reading ideology gives unlimited power to the designers of the public education curriculum because the creators dictate right and wrong in an act that Ferguson (2013) argued requires so much reader influence in meaning-making. With his video on conducting close reading, Coleman (2016) can claim this is the “right” reading of the letter, and because he was a lead architect of the CCSS, many educators followed the close reading practice. In education today, corporations are the ones who determine the “right” reading of a text.

Corporations and Close Reading

Reforms in education have continued to push American education towards a more business-based model with the purpose of an American education being to teach students how to have the tools needed to gain economic success (Endacott & Goering, 2014). Educational companies create standards-based materials generating reading outcomes that connect to the goals of corporate America (Carillo, 2019). Endacott and Goering (2014) claimed:

Our children have become akin to new products some ‘edu-corporation’ wants to research and develop before bringing to market. Not surprisingly, the product reflects exactly what big business values in its workers—emphasis on analysis, argument, and specialization—at the potential expense of beauty, empathy, personal reflection, and humanity. (p. 90)

Big business values are ever present in the standards likely because corporations such as ACT, College Board, and Achieve Inc. helped write the CCSS over actual classroom teachers.

Education groups like the National Council for Teachers of English (NCTE) did not provide feedback until after the corporations worked with the federal government to write the standards (Endacott & Goering, 2014). After receiving tens-of-thousands of suggestions from educational organizations, the lead writers spent only two months revising the CCSS then the federal

government pushed the CCSS out to states before anybody actually tested the standards for their effectiveness in the classroom (Endacott & Goering, 2014).

Corporations played key roles in writing the standards, and educational corporations are heavy stakeholders in continuing the standardized testing era because many testing companies receive large sums of money from the federal government to create standardized tests (Endacott & Goering, 2014). Teachers teach what is on the test; therefore, test making corporations dictate school curriculums and education corporations maintain their power through high stakes testing (Endacott and Goering, 2014). The power cycle detailed above is one area where Ferguson's (2013) claims may come to fruition; by corporations maintaining their power in high stakes testing, they are able to dictate what they want students to know.

Corporations can dictate political or business agendas through close reading. Close reading allows political entities and corporations to dictate reading interpretations because it allows state politicians and companies to determine the purpose of reading and the correct readings of a text (Thomas, 2018). When educators teach close reading and accept only one interpretation of a text, the creators of the content, who profit from the tests, can control students' thoughts about the things they read and create right and wrong readings (Thomas, 2018). Instead of encouraging students to create and connect with others, schools promote business values through the CCSS to make future "products," also known as workers (Carillo, 2019), and erase all individuality and cultures outside capitalism (Cunningham, 2019).

In addition to the productization of American youth, close reading can also lead to dangerous reading ideologies. Carillo (2019) claimed America operates in a "post-truth" society where people share fake news, racist ideologies, and political agendas on social media unchecked. In addition to its connection to standardized testing, the CCSS created dangerous

purposes for reading in modern-day society by valuing the text over all else. When teachers use the reading approach advocated for in the CCSS, the text holds all power, and students learn to look only within the text. As a result, teaching close reading causes readers to “download” the text and know it but not understand it within a cultural context further perpetuating the dangers of an abundance of fake news articles (Carillo, 2019). For instance, when teachers teach readers to focus only on what the text says, articles discussing racist ideologies, such as the Muslim ban during the Trump administration, are taken at face value, affirm racist views, and neglect the more prominent cultural context (Carillo, 2019). If teachers teach close reading as a focus on text over context, then students may struggle to recognize fake or false articles and view the articles as true.

Overall, the positivist reading approach in the CCSS eliminated the voice of any student who does not follow the capitalist ideology ever-present in mainstream American culture (Cunningham, 2019). Tampio (2018) argued positivist reading hinders student autonomy, causes school administrations to eliminate anything not tested, leads to formulaic and non-creative writing, and does not consider student experiences or knowledge.

This positivist approach may not pose a recognizable issue to students who connect with the cultural lens utilized on the standardized test; however, new critical approaches give the United States public education ultimate power in promoting messages that benefit specific political or capitalist agendas (Cunningham, 2019; Endacott & Goering, 2014; Ferguson, 2013). In other words, the lens through which teachers teach how to read for standardized testing coincides with the ideologies of the ruling class and perpetuates the status quo. Reader response theory replacing new criticism as the dominant reading paradigm in America could remedy many of these social inequities.

Reader Response Theory Over New Criticism

Textual interpretation is a cultural phenomenon (Daiute and Nelson, 1997; Fish, 1976; Hakonen et al., 2020) and therefore calls for reader response to replace new criticism as the primary reading paradigm used in modern American classrooms. The CCSS proposed one unified reading of a text where texts have the knowledge to give through one unified interpretation (Coleman & Pimentel, 2011; Di Leo, 2020). However, Cunningham (2019) argued the interpretations of texts under the CCSS align with capitalist ideology, and anyone falling outside capitalist views was more likely to struggle with the reading items on American standardized tests. Tampio (2018) argued that the CCSS did not consider student background or culture and eliminated student autonomy in interpreting texts. Instead of viewing textual interpretation as a unified positivist practice executed through close attention to text features (Di Leo, 2020), American education should consider viewing textual interpretation as individual and experience-based (Brewer, 2019) to allow students to feel empowered to see themselves as holders of knowledge (Thomas, 2018).

The United States' education system has failed to impact reading scores over the last decade, and nothing has changed despite countless attempts highlighted in the arguments in the reading wars (Castles et al., 2018; Wexler, 2019; Aukerman & Chambers Schuldt, 2021). Given this information, government agencies such as federal and local departments of education should revise the new critically-based CCSS as the standards are seemingly (a) not working, (b) not being assessed properly, or (c) a combination of both. Educational agencies could consider how both the work of Rosenblatt and the creation of reader-response theory has timeless application and value in the classroom (Connell, 2000).

A Shift in the Purpose for Reading

Rosenblatt created her reader-response theory in the 1930s under the ideas of John Dewey as a direct opposition to new criticism (Connell, 2000, 2008). Connell (2000) claimed Rosenblatt's theory was one of the best manifestations in an approach to education, answering John Dewey's call for education to be based on experiences and explained Rosenblatt's views are rooted in radical empiricism and pragmatic philosophy. Further, Rosenblatt used the term transaction to solidify her connection to Dewey (Connell, 2000). John Dewey (1938) expressed that education should focus on helping students learn through interactions and experiences found in actual society. A new critical approach eliminated all knowledge outside mainstream interpretation and ignored other experiences. Instead, educators could shift to valuing the reader's experience and focus on experiential learning (Brewer, 2019). This progressivist approach is in almost direct contrast with the CCSS because close reading focuses on a reading from one cultural view in America, heavily relying on capitalism (Cunningham, 2019). Reader response theory allows teachers the opportunity for multiple readings of a text in their class and a basis to teach through student experiences.

Educators could approach reading instruction and assessment within the spirit and confines of the reader response and transactional theory of reading to tap into the value of experiential learning. Afflerbach et al. (2013) claimed students' abilities to connect their experiences to the text demonstrates reading development in a way standardized positivist approaches could not. According to Connell (2000), the primary shift in curriculum needed is a change in the purpose of literacy instruction. Presently educators focus on teaching text features (such as the main idea, author's purpose, structure, topic sentences, or supporting details) and how to take what the text is trying to tell the reader. Instead, Connell (2000) proposed a shift to

gaining an authentic experience through an aesthetic transaction with the text using Rosenblatt's (1978) reader response theory. In short, students study literature to gain experiences instead of knowledge.

Experiential Literary Instruction. Books are works of art that add to our experiences, and the language arts classroom could be a place of broadening experiences, not extracting information, because experiences shape us (Connell 2000; 2008). In her discussion of why people read books, Baron (2015) quoted India's prime minister Jawaharlal Nehru's 1935 prison diary. While imprisoned for acts of civil disobedience, Nehru (1935) wrote the purpose of reading is:

... to instruct oneself, amuse oneself, train one's mind...certainly all this and much more.

Ultimately it is to understand life with its thousand faces and to learn to live life.... books give us the experiences and thoughts of innumerable others, often the wisest of their generation, and lift us out of our narrow ruts. (as cited in Baron, 2015, p. 24)

This quote aligns with Connell's (2000, 2008) call to have reading experience-based instead of knowledge-based. While Connell (2000, 2008) and Nehru (1935) both advocated for books to lead experiences that shape us, the modern purpose of literary instruction attempts to lead students to different outcomes.

Probst (1994) claimed language arts curriculums attempted to create literary critics. Instead, the language arts classroom should try to help students explore their ideas and learn to create meaning. If the writers of the CCSS based the reading approach on new criticism, educators are asking students to come to the same conclusion about a text as literary scholars did (Thomas, 2014). Probst (1994) asserted that reading instruction too often relied on literary scholars' thoughts and discounted or completely ignored the ideas of the individual reader.

Tucker (2000) partially agreed with Probst (1994) but thought the creation of literary critics and scholars was a primary goal of reading instruction. Tucker (2000) asserted students could become literary scholars when educators accepted students' knowledge and experiences as factors in interpreting a text. More recently Beers and Probst (2020) argued that teachers should help create independent readers who utilize texts to reshape visions of the world and society and empower students to explore power dynamics. Educators could embrace how students use experiences to create meaning, or how texts can help reshape students' perceptions of society (Probst & Beers, 2020), but when students read literature under a new critical approach, it is a passive activity where the literature has something to give, and the student has something to receive (Tucker, 2000). Instead, a shift to Rosenblatt's (1978) transactional theory could allow meaning-making to be an event impacted by both the text and the reader and could achieve the goal of the experiential curriculum. Future standards and curriculums could center around experiences-based reading instruction.

Thomas (2014) argued that the creators of the CCSS did not consider the reader's intersectionality, thus perpetuating academic inequities. Instead of accepting the ideas of new criticism, a shift to genre study, where students look at a text through multiple lenses and discuss how meaning is changed, could be more culturally appropriate and meaningful than a singular reading of a text advocated for in new criticism and standardized testing (Brewer, 2019).

One way for school districts to move in the direction of analyzing multiple readings of a text (which is the basis of genre study), is to adopt the ideas of reader response theory (Brewer, 2019). The CCSS does not embrace reader response theory (Brewer, 2019; Gangi & Reilly, 2013; Thomas, 2014). With reader response theory, there are infinite ways a reader can interpret

a text, and all are valid as long as the reader can explain the connection to their own experiences and values (Rosenblatt, 1978).

Middle School Students as Creators of Meaning. Middle school students can participate in interpretive communities when making sense of literature and texts. Alvermann et al. (1996) completed a multi-case study observing the experience of middle school students having text-based meaning-making discussions. Students often recognize the factors needed for meaningful discussion and notice instances where meaning-making discussions disguised themselves as “teacher questions, then the student responds,” or standardized test prep (Alvermann et al., 1996). In these instances, little meaning-making happens as the teacher creates the only correct answer and thus mirrors the issues arising in new criticism (McGinley et al., 2017). When this occurs, students often abandon discussion and divide work to complete the assignment, because the students do not need discussion to complete the activity (Alvermann et al., 1996). Even though students cannot “divide up” multi-meaning discussion questions, which could lead to more effort and work, many students prefer multi-meaning discussion questions and topics that are engaging and debatable (Alvermann et al., 1996).

These debatable discussion questions in the classroom can lead to rich meaning-making experiences for the students because each student’s literary analysis and the meaning-making process are different (Hancock, 1993). In a mixed-method study utilizing journals, interviews, and observations, Hancock (1993) found that out of ten different middle school students, nine respective participants approached reading differently. The students came to remarkably diverse interpretations of the same text, and some individual readers took on different processing approaches when reading different texts. These findings seem to coincide with sense-making in the adult populations Brown et al. (2008) and Daiute and Nelson (1997) used.

Multiple other studies and articles have detailed instances where middle school students can come to a diverse set of readings of a text even though the students participate in the same language arts classes or attend the same school district (Aukerman, 2006; Hansell, 1984; Park, 2012; Pennell, 2014; Pike, 2002; Pope and Round 2015; Tucker, 2000). Middle school students can participate in interpretive communities and be creators of meaning when they are allowed. However, when educators ask for students to identify specific things in a text, educators “get what they ask for” from students (Hansell, 1984). Because of this, sixth- to eighth-grade students are highly capable of viewing multiple meanings within texts but teachers seldom ask for responses from students that require multiple interpretations (Hansell, 1984). When given the arena to demonstrate sense-making ability, many can make intricate personal connections to a text without the constraints of attempting to find a single correct answer (Park, 2012). Although some think these connections are limited to young adult literature written within the time period the students currently reside in, Pike (2002) found students can still create meaningful connections to texts within the literary canon. Student responses to literature can rival or challenge literary critics' responses (Pope & Round, 2015). When the teacher steps aside and allows students to be the “knowers” of a text, students can validate and explore their thinking and challenge one another (Aukerman, 2006). Educators could allow students to explore literature with Rosenblatt’s (1978) reader response theory and abandon the cultural and interpretive constraints of new criticism (Brewer, 2019; Gangi & Reilly, 2013; Thomas, 2014). Educators can help students achieve meaningful transactional responses by allowing students to validate their thinking and see themselves as an independent authority to interpret a text (Aukerman, 2006).

Reader Response in Practice

Di Leo (2020) articulated three outcomes of reading paradigms. The meaning-making process can be: (1) monolithic, where the form and content of the work are connected, and one correct meaning of a text exists, (2) dualistic, where the form of the work is separate from the content, and readers can view form in different fashions, but the content holds one meaning, or (3) pluralistic, where there are multiple meanings in both form and content (Di Leo, 2020). Under the CCSS, students became monolithic readers (Sulzer, 2014). Monolithic readings removed the power from the reader and established a hierarchy between teacher and student where the teacher will view students' responses and redirect students when their responses do not align with the CCSS (Sulzer, 2014). However, when given the opportunity, students could engage in pluralistic readings, as shown in the studies Del Nero (2017), Park (2012), Pennell (2014), and Spring (2016) conducted. To move away from monolithic and teacher-centered readings, education standards could shift to reader response theory because it is tailored to work as a student-centered reading paradigm in the classroom and empowers students to have ownership over their thoughts and ideas (Sheridan, 1991). Rosenblatt did not see reading as monolithic or dualistic, but as a non-linear and ever-changing event based on a person, time, and place (Wilson, 2021). The current reading instructional practices have students simply waiting for the answer from the teacher and never generating their ideas (Sulzer, 2014). Pennell (2014) found when elementary students were able and encouraged to utilize their personal experiences to help create meaning in a text, struggling readers were able to engage in higher order analysis.

Pennell's (2014) results seem promising, but they are not the only example of successful reader-response pedagogy. Park (2012) found reader response-based group reading allowed students to access the text from multiple points of understanding, understand themselves, and

empathize with others. When using new critical approaches, teachers encourage students to value the text over personal responses and this encouragement limits the instances students use texts to learn about others in the class or in their life (Park, 2012).

The personal responses students can generate from a text come from multiple experiences, but Spring (2016) found the place a student came from held high importance in the student's interpretation of a text. Different students in Spring's (2016) study valued different parts of the text depending on the geographical location of their upbringing and current living situation. I attributed the results of these reader response-based studies to the idea that reader response is both pragmatic and practical (Davis, 1992). Rosenblatt's framework valued democracy, allowed a challenge in the power dynamics of the classroom in whose voice matters in the interpretation of a text, and encouraged pedagogy that helps students embrace their backgrounds during the act of reading (Davis, 1992).

Embracing backgrounds and sharing experiences through the reading process allowed the language arts classroom to become a place for learning about themselves and others (Park, 2012). Lewis Ellison (2019) claimed moving away from a heavy focus on standards-based teaching would lead to the possibility of culturally-responsive teaching not currently endorsed in the reading paradigm of the CCSS. Thomas (2018) called for educators to realize the difference in experiences caused significant divergences in interpretation and a need to embrace those divergences in the reading process. Afflerbach et al. (2013) stated the personal responses students made connecting themselves to the text were in fact evidence of student growth in reading.

Curriculum Implications

If educators embrace the diverse outcomes in the sense-making processes (Brown et al., 2008; Daiute & Nelson, 1997; Hakonen et al., 2020) and recognize the CCSS are plagued by the intentionalist thinking of new criticism (Brewer, 2019; Gangi & Reilly, 2013; Thomas, 2014), teachers can move reading instruction forward into a space where it creates outward-facing, culturally-aware citizens (McGinley et al., 2017). Educators' views of reading instruction could abandon the notion that there is a singular interpretation, whether a teacher or test maker creates the meaning, and teach students critical lenses through which to observe literature (McGinley et al., 2017). Teachers can promote students drawing multiple conclusions about texts by allowing for dialogic teaching, recognizing a text as a fluid entity, and recognizing the reader as a fluid entity (Pennell, 2014). This teaching philosophy must be ongoing because meaning is not made in a moment but changed and created over time (Taylor, 2011). In a case study following how middle school students make meaning, Taylor (2011) found the meaning-making process starts as soon as the idea of reading a book comes into being and never truly ends; instead, meaning builds.

Through observations within the case study, Taylor (2011) proposed a reimagining of Rosenblatt's (1978) reader response theory stating readers make meaning through intrapersonal and interpersonal connections. Students make meaning internally, based on their background, and externally when their interpretation is challenged and discussed within a group. As more ideas, new experiences, or other cultural influences enter the group dynamic, overall meaning changes (Taylor, 2011).

To allow these meaning-making events to transpire, McGinley et al. (2017) asserted educators can and should have “both/and” a critical reading of a text as well as a personal

reading of a text within language arts classrooms, and the personal reading will help create the critical reading. This approach could allow students to lead with their imagination and transport into the lives and the worlds of characters, then view those characters through multiple critical lenses to create outward-facing citizens and readers (McGinley et al., 2017). By shifting the purpose of reading as a means to create outward facing citizens, readers will gain empathy for the characters and better understand the social injustices impacting others that may not have transpired during an individual reading or a reading in search of a single answer (McGinley, 2017). Students should have the opportunity to participate in a discussion-based classroom where teachers and classmates value all opinions, validate and argue ideas, and embrace individual thinking (Aukerman, 2006). Cultural and systematic barriers stand in the way of this occurring, as the CCSS perpetuates new criticism and a single interpretation of a text (Brewer, 2019; Gangi & Reilly, 2013; Thomas, 2014).

Until schools and policymakers acknowledge the sense-making ability of children and the cultural and future value that can manifest from sense-making as a fluid process (McGinley, 2017), teachers and students will continue to fall victim to “the reading wars,” new criticism, and poor standardized scores because American education fails to recognize the reader as a meaning-making individual (Gangi & Reilly, 2013; Rosenblatt, 1978; Thomas, 2014).

Schools Cannot Embrace Reader Response

Unfortunately, teachers cannot embrace the experience-based teaching promoted by Del Nero (2017), Park (2012), Pennell (2014), and Spring (2016) because America focuses on standardized testing, which is inseparable from the CCSS (Shanahan, 2015; Thomas 2014). Standardized test scores hold significant weight in education and make embracing differences in students almost impossible (Knoester & Au, 2017). The standardized tests states used to hold

schools accountable for student learning stem from new critical practices (North, 2013), but if educators see reading as pluralistic, these tests do not measure reading ability but instead students' abilities to align with the thinking of the dominant class (Cunningham, 2019).

In his speech at the New York State Department of Education, Coleman (2011), a lead architect of the CCSS, voiced his disdain for experience-based reading pedagogy with his line, "As you grow up in this world, you realize that people don't really give a shit about what you feel or think." This ideology directly negates the thoughts students bring to the text and focuses on the future rather than the here and now. The CCSS discusses preparation for the future of entering the workforce or attending college. This goal ignores the present status of the students' capabilities and writes the narrative that students are not yet ready to make meaning of complex texts and ideas (Sulzer, 2014). The creators of the CCSS did not have students in mind but testing in mind to create questions allowing states to compare scores (Sulzer, 2014) and used a paradigm unresearched within the student population (Hinchman & Moore, 2013). However, students can engage in complex texts when they can understand a text through their own experiences and cultural constructs (Thein, 2009). Students can then begin to view the text through other lenses and perspectives (Brewer, 2019).

Del Nero's (2017) case study highlighted the primary tension regarding which reading paradigm educators should use to inform instruction when school administration put a stop to their study mid-way through because reader response approaches did not align with the CCSS. Despite the halt, Del Nero (2017) showed students' high order of thinking and analysis throughout the unit, but the thinking and analysis aligned with reader response paradigms rather than new critical, causing the school administration to diminish the value of the teaching and learning, and call for instruction aligned with the CCSS.

Conclusion

Architects of the CCSS utilized new criticism as a reading paradigm and attempted to create text-centered questions providing key details, specific text evidence, and text-dependent responses to promote in-depth and accurate readings of texts, creating outcomes states could quantitatively use to show reading progress (Coleman & Pimentel, 2011; Sulzer, 2014).

However, architects of the common core used minimal empirical research in the creation of the reading standards (Hinchman & Moore, 2013; Tienkein & Orlich, 2013), and in advocating for a single right answer to a text, current literary practices removed the reader from the act of reading (Sulzer, 2014), failed to improve quantitative reading ability (Wexler, 2019), and perpetuated school segregation and the achievement gap (Cunningham, 2019; Knoester & Au, 2019). Reader response approaches have demonstrated positive, promising, and affirmable results in classroom practices (Del Nero, 2017; Park, 2012; Pennell, 2014; Spring, 2016).

I chose to utilize a reader response framework to conduct this study because of the clear adverse outcomes of the new critical paradigms I detailed in this present literature review. While multiple studies have utilized reader response approaches (Del Nero, 2017; Park, 2012; Pennell, 2014; Spring, 2016), none I have uncovered have studied students' natural meaning-making approaches when reading. Thein (2009) claimed, "...researchers must study how readers respond to texts by employing similar socially and culturally constructed processes and practices that transfer across their interpretations of both lived and text-worlds" (p.278). Aukerman and Chambers Schuldt (2021) called for researchers to conduct more case studies to strengthen the socially just science of reading. As a result of the calls of Thein (2009) and Aukerman and Chambers Schuldt (2021), I developed a QUAL-QUAL simultaneous design (Morse, 2010) case

study and document analysis to center student responses in order to compare their responses to the PSSA to understand the reading paradigm students employ when making meaning of a text.

Davis (1992) claimed Rosenblatt built reader response theory with the classroom in mind and stated meaning-making happens within the connections made based on experience. I built this study to center student responses and explore how students make meaning to help inform future reading curriculums, standards, and instruction. According to Thein (2009), educators should understand how readers respond to texts. Further, researchers may need to examine if the issues in reading scores are in part due to the CCSS employing a positivist reading approach and potentially shift to experience-based practices (Brewer, 2019), especially at the middle school level where test scores have remained stagnant under a new critical regime (Wexler, 2019) and fallen after pandemic-related school closures (Associated Press, 2022),

Summary

Overall, in this section I discussed multiple factors that potentially contribute to stagnant reading scores in the United States. I first articulated the theoretical framework I used while conducting this study. Next, I discussed how new critical reading approaches are present within the standardized testing era now functioning under the CCSS, and how the standardized tests may be assessing factors outside of student reading ability. I then reviewed different instructional approaches teachers use in classrooms in modern education. After, I discussed the ways in which people create meaning through cultural and experiential factors. I detailed the inequities in education possibly exacerbated through the implementation of the CCSS, and concluded the section with what a reader response reading paradigm might look like and achieve in modern school settings.

Chapter III: Methodology

Many reading experts have posited that the CCSS are a reincarnation of new criticism, where all needed information to create meaning comes within the four corners of the text (Tampio, 2018). Arguing against new criticism, Rosenblatt (1978) detailed transactional reading, where the text and the reader both create meaning, and the reading generates an emotional response. In order to learn more about how eighth-grade students in one classroom approached literary analysis and how that analytical approach compared to the CCSS, I used a simultaneous mixed-methods QUAL-QUAL design (Morse, 2010). Phase 1 of this qualitative study was a document analysis of PSSA's available released items to identify recurring themes arising in the TDA section of the PSSA released items (Pennsylvania Department of Education 2015; 2021; 2022). Phase 2 of this qualitative study was a case study of an eighth-grade classroom in a suburban, Pennsylvania middle school. As part of this case study, students read and responded to myth and poem passages from the PSSA released items. I coded student responses to identify the themes and literary approaches the students utilized. I combined the results of these two studies by comparing the themes generated from the two types of qualitative analysis to explore if the PSSA's anticipated student approach to analysis of texts matched or differed from that of how students naturally approached these passages.

Summary of Research Design

In this dissertation, I utilized a mixed method QUAL-QUAL simultaneous design which utilized both document analysis and case study approaches.

Mixed Methods

In practice, mixed method designs combine qualitative and quantitative methods together when one or the other is not sufficient (Creswell & Clark, 2017). By combining both quantitative

and qualitative designs, researchers are able to create more sophisticated designs and combine designs that could not exist together before the emergence of mixed methods (Creswell & Clark, 2017). However, other methodologists in mixed methods research allowed for the mixing of two qualitative methods to strengthen the ways in which researchers can understand data (Morse, 2010; Morse & Cheeks, 2014).

Many researchers acknowledge three core mixed methods designs: convergent design, explanatory sequential design, and exploratory sequential design (Creswell & Clark, 2017). Morse (2010) provided a simultaneous mixed methods design where researchers are able to use two different qualitative designs within one study. Morse's (2010) simultaneous design is very similar to Creswell & Clark's (2017) convergent design. In both simultaneous designs and convergent designs, the researcher collects two data sets, analyzes them separately, and compares the results. Neither data set holds more importance over the other, and which data set the researcher collects first does not matter (Creswell & Clark, 2017; Morse, 2010).

In traditional mixed methods designs, researchers use a convergent design when they want to collect both qualitative and quantitative data in two separate databases then combine or compare the data. Within convergent designs, the order in which the researcher collects the data should not matter as one database does not inform the other, but the mixing of the findings from the two databases provides researchers further understanding about their research problem (Creswell & Clark, 2017). Similarly, simultaneous design provides the same data collection format as the convergent design, but while using a simultaneous design, researchers collect qualitative data through the lenses of two different qualitative methodologies.

Morse (2010) claimed a simultaneous design of two qualitative methodologies is mixed methods research; however, they argue that one study must be a core component, while the other

must be a supplementary component. While Creswell and Clark (2017) articulated their convergent design as QUAL-quan, QUAN-qual, or QUAL-QUAN, Morse (2010) only provided a QUAL-qual design. In this present study, neither data set was impacted by or needed to come before the other. Further, each data set played an equal role in the study in order for me to make meaning of the research question. To explore how the literary interpretations anticipated on Pennsylvania's standardized test, the PSSA, compared to the natural literary interpretations of eighth-grade students, both data sets needed to be present in the analysis. Therefore, this present study is a QUAL-QUAL simultaneous design informed by both Creswell and Clark's (2017) convergent design and Morse's (2010) simultaneous design.

In sum, in this dissertation I conducted a mixed methods study mixing document analysis (Bowen, 2009) and case study (Stake, 1995). Although the order in which I collected data did not matter, I conducted a document analysis during Phase 1 of the study, and I conducted a case study during Phase 2 of the study.

Document Analysis

Phase 1 of the present mixed-method study utilized document analysis to analyze the themes emerging on the eighth-grade PSSA released narrative fiction TDA items. In practice, "document analysis is a systematic procedure for reviewing or evaluating documents—both printed and electronic material" (Bowen, 2009, p. 27). Any document containing text qualifies for qualitative document analysis (Morgan, 2022). The process of document analysis is effective because the document is static with unchanging data, non-intrusive, and cost effective (Bowen, 2009); however, document analyses are limited to the number of pre-existing documents available (Morgan, 2022).

Document analysis is a combination of content analysis and thematic analysis where the

researcher skims, reads, then interprets the document (Bowen, 2009). The method does not utilize the quantitative aspects of content analysis where the text is analyzed for frequency of word usage, but instead document analysis does an initial read through of the document to identify key areas of the document. When analyzing the document, researchers should view the document as expressing the biases of the original creators (Morgan, 2022). After the researcher identifies these biases, they can focus on key parts of the document to re-read, code, and categorize to uncover themes emerging from the document (Bowen, 2009).

Case Study

Case studies, unlike most other designs in research, do not have a universal agreed upon implementation (Yazan, 2015). Creswell and Clark (2007), as well as Yin (2002), viewed a case study as a mixed-method where the researcher mixes qualitative and quantitative designs and data. However, both Stake (1995) and Merriam (1998) asserted case studies can center around qualitative data only. In this present study I utilized Stake's (1995) definition of a case study where "the case is a specific, a complex, functioning thing" (p. 2). In Stake's rendering of a case study, data collection begins as early as the time when the researcher starts to understand the case and considers the case's particularities and systems (Stake, 1995). Once a researcher chooses a particular case and begins learning about the case through observations, the researcher's questions should inform all data collection (Stake, 1995). A case study should consist of observation, interviews, and document reviews, and researchers should be able to make flexible decisions about the design and instruments as they learn more and more about the case (Stake, 1995).

Stake (1995) stated there are three types of case study designs: intrinsic, instrumental, and collective. In an intrinsic case study, the researcher learns about one case and focuses on a

current problem (Stake, 1995). When a researcher conducts an intrinsic case study, the current situation or problem within a setting like a school or company forces the researcher to study a specific case to gain understanding of how the case functions within the specific setting (Stake, 1995). In an instrumental case study, the researcher studies one specific case but seeks to understand something outside of that specific case (Stake, 1995). In a collective case study, the researcher examines multiple instrumental case studies as a group or collection (Stake, 1995).

Because Stake's (1995) case study design is flexible, I also utilized Merriam's (1998) description of case study to provide some additional structure to the present study. Merriam (1998) stated a case study should conduct a literature review, construct a theoretical framework, identify a research problem, craft research questions, purposefully select the sample, and utilize field observations, interviews, and written responses to explore the case. Thus, I have interwoven each of these components into this particular study. In the next section, I will detail the attributes and selection process of this specific case.

The Case

Stake (1995) claimed a case is a specific thing. The case I utilized in this present study was a single class at a suburban middle school. This section will detail how I selected the case as well as attributes of the case.

Case Selection

When selecting a case, a researcher should consider how much they can learn from the case, how much access they have to the case, and how welcome they are at the site of the case (Stake, 1995). Also, a researcher should choose a case that is unique yet still representative of the researcher's line of inquiry (Stake, 1995). I chose to select a case from a middle school in a district where I was employed because I already had an early-stage observational understanding

of this specific case that Stake (1995) advocated for in a case study. In particular, I had daily access to the case, was welcome as a teacher-researcher in the space, and had multiple cases available. I purposefully selected a single rostered class period I taught that had the widest range of proficiency on the seventh grade PSSA. The wide range of scores maximized what I could learn from this case because the case captured a wide variety of performances on the test. While standardized performance may capture reading ability, it may also capture students conducting analysis differently or aligning to a diverse cultural view other than the test promotes (Cunningham, 2019), and I wanted to understand how this specific case conducted analysis.

Case Description

The population of the school is approximately 75% white, 10% of two or more races, 5% Asian, 5% African American, and 5% Hispanic. Approximately 20% of students receive free or reduced lunch. This site typically has high student achievement, but low growth on eighth-grade language arts PSSA standardized tests. On the 2021 PSSA, 73% of eighth-grade students read at a proficient level compared to the statewide average of 57.9%. Stake (1995) stated a researcher should select a case based on the research questions and the ability to maximize learning, and this population is well suited for this study because I chose a class within the school that has multiple students in most scoring categories of the PSSA (no students in this class scored below basic). The class breakdown in seventh-grade PSSA scores included approximately 50% of students scoring in the proficient range, 30% of students scoring in the advanced range, and 20% of students scoring in the basic range. I chose this class because it represented the widest student score range of all available classes in the case and had multiple students in each scoring category (except below basic). Having multiple students in each scoring category allowed me to gather data from all levels of students within one case allowing me to maximize what I could learn from

this case, and I selected this case based on my second research sub-question examining how eighth-grade students approached literary analysis. I chose not to include any further demographic information (outside of gender) about each student to protect the identity of the participants. Providing further demographic information about participants in the present small sample could allow for others to identify individual participants.

Case studies should focus on a problem within the site (Stake, 1995). This site typically has high achievement but low growth on standardized reading assessments, so questioning the analytical approach of eighth-grade students at a site where students generally do well on comprehension illuminated some possible reasons many students at the site are not showing reading growth between grades. This research study benefited the site by providing a better understanding of the way the students approached analysis in order to help make pedagogical choices surrounding reading instruction.

Setting

This study occurred at a suburban Pennsylvania middle school where I spent nine years teaching eighth-grade language arts. I was an active participant in this research because I taught the participants in the study and mostly collected data through typical classroom practices within this district.

My classroom was located within a cluster of four rooms all connected to a team center. The team center was a general meeting place for all students on my team. My team consisted of a language art teacher (me), a social studies teacher, a science teacher, a math teacher, and a special education teacher, where approximately one-hundred students shared this same group of teachers. The entrance to my room was located through the team center, and my room had three windows, two whiteboards, and an emergency exit to the outside. The room was a medium-sized

room and held up to approximately thirty-five students, but class sizes averaged around twenty-two students per class. Because I was a teacher-researcher at this setting, an active participant in the research, and analyzed and interpreted all data, it is important to consider my biases.

Researcher's Bias

I discussed my researcher bias in a previous chapter (see Chapter I) where I claimed I favored reader response approaches. Because I have acknowledged biases that impacted my interpretation of the data, I employed a constructivist worldview and a framework informed by reader response theory throughout this present study. In this framework, readers make meaning through an aesthetic transaction between the reader and the text (Rosenblatt, 1978), and every text has two poles, the artistic and the aesthetic. The artistic pole is the creation of the author (the artist), and the aesthetic pole is the interpretation of the reader. Meaning is made somewhere between these two poles (Iser, 1980). A group of readers with similar values and world views, like a group of people following the same religion or students in the same language arts classroom can employ interpretive strategies to create a similar meaning of a text (Fish, 1976). Overall, in Reader Response theory, a group of readers creates meaning in tandem with the text. This contrasts with new criticism where meaning is universal (Di Leo, 2020).

Reader response theory is similar to constructivism as it holds constructivist values, and Creswell and Clark (2017) described a constructivist worldview as one that has multiple realities, calls for closeness and subjectivity, is biased, and is inductive. Stake (1995) claimed qualitative research centers around the idea that there are multiple interpretations and views of a case. Table 2 demonstrates my worldview through the categories Creswell and Clark (2017, p .37) suggested.

Table 2*My Worldview*

Philosophical question	Constructivism	My worldview
Ontology (What is the nature of reality?)	Multiple realities	There are multiple theories surrounding reading instruction and the meaning-making process. This study focused on close reading versus reader response.
Epistemology (What is the relationship between the researcher and that being researched?)	Closeness and subjectivity	All the data collected in this study took place in one of my rostered language arts classrooms at the school all the participants regularly attended.
Axiology (What is the role of values?)	Biased	I favor reader response approaches over new criticism therefore I am not an advocate of the common core language arts standards as they are a reincarnation of new criticism.
Methodology (What is the language of research?)	Inductive	I used inductive in-vivo coding to build a codebook from the ground up in order to capture participant views during the case study. However, I used deductive coding during the document analysis in order to balance some of my biases.

Note: Philosophical question and constructivist view column directly quoted from (Creswell and Clark, 2017, p 37).

Constructivism aligns closely with the beliefs of the reader response theory because, according to Creswell and Clark (2017), participants in constructivist studies create meaning through social interactions and personal histories. In Rosenblatt's (1978) transactional theory, the reader interprets a text using the text as well as their own personal experiences to co-construct meaning. Meaning is not objective but subjective. The constructivist worldview is also utilized

primarily in qualitative research and is an appropriate worldview for a QUAL-QUAL simultaneous design seeking to gain understanding.

On the other hand, new criticism closely aligns with Creswell and Clark's (2017) definition of postpositivism where the researcher is independent of the research and there is one universal truth. Constructivism and postpositivism cannot exist in the same study just as reader response and new criticism reading paradigms cannot take place in the same reading and analytical process. Therefore, it is important for researchers to determine the analytical approach eighth-grade students use while reading literature.

Generalizability

Stake (1995) stated the purpose of case study is not necessarily to identify generalizable results but to further understand phenomena. Neither Bowen (2009) nor Morgan (2022) discussed the generalizability of document analysis because document analysis allows for further understanding of the document at hand, not other documents. The purpose of this present document analysis was not to produce generalizable claims, but to examine what analytical reading approach test writers of the PSSA used to score TDA responses. The purpose of this present case study was to add to the knowledge base of how eighth-graders approach literary analysis. Educators and researchers can use the results of this study, while not generalizable, to inform future curriculums, lesson plans, and assessment surrounding the student analytical approach (McGinley et al., 2017; Thein, 2009).

Case Study Instruments

Researchers should collect case study data through multiple data sources (Merriam, 1998; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2009). Both Merriam (1998) and Stake (1995) agreed the data collected in case study research should be qualitative. Stake (1995) advocated for data collection through

observation, interviews, and document review. In this study, I collected data through three sources: written responses, small group discussions, and semi-structured one-on-one interviews.

Written Response

First, participants read the myth and poem about Icarus and Daedalus from the PSSA released items and responded in writing to the following prompt (See Appendix B):

Respond to the myth and poem by writing what were your initial reactions to the texts, what feelings each brought up, and anything you noticed as important in the myth and the poem. Explain your thinking in detail. You may respond to the myth and poem separately, or together.

I designed this prompt to allow for both efferent and aesthetic responses from students. The first part of the prompt (*what were your initial reactions to the texts*) does not dictate to students what type of reactions to have when they responded. This phrasing allowed for students to respond in a way they saw fit and not necessarily what they thought I wanted from them. Their initial reactions provided me insights into their analytical process because students noted their thoughts immediately after they read the texts, and these thoughts were formulated without teacher discussion, group discussion, or explicit direction about these specific texts.

Part two of the prompt (*what feelings each brought up*) is specifically aesthetic as it notes the students' feelings. The students detailing their feelings provided insights into their experience with the text and provided me an avenue to gain further knowledge of particular students during the one-on-one interviews. Part three of the prompt (*anything you noticed as important in the myth and the poem*) is intentionally efferent as it asks for importance within the myth and the poem. Nevertheless, aesthetic responses could arise even when a reader's purpose is efferent (Rosenblatt, 1978), so this prompt may have also led students to discuss personal connections.

After answering these three parts of the prompt, I asked students to explain their thinking in order to gain a fuller perspective into their thought processes. Finally, I allowed students to respond to both the texts together or individually because I did not want instructions on how to respond to the texts to impede their analytical and meaning making approach.

Small Group Discussions

Meaning changes when a group collectively makes the meaning (Rosenblatt, 1978; Fish, 1976). I intentionally had the students respond to the prompt in writing prior to the small group discussion so the thoughts of their peers did not influence their individual response. After I captured student's individual responses through their writing, I randomly grouped students together by pulling names out of a hat. The students then participated in small group discussions with pre-written prompts (see Appendix C). I audio recorded each discussion to capture the data from each group. Like the writing prompt, I intentionally created questions seeking both efferent and aesthetic responses as well as responses aligning with new criticism and reader response.

Questions (1) and (2) allowed students to hear each group member's perspective before engaging in conversation and also recognized the group's similarities and differences in responses. Question (3) had a heavy basis in reader response theory as it asks for connections to the students' own lives. Question (4) prompted new critical analysis however remained open for an aesthetic response because it asks students why the quote they chose was meaningful. Question (5) allowed for students to discuss what they found meaningful, and I intentionally did not provide an avenue through which they should make meaning as I did in questions (3) and (4). Question 5 helped identify if students relied on emotional and experiential connections to make meaning or the text itself. All questions detailed above can be found in Appendix C (see Appendix C).

From data collected in the written response and group discussions, I purposefully chose four participants to participate in one-on-one interviews. Stake (1995) stated a researcher should make data collection choices as they learn more about the case and also stated researchers should maximize what they learn. I chose the four interview participants based on how far their responses diverged from the majority of the student responses. While interviewing every student would garner the most holistic results, Stake (1995) acknowledged time restraints impact research decisions. I had responsibilities to this site outside of this present study, so I had to narrow the number of interviews I conducted to a number that would not greatly impact the site itself. Four participants allowed for me to gain multiple perspectives and my purposeful selection allowed for each perspective to offer different insights into my research question.

Interviews

Finally, this study collected additional data through one-on-one semi-structured interviews. Stake (1995) claimed interviews help uncover multiple perspectives and lead to each participant and member of the case sharing personal stories and thoughts often not captured in survey data. Four of the participants participated in the interviews based on their answers to the written prompt and during the discussion. I purposefully chose participants who seemed to have in-depth analytical thinking surrounding the reading. The purpose of this study was to explore the analytical process of eighth graders, so purposefully selecting eighth graders showing in-depth or divergent thinking is appropriate. I defined *in-depth thinking* as students making claims and explaining claims in a way that goes beyond the plot of the story and adds or creates meaning to the text.

While Marshall and Rossman (2014) advocated for pre-written interview questions, Stake (1995) advocated for a flexible structure in data collection, in this study, aligning with my

constructivist worldview and reader-response framework, I needed to know what the participants discussed before creating the interview questions. Instead of a strict interview protocol, I had both pre-written questions and question shells in which I could fill in participant analytical processes (see Appendix D).

Document Analysis Data Collection

I explored research sub-question one (What reading paradigm do the text-dependent analysis questions align with on the eighth-grade PSSA?) through document analysis. In this document analysis, I created a deductive code list (see Appendix E) using ideas from new criticism, reader response, the CCSS, and the TDA scoring rubric provided in the released items. After creating the deductive code list, I first skimmed the TDA sections of the PSSA-released items from 2015, 2021, and 2022 (Pennsylvania Department of Education). 2022 was the most recent date the state had released PSSA items at the time of the document analysis. Through my initial read-through, I identified areas of importance in the question types as well as text selections. I utilized deductive coding to code and sort the document into thematic categories. This process helped build an understanding of the recurring themes found in the eighth-grade PSSA TDA questions and scoring explanations and allowed for comparison to the themes eighth-grade students generated through textual analysis during my case study.

Procedures

In this study I gathered data through multiple methods. During qualitative research, researchers must triangulate data through multiple methods of data collection in order to increase the validity of a particular study (Creswell & Clark, 2017; Merriam, 2022); Stake, 1995) In the document analysis I gathered all available narrative fiction TDA released items making the sample all-inclusive of the materials PDE made available to Pennsylvania teachers. In the case

study, I used a writing prompt, audio recorded small group discussions, and audio recorded one-on-one interviews to collect data.

The case study data collection took place over two 45-minute class periods and four one-on-one semi-structured interviews lasting approximately 15-minutes each. During the first 45-minute language arts period students read PSSA released items titled "Icarus and Daedalus" and "Icarus" (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2022). Each participant received a printed copy of the reading and read the passage silently at their own desk spaced approximately two feet apart from any other desks. After they finished reading, they responded to the written prompt (see Appendix B).

The next school day, during the students' 45-minute language arts period, I randomly placed students in table groups of three by pulling names out of a hat to construct groups. Any students who did not receive permission to participate in the study or did not assent to participate in the study were intentionally placed at tables together away from recording devices, and their names were not placed in the hat. Each of the tables with participants who received consent and assented had an audio recorder placed in the middle of their table to capture the conversation. Students discussed their written prompts from yesterday and responded to and discussed the pre-written questions I created and provided to each group (see Appendix C). During this time I was available to answer student questions. Questions I directly answered were related only to student needs such as going to the bathroom and clarifying directions. During this point of data collection, answering questions about the text might have led to my own analytical approach influencing the student answers, so I documented and answered questions about the text after I collected data. At the end of the study, I debriefed with the whole class and discussed sample responses provided by the PSSA released items (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2022). I

did not record the debrief session and did not collect data during the debrief because it involved both participants and non-participants.

After I completed initial read-throughs of the data generated from the written responses and small group discussions, I selected four students to participate in one-on-one semi-structured individual interviews. The purposeful selection process included one student who most aligned with the analytical approach of the PSSA as determined from document analysis of the released items (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2022). I chose the other three students who had both in-depth analytical thinking and unique responses during the writing prompt and small group discussion. The purpose of this study was to analyze the analytical approach of eighth-grade students, so selecting students who came to different conclusions about the text helped explore various analytical approaches. This selection process ensured I had a wide variety of perspectives to explore (Ortiz, 2013).

The interview protocol is in the attachments (see Appendix D). Ortiz (2013) stated ethnographic interview protocols must be written after the researcher understands the space. I first understood the ideas students generated before completing full semi-structured interview questions. The semi-structured interviews lasted approximately thirty minutes and took place during the eighth-grade lunch period. The interview took place in two student desks facing each other spaced approximately four feet apart next to the windows in the classroom. The participants had access to their written response and the reading during the interview which they could refer to at any point. Since the interview took place during lunch, the participant was permitted to eat their lunch while participating in the interview. I recorded all interviews. Marshall and Rossman (2014) discussed the importance of member checking and follow-up interviews to clarify, confirm, or elaborate on discovered themes. In late October and early

November, I member-checked transcripts after the interview to ensure the participants felt their responses were representations of themselves, and although I left open the option for follow-up interviews, no follow-up interviews were needed as the participants detailed their responses clearly, and I had three separate instances of reading responses from each student. Therefore, I chose not to conduct follow-up interviews to value the participants' time and because I could triangulate the data and did not need further clarification from the students.

Triangulation of Data

I intentionally ordered the case study data collection in a manner that coincided with ideologies in reader response. I first captured the students' individual responses before writing because if the students discussed the readings, their experiences within the act of reading could have changed and their meaning making process could have changed as well (Rosenblatt, 1978; Fish, 1976). Individuals use their own backgrounds and experiences to fill in gaps in texts (Iser, 1980), but groups work collectively to make meaning of a text (Fish, 1976). By collecting group analysis second, I maintained the individual's meaning-making process in the written responses. Conducting the interviews last allowed me to have both individual and group responses to pull from while interviewing the students.

In the document analysis, I could not triangulate the data as I used only one strategy for data collection. However, Stake (1995) stated document analysis can serve as an additional way to triangulate data in a case study, but in this present study the document analysis is outside of the case study because the document analysis represents a separate entity. Bowen (2009) and Morgan (2022) claimed researchers can use document analysis as a standalone study. Document analysis is limited to the number of documents available to the researcher, and documents should be selected using a selection criterion (Morgan, 2022). In this study, I selected all documents

meeting the selection criterion: documents must come from the PSSA publicly available released items (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2015; 2021; 2022), and documents must be narrative fiction TDA items. This criterion is based on needing documents demonstrating analytical approach of the writers and scores of the PSSA. I chose narrative fiction because the case study centered around data I gathered from student responses to narrative fiction. In the next section, I will detail the implementation matrix I used to conduct this mixed methods study.

Implementation Matrix

Creswell & Clark (2017) suggested researchers provide an implementation matrix. In Table 3 I detail the implementation matrix for each of the methods I used during the study. The multiple strategies I used in data collection and the purposeful order of the collection allowed me to triangulate student data, and the PDE released item documents allowed me to analyze the PDE's approach to scoring analytical responses on the PSSAs.

Table 3*Implementation Matrix*

Strategy	Sample and description	Goals	Analysis
Document analysis	Purposeful sample of PDE released narrative fiction passages and the corresponding TDA since 2015	Understand the literary analysis approach of the PSSAs	Content analysis and constant comparative analysis
Participant written responses	Purposeful sample of one rostered class of students in an 8th grade language arts class (my most diverse class in terms of standardized reading abilities) responded to an open-ended writing prompt asking what the participants found meaningful after reading a fictional passage from the PSSAs released items	Understand the literary analysis approach of an individual eighth-grade student	Constant comparative analysis
Recorded small group discussions	Students in one of the researcher's rostered eighth-grade language arts classes discussed what they found meaningful about the reading with a group of 3 peers through researcher created discussion prompts	Understand the literary analysis approach of a group of students	Constant comparative analysis
Semi-structured interviews	Purposeful sample of 4 students from one rostered 8th grade language arts class participated in an interview based on their unique written and small group discussion responses	Understand the literary analysis approach of an individual eighth-grade student	Constant comparative analysis

Note: Format of this table informed by Creswell and Clark (2017)

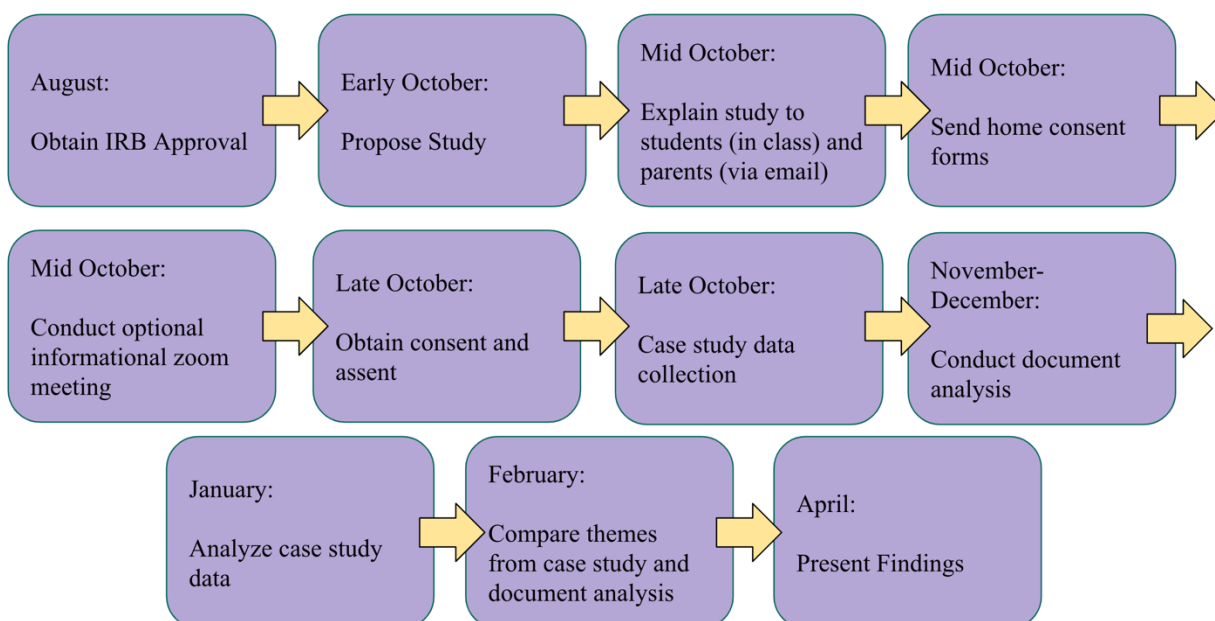
Table 3 provides a description of each strategy I used to collect data, the goal of each strategy, and how I analyzed the data I collected from each strategy. The next section will provide the implementation schedule of this present study.

Schedule

This study took place over the course of the 2022-2023 school year. Below, Figure 2 details the schedule and timeline of my implementation of this present research design.

Figure 2

Implementation Schedule



Note: This figure provides the timeline of the study.

Figure 2 provides the implementation schedule I followed throughout the study. Next, I will detail the analysis and coding procedures I employed during data analysis.

Analysis and Coding Procedures

Miles et al. (2018) stated coding is a form of data analysis where the researcher is able to interpret and draw conclusions from raw data. I utilized in-vivo coding to analyze the case study data. In-vivo coding honors the voice of the participants (Miles et al., 2018). I needed to honor the voice of the participants in this study to ensure it was in fact their analytical approach coming through in the data analysis.

Before coding can occur, all data the researcher intends to code should be processed from its original form (like a recording) into a clean transcript (Miles et al., 2018). To process the students' written responses, I made copies of the originals in order to maintain the originals and hand coded the copies. For the one-on-one interviews, I transcribed each recording verbatim. For the small group discussion recordings, I listened to each recording, and transcribed verbatim all areas of the small group discussion that focused on the reading.

Miles et al. (2018) stated researchers can make decisions on what areas of the data to process and what areas fall outside the scope of the research study. Because eighth-grade students often stray from the learning activity to discuss other matters such as sports and activities, I transcribed parts of the group discussion that fell within the scope of the study and did not transcribe or code any off topic conversations not caused by discussing the texts. In the transcriptions I noted the topic change, and the amount of time the students were off topic.

Once I processed the data, I began coding. In the first cycle of coding of the written responses, interviews, and discussions I assigned chunks of data one-to-two-word codes in order to create a code list (Miles et al., 2018). In the second cycle of coding, I grouped the codes created in the first cycle into categories to create an inductive code list (see Appendix F) (Miles et al., 2018). I utilized the created categories to inform theme generation. I then analyzed the themes to help explore how eighth grade students approached literary analysis, and if that analytical approach connected more to reader response theory or new criticism. As I coded, I utilized constant comparative method to compare earlier codes to new codes within categories and used my process to help draw conclusions.

Constant comparative method has four phases (Glaser, 1965). Phase 1 consists of "...comparing incidents applicable to each category" (Glaser, 1965, p. 439) where the researcher

constantly compares new codes to past codes within the same category to begin to gain understanding of the full dimensions of the category. The researcher writes memos throughout the process on each category. Next, the researcher, "... integr[ates] categories and their properties" (Glaser, 1965, p. 440). In Phase 2 the researcher begins to see overlap in categories where one category begins to tell the story of the other, and the researcher should again note these understandings in research memos (Glaser, 1965). During Phase 3 the researcher, "... delimit[its] a theory" (Glaser, 1965, p. 441). At this stage the researcher reduces the original code list, after identifying uniformities and integrations within and across codes, to a few high-level concepts. At the final phase of constant comparative method, the researcher writes a theory (Glaser, 1965). The researcher realizes the theory through the memoing and coding process they have conducted during thematic analysis (Glaser, 1965).

Bowen (2009) claimed document analysis consists of both content analysis and thematic analysis. In the document analysis I utilized Bowen's (2009) suggestion to combine aspects of content analysis and constant comparative methods. Hsieh and Shannon (2005) discussed three ways to approach content analysis: conventional, directed, and summative. This present study utilized a directed content analysis approach. In directed content analysis an existing theory already exists about the document and the researcher creates a deductive codelist based on the theory to conduct coding (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Researchers utilize directed content analysis when their primary goal is to validate an existing theory. In this instance, I wanted to validate that PSSA writers and scorers used a new critical literary analysis approach when writing and scoring the PSSA, a standardized test aligned to the CCSS. I worked with the documents in their original and unaltered form. Because a sound theory existed connecting new criticism to the CCSS (Cunningham, 2019; Hinchman & Moore, 2013; North, 2013; Shanahan, 2015; Sulzer,

2014; Thomas, 2018), directed document analysis allowed me to utilize theories from new criticism and reader response as well as the TDA scoring guidelines and CCSS to generate a deductive code list. Unlike the case study, I created a codelist prior to my first cycle of coding. Directed content analysis also allows researchers to add additional codes after an initial coding.

Next, I created definitions for each coding category (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005).

Researchers can code the data immediately after making a deductive code list and note any data that did not fall under the predetermined codes (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). The researcher can create new code categories to capture the missed data or can explain why the data is not included in the coding.

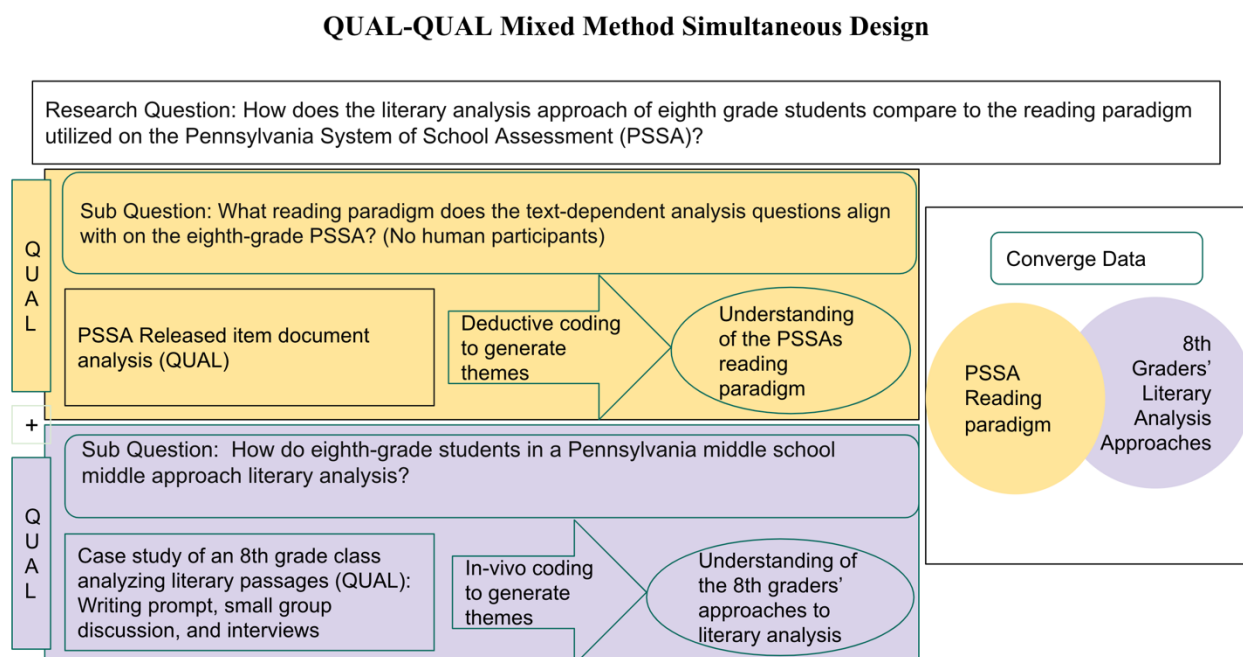
In addition to content analysis, document analysis should include thematic analysis (Bowen, 2009). When conducting thematic coding with the document, Bowen (2009) suggested utilizing Glaser and Strauss's (2017) constant comparative method. I performed aspects of directed content analysis on the TDA released narrative fiction items of the PSSA. After creating the deductive code list, I utilized constant comparative method (detailed above) to generate themes and draw conclusions from the document analysis. The primary difference between my coding approach in the case study and the document analysis was the initial code generation. After I had a code list for each data set, I utilized constant comparative method (Glaser and Strauss, 2017) to analyze data.

After I collected each data set, I merged the data using constant comparative analysis to analyze connections in themes and conducted any needed re-coding after realizing if any emerged themes in each data set warranted further analysis. By merging the data, I was able to identify where the literary approach of students converged and diverged from that of the CCSS (Creswell & Clark, 2017). The findings in this analysis can help inform state education

departments, educators, and researchers decisions surrounding curriculum, instruction, and assessment centered around eighth graders' approaches to literary analysis. Figure 3 illustrates the overall research design.

Figure 3

Research Design



Note: A diagram of the research design used in this study.

In the design above, the white corresponds with my primary research question: *How does the literary analysis approach of eighth-grade students compare to the reading paradigm utilized on the (PSSA)?* The yellow corresponds with sub-question one: *What reading paradigm do the text-dependent analysis questions align with on the eighth-grade PSSA?* The purple corresponds with sub-question two: *How do eighth-grade students in a Pennsylvania middle school approach literary analysis?* When I converged the data. I compared themes from each individual study to identify areas of convergences and divergences between the two data sets. I will detail the results in Chapter IV.

Threats to Validity and Reliability

The main threat to validity or trustworthiness is acknowledging I made meaning of the data, and considering my framework and world view, that interpretation may not align directly with the interpretation of another. Also, since language arts instruction occurred in the classroom before the study, students may have utilized the analytical approaches I taught them rather than their own. Finally, my closeness to the subject may have caused issues in authentic data collection as the students know I grade them. As a result, this particular activity was ungraded.

I established reliability through following a systematic coding process, member checking interview transcripts, and triangulating data. The written response provided another layer of reliability as the student writing, once submitted, is a static and unchanging piece of data that I did not need to transcribe.

Limitations of Methodology

This study had multiple limitations. For instance, the students in the study have had common core-based instruction for their entire school career, so even though I did not prompt their responses, past teaching on how to respond to literary texts could have swayed student responses during the case study. Second, under the ideology of reader response, the reader makes meaning of texts based on experiences (Rosenblatt, 1978). I created codes and analyzed student responses systematically, but my biases and experiences may have caused me to interpret something differently than others might. Future researchers should replicate this study with multiple researchers analyzing the data. Third, this group of students, living in the same area and attending the same school, had similar experiences and therefore may not diverge in reading responses as a more diverse case. Researchers should replicate this study with students from multiple different geographical locations.

In the document analysis I was limited to the available texts from the released items. Future researchers could conduct a more thorough document analysis if they gained access to the actual PSSA tests and any documents that aided in writing the tests. Also, qualitative document analysis hinges on interpretation through a researcher's biases (Morgan, 2022) Researchers use reflexive approaches to identify patterns (Morgan, 2022). I was the only researcher coding and interpreting data; therefore, this study should be replicated with multiple coders to gain insight on different interpretations of the data.

Overall, I acknowledge I made meaning of the data and considering my reader response framework and constructivist worldview, that interpretation may not align directly with the interpretation of another. Also, students may utilize the analytical approaches I taught them rather than their own. Finally, my closeness to the subject may cause issues in authentic data collection as the students know I grade them even though I did not grade this particular activity. I attempted to minimize these limitations of methodology by following systematic coding procedures, utilizing deductive coding in the document analysis, placing the data collection before the literary analysis unit, and making all data collection activities ungraded. While recognizing limitations is important to research, protecting human subjects, especially minors, is paramount. In the next section, I will detail how I protected the participants in this study.

Informed Consent and Protection of Human Subjects

Before I began data collection, I obtained consent and assent from both guardians (see Appendix G) and participants (see Appendix H). I sent an informational email (see Appendix I) to all parents detailing the study and provided a date for an optional informational Zoom meeting. After sending the email, I explained to students the details of the study using a pre-written script (see Appendix J) in child-friendly language. After allowing students time to ask

questions, I sent each student home with two consent forms (see Appendix G) and an envelope. I instructed the students and guardians to fill out one consent form and send it back to school with their child to return to me, and guardians kept the other form for their records. After gaining parent consent, I gained student assent using a Qualtrics survey. I informed students and guardians this study was completely voluntary, would not impact their grade in any way, and had IRB approval (see Appendix K). Even though I gained consent and assent, there were many other ethical considerations I considered.

Ethical Considerations for Case Study

The Belmont report created three basic ethical principles to consider when designing and conducting research: respect, beneficence, and justice (National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research, 1979). Ethical research considerations are highly apparent in quantitative studies with human drug testing or other medical treatments; however, "...qualitative research poses unique ethical challenges in terms of informed consent, recruiting participants and gaining access to diverse communities, confidentiality, researcher dual roles and multiple relationships" (Ponterotto, 2010, p. 587). This section will examine the ethical considerations of this present study.

Respect. This study considered multiple ways to ethically treat participants in a case study and acknowledged the potential harm document analysis can do to organizations or individuals who created the document. First, Marshall and Rossman (2014) claimed that respect for persons should be at the center of all ethical considerations. A key aspect of respect is the researcher ensuring the participants in the study are knowledgeable that they are a part of a study, know their participation in the study is completely voluntary, and understand they can withdraw from the study at any time (Creswell & Clark, 2017; Marshall & Rossman, 2014;

Skarbek et al., 2006). This study used a vulnerable population of children; therefore, I needed to do more than just have participants sign consent and assent (Marshall & Rossman, 2014).

In order to ensure respect for persons, before I collected any data, I took appropriate measures to provide ample information to participants about the scope of the study, data collection methods, and the voluntary nature of participation in the study. First, I sent a recruitment email providing details about the study and the date and time of a zoom meeting for further detail and the opportunity for the participants' parents and guardians to ask questions. Next, I obtained informed consent from the participants' parents and guardians. The form reiterated the voluntary nature of the research, and I wrote at a level most adults would understand (Skarbek et al., 2006). Finally, I discussed the study with the students, informed them their parents had given them permission to participate, obtained student assent, and again reiterated the voluntary nature of the study and the ability to withdraw at any time.

Although I made it clear that participation in the study was voluntary, as the participants' teacher, I needed to consider the power dynamics within the teacher-student relationship to ensure I did not coerce participants into volunteering (Martin, 2013). In educational settings, participants may feel pressure to participate because they believe not participating may impact their grades or be met with disapproval from their instructor (Martin, 2013). After considering the potential for coercion, I chose to make the learning activities taking place in the research study ungraded. This way, participants did not fear they would receive a poor grade on the assignment because they did not participate. Before students signed the assent form, I reiterated that their participation in the study was voluntary and that nothing bad would happen if they should choose not to participate.

To protect confidentiality, I stored all data gathered throughout the study in a locked desk drawer or on a password-protected laptop (Marshall & Rossman, 2014). I deidentified all data that could disclose a participant's identity (Marshall & Rossman, 2014). I destroyed all the data three years after the study.

Beneficence. Many claimed research designs need to maximize benefits and minimize harm (National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research, 1979; Martin, 2013; Skarbek et al., 2006). To minimize harm, I designed the study centering classroom practices as data collection events. Also, I chose a text from the PSSA released item sampler not only to align with the purpose of the study but also to ensure the reading was age and grade-level appropriate. Reading, responding to a reading in writing, and having small group discussions surrounding a reading all fall within typical classroom practices; therefore, there was minimal risk of harm during these activities.

However, this study was not without potential harm. Any time researchers conduct interviews, the researcher or the participant cannot plan exactly where the interview will go, what feelings the interview might evoke, and what the participant might discuss (Marshall & Rossman, 2014). I considered the unknown nature of interview research by reiterating before the interview that the interview was voluntary, and the participants could choose to stop at any time. Although I did not design the interview questions to bring up past experiences of trauma, it was possible that the events in the story could trigger a traumatic or unfavorable memory for the participant. I also considered my role as a mandatory reporter and would have reported any signs of abuse or self-harm. If an interview seemed to be troubling at any point for the participant, I planned to ask the participant if they would like to stop. I was also prepared to refer participants to the school counselor if needed.

I took measures in this design to maximize benefits (Martin, 2013). Participants in the study benefited from practicing reading, writing, and discussing in a low-stakes setting without the threat of grades. The data collected from the study allowed me to design future lessons with this group of students' analytical approach. The research informs the creation of future standards, assessments, and curriculum designed around students.

Justice. According to the National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research (1979), injustices occur when “...some benefit to which a person is entitled is denied without good reason or when some burden is imposed unduly.” This research occurred within my classroom, and I needed to ensure the participants and the students not participating all received quality instruction regardless of participation. Outside of the interview, all data collection occurred within the normal language arts period and involved typical classroom practices. All students in my class participated in the learning activities even if they were not part of the study. I only collected data from students who obtained consent and assented. The research sought to explore the students' analytical process, and during the learning activities, I did not answer content questions. Ignoring content questions would have been unjust, so I allotted a debrief time in the class period to answer any content questions of students and reviewed the answers and examples provided on the PSSA released items.

In order to minimize the burden of the students participating in the interview, I slotted the interview to take place at two times (lunch or study hall), and the participants could choose what worked best for them. Participants ate lunch during the interview and did not miss instructional time. I also ensured the interviews took place during times I did not teach students, so no students missed any instruction due to my involvement in the study.

Ethical Considerations for Document Analysis

Although a document is not a human participant, not considering ethical practices when conducting a document analysis could negatively impact those who created the document or those in which the document was intended (Marshall & Rossman, 2014). I used a public document released by PDE. This document names no single person or group outside of the PDE; therefore, the document analysis should not bring harm to any person or organization. Morgan (2022) stated the more publicly available a document is, the less ethical considerations the researcher needs to consider especially if the document is produced by adults and not children. The PDE released these documents to the public for the purpose of instructional aids. This research helped inform future instruction practices at the research site.

Ethical Considerations for the Researcher

Designing a study with ethical considerations in mind is important to minimizing harm to the participants. In order to do this, the researcher conducting the study must receive proper training in the research methods and methodologies used in the study (Creswell & Clark, 2017; Ponterotto & Grieger, 2008). Ponterotto and Grieger (2008) provided 12 areas a researcher must meet to conduct ethical research which centered around the researcher's (a) proper training, (b) ethical design, (c) data collection standardization, (d) data analysis, and (e) data presentation. Before the study, I participated in rigorous coursework detailing research methods, methodologies, paradigms, theoretical frameworks, and ethical research practices. I made clear to participants that this study was my first research study, and a veteran researcher advised my methods and methodologies in the study. Before data collection started, I completed all necessary training and obtained IRB approval.

Summary

In this chapter, I detailed my research methodology and design. The chapter started with a summary of the literature surrounding QUAL-QUAL simultaneous studies mixing case study and document analysis. The chapter continued with a discussion of the setting, participants, and participant selection process. Next, I detailed my biases and constructivist worldview.

Afterwards, I discussed the generalizability of this study and the instruments I used in this study. I then detailed procedures within the design, coding method, and analysis. After the procedures, I discussed threats to validity as well as limitations. The chapter concluded with a discussion of how I protected human subjects in this study.

Chapter IV: Results

In this simultaneous, mixed method study I examined how the literary analysis approach of eighth-grade students in a Pennsylvania suburban middle school compared to the literary analysis approach the PDE employed in the TDA section of the PSSA. PDE created The PSSA in assessment of the Pennsylvania core standards which PDE adapted from the CCSS. I conducted a document analysis of the PSSA released items and a case study of an eighth-grade language arts class responding to the 2021 PSSA released items. In this chapter, I begin with my findings in the document analysis, then move on to discuss my findings in the case study, and conclude with a comparison of the two simultaneous studies.

Document Analysis of PDE Released TDA Items

In the subsequent sections, I detail the findings of the document analysis with a focus on how PDE viewed student demonstration of analytical understanding during literary analysis when students responded to the TDA on the PSSAs. I discuss how analytical understanding is achieved, according to PDE, through adhering to a task, utilizing implicit and explicit details, making inferences, identifying main ideas, supporting claims with evidence, and writing quality. I uncovered themes demonstrating how PDE viewed task adherence, supporting claims with evidence and writing quality as the three most important factors to literary analysis and analytical understanding. When providing examples of inferencing, implicit and explicit details, and main idea, PDE often made contradictory statements about what constituted these terms, provided examples of these terms that some might find challengeable or invalid, and at times, used these terms interchangeably. PDE rarely acknowledged student background knowledge played a role in analytical understanding, but background knowledge potentially led to some students being more aptly able to demonstrate analytical understanding than others. Each of the areas listed

above is described in detail in the following sections except supporting claims with evidence.

This is because PDE referenced supporting claims with evidence in multiple areas, so this idea is acknowledged throughout each section.

Document Layout and Summary

Each year PDE releases items from the previous year's PSSA to help inform teacher instruction. These released items provide samples of texts read, multiple choice questions, scoring rubrics, statewide achievement on each item, writing prompts, example student responses to TDAs, and scoring explanations of the student examples. I used these released items to conduct a document analysis to examine the analytical approach the PDE used to assess student responses to the TDAs. The document analysis I employed in this study focused on the TDA writing prompts and scoring explanations. The scoring explanation area of the released items provided the only place where students responded in an open-ended fashion to an analytical question, and PDE provided rationale as to why the response was a 1, 2, 3, or 4 (highest) on a scoring rubric (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2022, pp. 28-29). PDE did not title the scoring explanation portion of the released items; therefore, I refer to it throughout this chapter as the scoring explanation.

In the scoring explanation, PDE explained the rationale behind a student score using language from the scoring rubric (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2022, pp. 28-29) in addition to segments from student responses (which PDE always placed in parenthesis). As such, in each quote from PDE released items any content in parenthesis are examples of student writing. In the next subsections, I summarize each story or myth students read in 2015, 2021, and 2022 and provide the writing prompt PDE asked students to respond to in their TDA. I also

explain content PDE omitted that may have caused some students difficulty in responding to the prompt.

2015 Released Item. In 2015, students read a story titled “Joe’s Reward” by Horatio Alger Jr. (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2015, p. 6). In the story, Joe gives guests of a nearby hotel rides in his rowboat which he uses as a way to earn income. The story consistently depicts Joe as a hero even before he has done anything heroic. Then, when one of Joe’s clients falls into the lake while riding in his boat, Joe rescues her. She happens to be the niece of the hotel proprietor. When Joe meets the proprietor, he does not accept a reward for saving the niece but does take a job offer to work for the hotel officially shuttling guests on his boat.

The prompt asked students to respond to the following question, “The plot of ‘Joe’s Reward’ is driven by specific events that take place. Write an essay analyzing how the passage draws on elements commonly found in myths. Use evidence from the passage to support your response” (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2015, p. 19). In this item, PDE does not provide students with a description of elements that are commonly found in myths, nor is the story a myth. PDE does not provide any sort of context to help students understand the prompt or story. This means students are expected to know elements found in myths even though the story the students read is not a myth. Students without this background knowledge may have struggled to address this prompt.

2021 Released Item. In 2020, PDE did not administer a PSSA due to COVID. To provide educators released items to utilize during the 2021-2022 school year, PDE republished a revised version of the 2017 released item. I could not analyze the 2017 released item for this study, as PDE removed it from their site. As a result, I analyzed the 2021 document. In this particular year, students responded to a paired set of texts that included both a myth and poem.

The myth was “Icarus and Daedalus” by Josephine Preston Peabody (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2021, pp. 20-21) and the poem was “Icarus” by Wendy A. Shaffer (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2021, p. 20). In the myth, Peabody tells the traditional story of Daedalus building wings of wax and feathers for him and his son to escape their imprisonment. Icarus does not heed his father’s warning, flies too close to the sun, and perishes in the sea. The poem is the same story, but the speaker told the myth in a way that questioned Icarus's motives and provided a possible rationale behind them. After reading, the students responded to the following prompt, “Nature often has a role in many myths. Write an essay analyzing the role of nature in both the passage and the poem. Use evidence from both the passage and the poem to support your response.” (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2021, p. 24). Like the 2015 item, PDE did not provide examples of other myths in which nature plays a role. By asking this prompt, PDE forced students to accept that nature played a role in the myth even if the students were not familiar with this concept or did not agree with the analysis. PDE could have named examples of other myths students might know that included nature playing a role, but students would only benefit from this if they knew the example myth. PDE also could have provided students a definition of nature as the myth lends itself to comments on human nature as well as involving literal instances of nature. Finally, PDE used the term role. This word has multiple meanings within a story. PDE did not clarify if they wanted students to treat nature as if it had a character role or if nature had a role in impacting the plot. Overall, PDE left a lot of areas undefined and expected students to have background knowledge to answer the prompt, even though background knowledge is not addressed in the CCSS standards or TDA scoring rubric.

2022 Released Item. In 2022, students read a story titled “The Penguin Whisperer” by Guy Stewart (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2022, pp. 20-23), which is a science

fiction story set in a space station where two characters study penguins in a research lab. In this narrative text, one character approaches research with play while the other approaches research in a serious manner, but when the lab in the space station suddenly drops to deadly freezing temperatures, the characters must decide what to do, and the playful character comes up with an idea to use a technique the penguins use to stay warm. The reading is dense with scientific language. PDE did not define any of the language meaning any student without previous knowledge of the words used may have struggled to comprehend the text. The students responded to the prompt, “The penguins play an important role in the passage. Write an essay analyzing how the author uses the penguins as a means to reveal characteristics of both Candace and Dejarrio. Use evidence from the passage to support your response” (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2022, p. 25). In this prompt, PDE asked students to analyze characters through the story element of the penguins in the setting of a penguin research lab.

Code Frequencies in the Document Analysis

To conduct the document analysis of the PSSA released items above, I created a deductive code list (see Appendix E) developed from both new critical theories, reader response theories, and the TDA rubric provided in the PSSA released items. In this document analysis, I uncovered ways PDE approached literary analysis first by the frequency in which I applied each code.

During the analysis I applied the code *analytical understanding* 89 times which demonstrated PDE’s use of the TDA to assess a student’s analytical understanding of a text. The next most frequent code I used was *addresses task* (72) showing PDE viewed task adherence as a key component in demonstrating analytical understanding.

Although many researchers have claimed the CCSS are built on new criticism (Bindewald, 2021; Del Nero, 2017; Fisher & Frey, 2014; Park, 2012; Pennell, 2014), PDE's assessment of analytical understanding did not appear to support this claim, as I seldomly used deductive codes generated from new critical theories. Codes, including *literary devices* (18), *the text itself* (13), *effluent response* (5) and *text structure* (0), demonstrated some connection to new critical theories outlined by Di Leo (2020) and Wellek (1978), but even though these codes were applied, PDE never directly highlighted a student's use of these analytical approaches within the scoring explanations. These code application frequencies somewhat diverge from PDE and Center for Assessment's definition of analysis where they stated, "Analysis is defined as 'a detailed examination of the elements or structure of text, by breaking it into its component parts to uncover interrelationships in order to draw a conclusion.'" (Thompson & Lyons, 2017). In this definition, Thompson & Lyons (2017) highlight text structure and text elements as areas needed for analysis. While there is ample evidence PDE used text elements in their scoring explanations (in which I detail in the subsequent sections), PDE does not reference text structure at all. PDE directly highlighted when students addressed the task, made inferences, used implicit and explicit meanings, and made text references to demonstrate analytical understanding. While many of these ideas are within new criticism, new critical theories put much emphasis on text structure (DiLeo, 2020; Wellek, 1978), yet PDE did not reference text structure at all as something the students analyzed. PDE did reference the structure of a student's writing multiple times, but that mention fell under the code *writing quality* (44).

While I applied codes created from new critical theories infrequently, I applied codes generated from reader response theory (Rosenblatt, 1978) the least of all demonstrating PDE's assessment of reading analysis did not readily recognize reader response approaches. I applied

the codes *culture* (3), *background knowledge* (9), *aesthetic response* (4), *experiences* (0), and *transaction* (1) collectively seventeen times. Experiential readings and transactions with a text are two key components in reader response theory (Rosenblatt, 1978), so their absence of use in the document analysis supported the claim that PDE's assessment of analytical understanding through the PSSA TDA did not value reader response readings as demonstrations of analytical understandings. I provided the full code application breakdown in Appendix L (see Appendix L).

While analyzing the code frequencies allowed me to gain an initial understanding of the analytical approach the PDE employed while scoring the TDA sections, a deeper analysis of themes emerging in the document led to more in-depth findings about the PDE's view of literary analysis. The following sections will detail my findings regarding how the PDE omitted the need for background knowledge in their view of literary analysis in connection to the PSSA released items, and focused on task adherence, implicit and explicit meaning, inferencing, identifying main idea, and writing quality.

PDE's Definition of Literary Analysis

While conducting the document analysis and applying codes, I utilized a constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 2017) to compare newly-coded excerpts to past excerpts. I then analyzed excerpts to generate themes. At the end of the document analysis, I concluded that PDE, through the implementation of the PSSAs, placed heavy emphasis on students demonstrating an analytical understanding of the text. To determine if a student analytically understood a text, PDE cited a student's ability to adhere to the task (or answer the prompt) first and foremost. Next, PDE valued writing quality as indication of a student's analytical understanding of a text. Behind task adherence and writing quality PDE placed emphasis on

identifying the main idea, making inferences, using both implicit and explicit meanings from the text, and supporting claims with evidence.

PDE did not place much emphasis, if any at all, on student background knowledge, experiences, or culture. Despite a lack of emphasis, background knowledge seemed to play a large role in student success at demonstrating analytical understanding. There were times in the released items where a student was utilizing background information, experiences, or cultural contexts, but PDE did not outright state these aspects led to analysis. Instead, PDE remained consistent on viewing task adherence, inferences, text references, main idea, and implicit and explicit meanings, and writing quality as the keys to demonstrating analytical understanding. In the next section I detail why omitting background knowledge is problematic when assessing analytical understanding.

Omission of Background Knowledge. Background knowledge plays a significant role in reading ability (Shanahan, 2014), yet PDE did not connect student background knowledge to analytical ability. In the 2022 reading, students might require an understanding of the science fiction genre to rationalize why there was a penguin research lab in space, and students needed to be well versed in scientific language to fully understand the text. In each of the prompts in 2015 and 2021, PDE assumed the background knowledge students would bring with them to the text. In both prompts, PDE asked students about elements of myths. In order to effectively answer this question, students needed knowledge of myths and character archetypes. While the prompt does not ask outright for these elements, the PDE explanation of student responses commended student's use of background knowledge. For example, PDE noted that a response "analyzes explicit and implicit meanings from the text ("He is poised to become the hero", "Joe sets course for a life changing trip, kinda [sic] like Ulysses", "putting others above himself—another heroic

trait”)” (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2015, p. 29). In this instance, PDE claimed the student used implicit and explicit meanings from the text. While PDE did not identify which detail is implied and which is explicit, the comment on Ulysses is presumably the implicit meaning; however, the 2015 text provided no context of Roman heroes and Ulysses is not mentioned in the reading.

While referencing Ulysses in analysis would have come strictly from this student’s background knowledge, since Ulysses is not mentioned in the text, PDE did not recognize a student comparing Joe’s journey to Ulysses as background knowledge. Instead PDE labeled the claim about Ulysses as either implicit or explicit meaning. In other responses to the 2015 prompt, two students referenced the archetype of a damsel in distress (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2015, pp. 29, 33), demonstrating background knowledge as needed for analysis. Again, this student could only infer this idea if the student had background knowledge about character archetypes because PDE never detailed character archetypes anywhere in the released item.

Another example of where students would need background knowledge to answer a prompt occurred with the science fiction text included in the 2022 released items. In this case, knowledge of the science fiction genre was important for being able to thoroughly analyze the text, however PDE did not provide information about the genre. In a scoring explanation of a student’s strong response, PDE commended a student for applying background knowledge even though the need for background knowledge is not recognized in the rubric or in the standards:

An extensive introduction demonstrates clear understanding of the science fiction genre, thus providing context helpful in addressing the two areas of focus: multi-layered characters within the science-fiction genre and how interactions with fellow characters

and responses to given circumstances reveal a character's flaws and positive attributes.

(Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2022, p. 35)

In their scoring explanation of the student's response, PDE stated the science fiction genre provided the context needed to support the student's areas of focus. Therefore, a student who lacked background knowledge about science fiction texts might struggle to provide the level of analysis the student PDE exemplified achieved, yet PDE ranked all student responses in the same way regardless of background knowledge or familiarity with the content. Background knowledge played a large role in the above student's analysis, yet background knowledge was not within the scope of PDE's approach to analysis according to their scoring rubric, standards, and example student responses. My seldom use of the code of *background knowledge* throughout the document analysis (only 9 instances) demonstrated PDE did not put emphasis on background knowledge. This finding is aligned with Coleman and Pimentel (2011) who stated background information can help a reader but does not replace a reader's attention to the text itself. Instead of placing emphasis on a need for background knowledge, PDE emphasized an adherence to task (or answering the questions asked) as a strong indicator and aspect of analytical understanding.

Defining Task Adherence as Analysis. Above any other measure, PDE placed task adherence (answering the question asked) at the top in demonstration of analytical understanding. The code *addresses task* represented the times PDE noted students adhered to the task, or, in other words, answered the question asked of them. I applied the code *addresses task* 72 times throughout the document analysis.

In each explanation of a student score, PDE started with a line delineating the amount in which students addressed a task (for examples of this language see Table 4). PDE placed such great weight on task adherence that they made multiple causal claims stating the amount to

which a student followed a task directly demonstrated the amount they analytically understood the text.

Task Adherence Demonstrating Analysis. All 24 scoring explanations provided in the PSSA released items started with a casual statement connecting task adherence to level of analytical understanding. In Table 4 I have organized examples of the causal statements PDE made about students' adherence to the task demonstrating their analytical understanding.

Table 4*Task Adherence Demonstrates Literary Analysis*

Student score	2015	2021	2022
1	“In this response, the student minimally addresses part of the task by providing a summary of the passage...” (2015, p.39).	“This response minimally addresses parts of the task, demonstrating inadequate analytic understanding of the texts” (2021, p. 46).	“This response minimally addresses parts of the task, demonstrating inadequate analytic understanding of the text” (2022, p. 45).
2	“...the student inconsistently addresses some parts of the task (“Joe is like a hero in a myth”), demonstrating partial analytic understanding of the text” (2015, p. 36).	“This response inconsistently addresses some parts of the task, demonstrating partial analytic understanding of the texts” (2021, p. 43).	“This response inconsistently addresses some parts of the task, demonstrating partial analytic understanding of the texts” (2022, p. 43).
3	“...the student adequately addresses all parts of the task, demonstrating sufficient analytic understanding of the text” (2015, p. 33).	“This response adequately addresses all parts of the task, demonstrating sufficient analytic understanding of the texts” (2021, p. 40).	“This response adequately addresses all parts of the task, demonstrating sufficient analytic understanding of the text” (2022, p. 37).
4	“The response effectively addresses all parts of the task, demonstrating an in-depth analytic understanding of the text” (2015, p. 29).	“The response effectively addresses all parts of the task, demonstrating an in-depth analytic understanding of the texts” (2021, p. 34).	“The response effectively addresses all parts of the task, demonstrating an in-depth analytic understanding of the text” (2022, p. 35).

Note: This table depicts how PDE phrases adherence to task as a causation for literary analysis.

Table 4 displays examples of how PDE used consistent wording across seven years of time to describe how task adherence demonstrated analytical understanding. The word choice of “demonstrating” in all but one of the twelve excerpts shows PDE viewed task adherence as a potential causation of analytical understanding. In other words, PDE claimed if a student answered the question fully, then they have an analytical understanding of the text. This thinking is problematic in two ways. First, if a student does not understand what the prompt is asking but could approach the analysis in a different way, the student is not provided an opportunity to demonstrate their analytical understanding. For example, if the student did not see how the penguins showed characteristics of the characters but could analyze in detail how the differing personalities of the characters came together to overcome challenges, that student would presumably be scored as minimally addressing the task. Second, a student can misinterpret the prompt. PDE demonstrated a student misinterpreting a prompt in a scoring explanation where PDE stated, “A minimal conclusion reaffirms the student’s original misinterpretation of the task (so yes I think the penguins do have an important role in the story)” (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2022, p.45). This student misinterpreted the prompt and wrote their response on why the penguin’s role in the story was important as a whole rather than how the penguins revealed the characteristics of the characters. As a result, PDE claimed, “This response minimally addresses part of the task, demonstrating inadequate analytic understanding of the text” (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2022, p. 45). In this instance, the task was presented as “The penguins play an important role in the passage. Write an essay analyzing how the author uses the penguins as a means to reveal characteristics of both Candace and Dejarrio. Use evidence from the passage to support your response” (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2022, p. 25); however, the student seemingly read the task as asking students to

explain why the penguins play an important role in the story. The misinterpretation of the task did not seem to be the only reason the response earned a 2, as a scorer could attribute the 2 to multiple reasons including writing quality, structure, explanation, and citing text evidence, but the excerpt acknowledged a student misinterpreting a prompt is a possibility. Although PDE claimed task adherence demonstrated analytical understanding (see table 4), PDE did not seem to have a way to accurately assess a student's analytical ability when the student misinterpreted or misunderstood the prompt.

The student the PDE used as an example of not addressing the prompt had written their response on the importance of a character's role in the story. While it is possible the PDE does not view discussing a story element, such as a character's role in the story, as strong analysis, PDE had asked students to do just this type of analysis in the previous year. By addressing the prompt (in any year) PDE claimed students demonstrated analytical understanding. This idea would mean PDE created the prompts to garner student analysis. In 2022, PDE asked students to analyze how a story element, the penguins, helped reveal characteristics of the characters. A student misinterpreted that prompt and instead explained whether or not the penguins played an important role in the story. This analytical approach, discussing the role an element played in a story was the analytical approach PDE asked the students to employ in 2021 when PDE prompted students to explain how nature played a role in the myth. However, if a student does not answer the specific prompt at hand, according to the wording shown in Table 4, then that student cannot demonstrate an analytical understanding. Despite this, there were instances where students seemingly addressed the prompt, but PDE claimed they did not.

Contradictions in Task Adherence. In 2021 PDE asked the students to “Write an essay analyzing the role of nature in both the passage and the poem. Use evidence from both the

passage and the poem to support your response” (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2021, p. 24). A student seemingly addressed this prompt when they wrote how the birds (which are a part of nature) in the myth symbolized freedom and liberty. However, PDE stated, “The student’s introduction identifies a controlling idea that is somewhat related to the texts (The way that nature had a role in this myth was by presenting the birds as freedom and liberty)” (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2021, p. 43). PDE provided no explanation as to why this answer is only somewhat related to the text; however, the student response seemed to address the prompt because it stated the birds played a role by representing freedom and liberty. As I previously stated, PDE did not define the term role, so it is possible the PDE wanted the student to present nature as a character in the story. This student presented nature as a symbol (albeit the student did not use the term symbol), but PDE seemingly did not see the birds representing freedom, in this instance, as fully related to the text or addressing the prompt.

PDE’s response that the birds representing freedom and liberty only somewhat related to the texts is contradicted in PDE’s scoring explanation of a prompt scored a 4. In the same year PDE wrote, “The development continues with more effective analysis (The birds represent freedom in the passage)” (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2021, p. 31). These two responses both claim birds represent freedom yet, the latter is effective analysis while the former is “somewhat related to the text.” Throughout the entire document, PDE made unexplained claims like the one above where they claim something is or is not analytical understanding with no explanation why, and these claims often contradicted each other. This trend was evident in PDE’s discussion of implicit and explicit meanings as well.

Defining Analysis Through Implicit and Explicit Meanings. When discussing implicit and explicit meanings leading to a demonstration of analysis, PDE often made broad statements

claiming the student analyzed the implicit and explicit meanings, but PDE did not explain how the students analyzed the meanings or what constituted analysis. For example, in response to a student earning a 4, PDE wrote:

The student analyzes explicit and implicit meanings from the text (“He is poised to become the hero”, “Joe sets course for a life changing trip, kinda [sic] like Ulysses”, “putting others above himself—another heroic trait”, “his modesty (another trait of mythical heroes) makes him act as if it was nothing at all” and “he was able to find the future (hidden treasure) he was looking for in a place he did not expect to find it”) effectively supporting claims and ideas. (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2015, p. 29)

In this excerpt, PDE did not clarify which meanings were implicit and which were explicit; however, the claim about Ulysses may be an implicit meaning based on the student’s previous knowledge of Roman heroes. This implied meaning seems to be more of a connection to background knowledge than anything else given that there is no direct reference to Ulysses. This student connecting Ulysses to this text could only be an inference a student based on their background knowledge of Roman heroes, yet PDE labeled it as implicit or explicit meaning. The connection to Ulysses can not be implied meaning as no part of the text provided any reference to Ulysses. This claim appears to be a student inference.

Determining what constituted implicit and explicit became even more difficult when a student who wrote a response earning a 1 made similar claims to the student above who earned a 4. PDE wrote in response to the student earning a 1:

In this response, the student minimally addresses part of the task by showing that Joe was heroic in the story; however, only an inadequate analytic understanding of the text is

demonstrated... There is only insufficient analysis (the inference that the author refers to Joe as “our hero” because he saved the girl and turned down the reward). References to the text are insufficient, consisting of literal, simplistic retellings of specific plot points within the story. (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2015, p. 37)

While the students’ writing quality and detail in these two responses are drastically different, the implicit and explicit ideas are similar. Both responses noted Joe did not take a reward, Joe is a hero, and Joe (while not noted in the student earning a 1 excerpt above but detailed in the student’s response) took a job. The PDE claimed the student who earned a 1 retold the plot instead of analyzing it, but upon review, the student who earned a 4 also provided a response that was almost entirely summary. The key difference between these two student responses is the quality of the writing, and the student earning a 4 demonstrated in-depth background knowledge on the characteristics of myths, and recognized those characteristics within the plot. In these two responses, the students noticed similar implicit and explicit details in the text, but it appeared background knowledge and writing allowed the student who earned a 4 to construct a stronger response. Not only did PDE inconsistently label when students utilizing implicit and explicit details is or is not effective analysis, but PDE also provided an example of a student who they claimed sufficiently analyzed the story through implicit and explicit details, but upon review, I concluded the student’s analysis could be false.

Varied Analysis of Implicit and Explicit Meanings. In a scoring explanation from the 2015 released items, PDE said the student provided adequate analysis, but I found the student’s analysis did not seem accurate. In a scoring explanation of a student who earned a 3 PDE noted:

The response adequately analyzes how the passage draws on elements commonly found in myths, demonstrating sufficient analytic understanding of the text. The student

analyzes explicit and implicit meanings from the text to support ideas and claims (“This is a theme often found in myths: the rags to riches tale”, “Little does Joe know that fate is about to step in”, “The author uses fate as an ironic way for Joe to get what he wants”, and “his reflexes had him unconcerned for his own safety”).

(Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2015, p. 37)

Again, it is impossible for me to know which details PDE are labeling implicit and explicit because PDE never delineates between the two, but the student claim (which most likely stemmed from background knowledge) that noted myths often feature “rags to riches tales” did not seem to be stated or implied anywhere in the story. In addition, the story did not seem to provide any indication that Joe becomes, or will become, rich from this new job. Finally, the student did not explain what is ironic about how Joe got the job, and the PDE did not address the student's analysis of irony; however, no other student example claimed this myth had any ironic situations, and it did not appear the way in which Joe got the job is actually ironic. However, PDE claimed this student response had “...sufficient analytical understanding...” (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2015, p. 37).

Despite my disagreement with the accuracy of the claims this student made, discussing theme and irony appeared highly analytical, but this student earned a 3 instead of a 4. The only obvious difference between this 3 response and the 4 responses was writing quality. While the document analysis uncovered multiple times PDE noted students' use of implicit and explicit details to support ideas and claims, I could not conclude what exactly constituted an implicit and explicit detail, as PDE never explained, and the presumably implied details seemed like background knowledge over implied meaning as evident through the example of Ulysses. Therefore, I concluded it is clear PDE emphasized a use of implicit and explicit meanings of the

text to demonstrate analytical understanding, but I could not conclude what constituted a strong implicit or explicit detail from the 2015 released item because PDE never explained why an implicit or explicit detail was strong, and never delineated between the two.

Issues in Defining Implicit and Explicit Meanings. This trend of neglecting to delineate what constituted implied versus explicit meaning continued in the 2021 released items, and defining what explicit and implicit meant became more problematic when the PDE shifted to using the term inference and implicit and explicit meanings to describe similar claims. For example in a scoring explanation of a student who earned a 3 PDE wrote:

(The role of nature in “Icarus”...is to teach Icarus a lesson and to melt the wax off of his feathers). This analysis is extended with an insightful generalization (I believe that nature wants to teach Icarus a lesson of to listen to your elders), demonstrating sufficient understanding of explicit and implicit meanings from the text. (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2021, p. 40)

PDE tagged the generalization above as demonstrating understanding of implicit and explicit meanings. Again, PDE did not differentiate between the two by identifying what constituted implicit and what constituted explicit, but the student essentially claimed nature taught Icarus a lesson.

In 2021 PDE claimed a generalization about the role of nature was an implied or explicit meaning of the text, but in 2015 PDE saw connections to mythology as implicit and explicit meaning. In 2015, many of the presumed implied details came from student background knowledge. In 2021, the implied meaning of the role of nature more than likely came from the text rather than the student’s background knowledge. This difference causes an issue for teachers

in determining whether they should teach implicit and explicit details as something that is text dependent, knowledge dependent, or both.

A rationale behind this difference in definition is in 2015 the prompt asked the students to connect the story to items commonly found in myths. This prompt is knowledge dependent. In 2021, PDE asked students to analyze the role of nature in the myth. This prompt is more text dependent (even though knowledge of myths and nature may help a student respond to the prompt). It is possible that PDE connected implicit and explicit meanings to task adherence as the examples they point out align directly with the prompt. If the task was knowledge based, then implied details came from knowledge. If the task was text based, then the implied details came from the text. If this were true, PDE again demonstrated task adherence is a key component to analytical understanding, so much so, that another area of demonstrating analytical understanding, implicit and explicit details, is intertwined with the student's adherence to the task.

While PDE does not provide whether implicit and explicit meaning is knowledge based or text based, PDE also did not maintain consistency in labeling student claims as implicit or explicit meaning thus making it even harder to understand a definition of the two terms. Sometimes (like above) students made claims about nature that PDE labeled implicit or explicit meaning. Other times, students made claims about nature that were not labeled implicit or explicit meaning, even though the claims seemed to fall under what the PDE had labeled implicit and explicit meaning in other scoring explanations. For example, in a scoring explanation of a student earning a 4:

...the student focuses on one positive (i.e., beautiful) role that nature plays in the story of Icarus, by providing the inference that nature helped Daedalus create an idea of how to

escape Crete. A well-chosen text reference supports the inference (“watching the seagulls in the air – the only creatures that were sure of liberty – he thought of a plan for himself and his young son, Icarus who was captive with him”) and is then connected with effective analysis (In that sentence it shows that nature gave him the idea of escape. The birds flying gave him the great idea that he could escape with his son to a new life). (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2021, p. 34)

In this response the PDE claimed the student inferred the role of nature, but in the scoring explanation of a student scoring a 3 the generalization about the role of nature demonstrated the students understanding of implicit and explicit meanings. When looking at these two examples It is unclear to me whether or not these two areas (inferencing and explicit and implicit meanings) are synonymous; however they do not appear to be, as in the scoring rubric it stated students should use, “Thorough analysis of explicit and implicit meanings from text(s) to effectively support claims, opinions, ideas, and inferences" (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2021, p. 37). This scoring guideline clearly has implicit and explicit meanings and inferences as two separate things. Further, implicit and explicit details are supposed to support inferences, yet the way in which PDE used the terms seemingly interchangeably makes understanding the definition of the terms difficult especially if implicit and explicit details are used to support inferences. In the examples above both students made a claim about the role of nature. One PDE labeled an example of implicit and explicit details while the other PDE labeled an inference.

When trying to determine the analytical approach PDE expects students to employ when responding to the TDA, inconsistency in tagging examples, ambiguity in definition, and inconsistency in language makes identifying an approach difficult for teachers or curriculum writers attempting to use the released items to inform instruction. Determining what constituted a

student's adequate analytical understanding became even more difficult when PDE made contradictory claims in relation to implicit and explicit meanings.

Contradicting Claims using Implicit and Explicit Meanings. While PDE is unclear as to the difference between inferences and implicit and explicit meanings making it difficult for teachers to use these terms in instruction, it appeared PDE used these terms at times when students made a claim about a text. However, much like when discussing task adherence (see *Contradictions in Task Adherence*), PDE exemplified seemingly parallel claims students made, but PDE contradicted how they viewed parallel claims. In a response earning a 2 a student made a similar claim to the student discussed in the previous section who earned a 4. The student who earned a 2 wrote, "In the passage the father and his son are imprisoned, the father spots a group of birds and get [sic] the idea to escape like birds—By flying." (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2021, p. 43). This claim seemed similar to that of the student who earned a 4 who wrote, "watching the seagulls in the air – the only creatures that were sure of liberty – he thought of a plan for himself and his young son, Icarus who was captive with him" (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2021, p. 34). PDE tagged each of these student excerpts as inferences even though they look more like explicit meaning as Daedalus literally gets his idea from the birds. Despite having identical meaning, each says Daedalus used the birds as inspiration, PDE claimed the student who earned a 4 showed an example of strong analysis, yet PDE did not say the student who earned a 2 exemplified strong analysis.

In this same response scored a 2 the student made the claim, "The sun is an enemy to Icarus, the sun is a bully to Icarus the father knows to stay away and tells Icarus, but he doesn't listen" (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2021, p. 43). While this statement addressed the prompt (stating the sun plays the role of a bully and enemy), PDE did not tag this excerpt as

utilizing implicit and explicit meanings or strong analysis. However, in the response earning a 3 discussed in the previous section, the student wrote nature is there to “...teach Icarus a lesson” (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2021, p. 40), and PDE called the response adequate analysis. A scorer could view these two claims as similar if they knew the context of the language. Bullies and enemies very well could want to “teach Icarus a lesson” but without the context only the student writing the response could provide, it is unclear if these responses are similar. Nevertheless, they both seem like implied meaning, both address the prompt, and seemingly demonstrate analytical understanding. However, PDE does not label these responses as both examples of strong analysis or demonstration of analytical understanding which demonstrates how PDE inconsistently labeled and or contradicted the analytical significance of claims as they relate to implicit and explicit details. These issues are compounded when PDE used implicit and explicit details and inferences interchangeably.

Making Inferences to Support Analysis. In the section above I claimed PDE made it unclear as to the difference between implicit and explicit details compared to inferences. The CCSS (which informed the PA state standards) has a standard addressing inferences. Under the CCSS, the standard states students should “cite the textual evidence that most strongly supports an analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text” (Common Core Standards Initiative, 2022). In alignment with this standard, PDE placed emphasis on students using inferences to demonstrate their analytical understanding of a text. The rubric in each of the released items stated a strong analytical response has, “...thorough analysis of explicit and implicit meanings from text(s) to effectively support claims, opinions, ideas, and inferences” (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2022, p. 28). These two statements differ because in the

CCSS standard, explicit details are separate from inferences, and the CCSS does not have implied meaning in the standard. The PDE added implicit meaning to the scoring rubric.

With this statement, “...thorough analysis of explicit and implicit meanings from text(s) to effectively support claims, opinions, ideas, and inferences” (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2022, p. 28), PDE stated students use implicit and explicit meanings from the text to support inferences, but in the previous section I detailed how PDE used implicit and explicit meanings interchangeably with inferences. To attempt to understand the difference between inferences and explicit and implicit meanings as PDE used the terms in the released items, I analyzed how PDE discussed inferences.

Inferences as Gaps Much like when discussing implicit and explicit meaning, PDE explicitly stated when students used inferences in their responses. For example, in a response earning a 4 from the 2022 released items, PDE noted the student “... includes an inference characterizing Dejarrio as fun. (Right off the bat the reader can tell that Dejarrio is not all buisness [sic] when Candace first walks in on him playing with the penguins)” (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2022, p. 32). With this example, PDE demonstrated that a student needed to fill in a gap (Iser, 1980) as the text the student read never outright stated Dejarrio was fun, but does show Dejarrio playing with the penguins, which a reader can infer is an entertaining activity. This student’s claim is clearly an inference as the student needed to fill in a gap with their own knowledge, but connecting playing with fun does not seem to be a difficult connection. This inference also aligned more with an implicit detail than an inference; it is implied Dejarrio is having fun. PDE provided this student response as an exemplary analytical response, yet the inference drawn is not particularly complex. Examples from the student discussing Ulysses could qualify as a much stronger inference, but PDE labeled the claim about Ulysses as implicit or

explicit meaning. It is possible PDE defines implicit meaning and inference as synonyms as both require students to fill in a gap with their own knowledge, but PDE never separated implicit and explicit details, and inferencing is noted outside of implicit details.

While the language PDE used to describe inferences and implicit and explicit details makes defining each difficult, PDE remained constant that both required a student to use their own knowledge. PDE never stated this, but the examples provided thus far supported both inferences and implicit details required students to fill a gap. When the student fills the gap, most times the fill made sense (dejarío [sic] is fun, someone on a journey on a boat is like Ulysses), but there are times where the PDE delineated an inference a student made as “adequate analysis,” but the way in which the student filled the gap(s), some readers might find as contradictory or invalid.

Contradicting Claims About Student Inferences. Much like in the task adherence and implicit and explicit meaning sections, PDE again had times where they potentially contradicted what constituted a strong and weak inference. In examples where students scored a 2, PDE pointed to inferences students made, but they claimed the inferences were weak. For instance, the sample response feedback noted that the student provided, “... two weak, character based inferences to describe Dejarío (He seems to be childish; shows candace he knows what he is doing)” (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2022, p. 42). PDE followed this excerpt with a claim that the student drew this inference from a vague text reference and stated, “The vague text and supporting inferences lack the analytical precision needed to clearly show how the penguins reveal Dejaríos [sic] characteristics” (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2022, p. 42). Again, PDE did not provide a rationale as to why this inference was weak. In comparison a student who scored a four (also discussed in a previous section) said Dejarío was fun because he

was playing. In the response scored a 2, the student said Dejario was childish. These inferences, fun and childish are similar, and the only difference I can surmise between the two inferences is the amount the student explained their reasoning. The student scoring a 4 stated Dejario is fun because he is playing, but the student scoring a 2 said Dejario is childish, but did not support why. An adult playing at work (which is what Candance thinks Dajarior [sic] is doing in the story) could very easily be seen as childish, so this excerpt is demonstrating the scoring of a quality inference may not be the inference itself, but whether or not the student supported the inference. The student scoring a 2 then goes on to make inferences that Candace is, "... more serious than DeJarior; she realizes she is wrong " (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2022, p. 42). PDE called these two inferences weak and stated they are supported by vague text references. For comparison, see Table 5 for some of PDEs examples of strong and weak inferences presented side by side.

Table 5

A Comparison of Strong and Weak Inferences

Strong inferences (p. 32)	Weak inferences (p. 42)
Dejarior is fun	Dajarior is Childish
Dajarior has an open heart	Dajarior knows what he is doing
Candace has a business mindset	Candace is more serious than Dejarior
Candace is open minded	Candace realizes she is wrong

Note: This table compares what PDE viewed as strong and weak inferences in the 2020 released items.

In the above table, I placed four examples of strong inferences alongside four examples of weak inferences PDE provided in their scoring of student responses. When noting the difference between a strong and weak inference, PDE turned to the students' use of what PDE found to be substantial text evidence or vague text evidence. The examples of inferences above seemed similar in nature, yet the way the students supported the inference with relevant text seemed to hold more weight in what PDE valued in analysis. The PDE continually viewed analysis in the document as multi-faceted combining task adherence, inference, using implicit and explicit details, supporting claims with evidence and the quality of student writing. PDE provided examples of strong and weak inferences, but what made the inference strong or weak was not the inference itself, but how the student supported the inference. As demonstrated previously, the inference did not need to be supported with high level analysis, as Dejarío playing with the penguins was enough to support that he was fun. In addition to PDE making arguably contradictory claims about inferences, the PDE also highlighted inferences that could be invalid.

Invalid Inferences. PDE highlighted where students used inferences to support analysis; however, a different scorer could challenge the validity of some of the inferences. For instance, PDE noted that a student, "...focuses first on Candace's character, making an inference..." (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2022, p. 35). PDE then provided the inference the student made; the student wrote:

Through Candace's choice to solely interact with the penguins for lab purposes, the the author showcased Candance's business-like mindset. Additionally, Stewart utilized Candace's non-emotional commitment to the penguins to highlight her open-mindedness. (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2022, p. 35)

These two characterizations the student wrote about Candance are seemingly contradictory, and non-emotional commitment does not seem to lead to an inference like open-mindedness. The student then goes on to write how Candance's ability to remove her emotions from the situation allowed her to accept others' ideas (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2022, p. 35). The passage is about the two characters surviving a temperature drop in a lab on a space station.

Dejario, the other character, was able to communicate on an emotional level with the penguins to get the penguins to allow the humans to join their huddle to keep warm and Candance accepted and tried his idea. The student viewed this acceptance as open-mindedness, when really Candance had no other option but to try something different, as it was a matter of life and death.

The student's inference that Candance had an open mind is not necessarily true, and PDE did not explain what made it true. The passage did not detail Candance taking Dejario's advice outside of the life or death situation, but did demonstrate Candance's frustration towards Dejario, which is not open-minded. In sum, PDE tagged this student response as a strong inference, but did not provide why the inference is strong, let alone valid.

That same student also claimed Dejario had an open heart (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2022, p. 35). In each of these examples, the student made a statement about a character that was not directly stated in the text seemingly making it an inference under PDE's definition. This student's responses exemplified what a scorer saw as a correct and or substantial inference, but PDE did not explain what made the inference substantial or valid. Depending on a person's experience with business-minded people, business-minded and open-minded could be two completely opposite attributes. For example, if a reader of this text viewed open-minded and business minded as opposite attributes, then this student contradicts themselves within their inferences. At the same time, depending on how a reader is interpreting certain words, open-

hearted and open-minded could be synonymous. The absence of an explanation on why these inferences actually demonstrate analytical understanding creates ambiguity for teachers who might use these documents to prepare students for the test or to inform instruction. Teachers could look to other years of released items for more examples and clarification, but I uncovered issues with potentially invalid inferences in the 2021 released items as well, and 2015 seldom recognized student inferences (only three times).

While the PSSA 2022 released item sampler only provided examples of inferences connected to characters, the 2021 sampler focused on inferences that made symbolic meaning. The 2021 TDA prompt asked students to explain how nature played a role in a myth and a poem. As such, each of the examples provided demonstrating students making inferences discussed some form of nature. In the first example, a student scoring a 4 wrote, “The sun is another part of nature that served an important purpose in both works” (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2021, p. 31). PDE tagged this student response as an inference, yet they did not explain what made this inference strong. Unlike the inferences in the 2022 released items, this inference comes seemingly directly from the prompt and text. PDE then discussed how this inference is supported with text references and explained with analysis. While a reader could argue whether or not the sun playing a role in the text is an inference, as the sun quite literally melts the wax on Icarus’s wings, PDE seemed to put more earnestness on the inference paired with the text evidence and analysis.

PDE then highlighted another arguably incorrect inference as strong. The same student referencing the sun also wrote, “(Daedalus warns Icarus against flying too low, as “the fogs of the earth” would weigh him down) which is coupled with an inference (This could be referring [sic] to the mists coming off the ocean, along with the fog).” I view fog and mist as synonymous,

so PDE, in this instance, claimed a student utilizing a synonym is inferring. These two examples that PDE explicitly said were inferences were two plot points explicitly stated in the story: the sun literally impacted the story and the fog could literally be the mist coming off the ocean. Here is yet another example where PDE is ambiguous in what the terms inference and implicit and explicit meaning actually mean. Throughout the document PDE labeled inferences as implicit meaning (the student referencing Ulysses), implicit meanings as inferences (the student claiming Dejarrio is fun) and explicit meanings as inferences (the student saying the sun melted the wax). A student making an explicit claim that PDE labeled an inference also occurred in a scoring explanation of a student who scored a 3, PDE stated that a student made "... an inference addressing personal accountability within the context of the poem (This example shows how even if he knew what would happen if he got too close to the sun, he would have still done it)" (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2021, p. 40). Again, this student seemingly restated something directly from the text, yet PDE identified it as an inference.

Overall, due to inconsistency in wording, potentially invalid claims students made in example PDE prompts, inconsistency in viewing parallel claims as strong or weak analysis, and ambiguity in the definition of words like implicit, explicit and inference, I found understanding how PDE approached scoring literary analysis in the PSSA released items complicated. The PDE's variability in their scoring explanations makes these released items difficult for educators to use to inform instruction or write curriculum. While PDE used inferences and implicit and explicit details interchangeably (even though they are separate on the rubric), PDE used the term main idea or controlling idea with regularity. However, understanding how PDE viewed main idea led me to similar conclusions as I made with PDE's use of other literary terms.

Main Idea in Analytical Understanding. The application of the *main idea* code led to similar contradictory and confusing findings as in the previous sections. In particular, PDE emphasized how the student identifying the main idea, often called controlling idea, led to analytical understanding of the text, but PDE did not explain the main idea of any of the passages, so anyone utilizing these resources to promote student learning would need to come to a conclusion about the definition of main idea for themselves.

For example, when a student made the inference, “(in ventor yoused the seagulls he seen from his tower as in spuration for his new invention wings! [sic])” (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2021, p. 42), PDE responded:

This inference is supported with a limited reference to a main idea from the texts (The inventor made the wings from wax and the fethers [sic] from the seagulls arowned [sic] his tower), which is developed further with weak analysis (The inventor also yoused the seagulls as an exapul of how to fly his new in vention [sic]). (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2021, p. 42)

With this excerpt, PDE provided no explanation as to why this reference to a main idea of a text is a limited reference to the text. In addition, without knowing how PDE defined main idea, it is arguable that the wings’ composition is not a main idea at all. Nevertheless, this student, despite their many grammatical and spelling errors, made the claim that the inventor used the seagulls as both inspiration and an example as to what it is to fly. This response parallels a response scored a 4:

In the first body paragraph, development begins with effective analysis of how the avian way of flight plays a role in the passage and poem (Birds played a large role in Icarus and

Daedalus because they were Daedalus's inspiration for his flying device). (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2021, p. 31)

In comparison of these two excerpts each student's main idea presented is parallel in meaning: both students claimed the birds inspired Daedalus to make the wings, but PDE labeled one as "effective analysis" and the other a "limited reference to the main idea." PDE may be referring to how the former response had minimal explanation and multiple grammar errors while the latter response was well written and explained, but elaboration and identifying main idea are two different areas in analysis. While considering why these contradictions in what is and is not effective analysis exist throughout the documents (where students make similar claims, but the claims are labeled strong or weak), I concluded that writing quality is a key separator in determining what is and what is not effective analysis.

Writing Quality. Writing quality does not fit within the scope of literary analysis as writing and analysis are two separate things. The PDE forces students to convey their analytical ability through writing, causing the score of the TDA to be a mix of analytical and writing ability instead of one or the other. PDE had virtually half (4/9) of their scoring rubric items addressing the student's quality of writing (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2022, p. 28). The areas on the rubric detailed a student need to have strong organization, transition use, vocabulary, and grammar. When describing the quality of a student's TDA that earned a 4, PDE commented on writing quality in the following way:

Transition use, though somewhat repetitive, appropriately links ideas (From this quote, the reader can infer, The author also reveals, Finally). Few errors are present (worrysome, micrometeroid, missing capitalization), and they do not interfere with meaning. There is

little use of precise language or domain-specific vocabulary. (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2022, p. 37)

As compared to a student earning a 1:

Many errors are present in sentence formation (fragment), grammar, usage (incorrect or missing words), spelling (studing, survied), capitalization (random and missing), and punctuation (extra apostrophes, missing commas); errors present often interfere with meaning. (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2022, p. 45)

In the second excerpt, PDE detailed multiple areas where this student had poor grammar and organization. This student could have had strong analytical ideas but poor writing. An issue with the layout of the scoring rubric is that holistic scoring does not separate writing quality from analysis quality; therefore, writing and analysis are either scored simultaneously in tandem with each other, or assessed separately, but the separate abilities of the student are not depicted in the score. Teachers utilizing PSSA TDA scores to inform instruction cannot be sure that the student scored a 2 due to both/or reading analysis or writing quality.

Conclusion

Overall, PDE approached analysis in a holistic way, embodying task adherence, implicit and explicit meanings in a text, inferences, main idea, text evidence, and writing quality. In the document and PA Core Standards, PDE did not provide much definition for what these terms mean, and often used them interchangeably or in contradicting fashions. These inconsistencies made truly understanding the analytical approach of PDE difficult, as the documents provided to aid instruction are confusing and contradictory. However, I concluded PDE does not seem to follow a new critical approach even though they used the CCSS to create the PA Core Standards, and many have claimed the CCSS utilized a new critical approach (Bindewald, 2021; Del Nero,

2017; Fisher & Frey, 2014; Park, 2012; Pennell, 2014). In the document analysis I did not conclude if PDE had a specific analytical framework used to understand what they saw as effective analysis outside connecting analysis to task adherence, writing quality, and evidence.

Case Study

The purpose of this case study was to examine how eighth-grade students approached literary analysis. In a class of 24 students, 9 parents and students consented and assented to participate in the case study. To protect student privacy, I coded each student as *student #* during the analysis process. Then, when writing the results for this section, I changed those codes into pseudonyms to increase the readability of this chapter. In table 6 I detail the student codes as connected to the pseudonyms I used throughout this chapter (see Table 6).

Table 6

Student Pseudonyms

Student Code	Pseudonym
Student 1	Matt
Student 2	Linda
Student 3	Allen
Student 4	Ethan
Student 5	Alexa
Student 6	Mary
Student 7	Sam
Student 8	Katie
Student 9	Joe

Note: This table provides the pseudonyms I used to refer to the students.

The students in Table 6 attended language arts class five times a week with fifteen other students for forty-five minutes. The students recently finished a unit on writing memoirs where the students discussed conveying a lesson in their writing, and developing tone and mood. While some literary analysis took place in the memoir unit through discussing mentor texts, I did not yet teach the students how to respond to literature with analytical writing at the time I collected data. However, the TDA is a section on the sixth and seventh grade PSSA as well, so these students all had some form of direct instruction on writing TDAs prior to the study. This site used the Pennsylvania Core Standards to write curriculum and plan lessons, so teachers at this site have taught lessons based on Pennsylvania's adaptation of the CCSS.

During the data collection students first read the 2021 PSSA released item myth “Icarus and Daedalus” and poem “Icarus” and responded to a writing prompt (writing) (see Appendix B). My purpose of having the students write first without discussing with peers or teachers was to ensure, as much as possible, the responses were the students’ unaltered views of the texts and analysis. The next day, students participated in small group discussions (discussion) consisting of three students per group discussing their responses to predetermined questions with the purpose of invoking students’ natural aesthetic and efferent readings of the texts (see Appendix C). Over the next week, four students participated in individual semi-structured interviews (interview) during their lunch period. The interviews were focused on the student’s view of literary analysis and provided an opportunity for students to further explain statements they made in their writing or in their small group discussion (see Appendix C).

To analyze the data gathered during the case study, I collected the students' written responses, audio recorded the small group discussions and interviews, and transcribed the audio recordings verbatim. I then conducted in-vivo coding (Miles et al., 2018). In the first cycle of

coding, I used the students' own words to create codes. I then grouped those codes into categories and created a code list (see Appendix L) in order to conduct second cycle coding. Throughout the coding process, I utilized constant comparative method to compare codes and revise codes as needed (Glaser & Strauss, 2017). I then used the coded documents to generate themes to understand how eighth-graders at this particular site approached literary analysis. The case study code application frequency is in the attachments (see Appendix M). In the following sections of this chapter, I detail the findings of the case study and discuss how students' analytical approach shifted over the course of the study where they understood a text first through characters and plot, then built their analytical response the more they interacted with the text and had conversations surrounding the text.

Approaching Analysis Through Summary and Characters

In the written responses, all but one student centered their response around a summary and reactions to characters. Students generally began their analysis with very literal interpretations of the text. For example, Sam wrote, "He [Daedalus] kept warning what would happen if he went to [sic] high or to [sic] low and taught him [Icarus] how to use wings. This shows how careless Icarus was" (Sam, Writing). In this response, Sam pointed out a detail from the plot to make a comment on a character. This response is an example of how students initially approached reading analysis. At the earliest moment of the case study, when students were writing their written response, they seldom made claims that went beyond plot and characterization. Sam's original written response consisted mostly of statements about characters and a summary of the plot. Her written response aligned with her definition of reading analysis. When I interviewed Sam, I asked her what her definition of reading analysis was, and Sam responded, "Reading analysis? Kind of figuring out what the book or passage is saying" (Sam,

Interview). I then asked, “So when you're reading, knowing you'll be asked to analyze the text, what are some things you do while reading?” to which Sam responded, “I think about sometimes what the characters are thinking or saying and what specific words are, and then I think back to those moments” (Sam, Interview). Sam’s written response aligned with her definition of literary analysis in her interview because both addressed her focus on plot and characters. As evidence of Sam’s analytical approach, her analysis started by demonstrating an understanding of the text, or in her words, “... what the book or passage is saying” (Sam, Interview), by highlighting a specific moment in the plot where Daedalus teaches Icarus to use the wings, then uses that moment in the plot to comment on how Icarus’s actions make him careless (Sam, Writing, Discussion, Interview). Overall, Sam approached literary analysis by using character actions to make inferences about the characters.

This trend arose not only in the small group discussion involving Sam, but also in the small group discussion in the group consisting of Allen, Alexa, and Mary. At the start of the discussion, all students read their written response to their group. When prompted to detail similarities in their writing, Allen said:

So, I would say one of the similarities in all of our writing was how we all, at some point, talked about how you have to stay at the middle, and how he [Icarus] didn’t really listen... And that, he [Icarus] went too high and then his suit fell apart, and then he fell back down and then died. That’s one of the ones I think we all had in our writing. (Allen, Discussion)

With this response, Allen noted all of his group members highlighted how Icarus did not listen (noting an action of the character) then how Icarus died (noting the plot in their writing). Similar to Sam, Allen also connected reading analysis to characters:

I would say reading analysis is like when you read a story it's kind of like I guess your point of view, and how you analyze the text, and different parts of whatever you're reading. The analysis is like what you can take away from each part of your life story that you're trying to read...When you're reading your book, a point of view can be like, you're trying to put yourself in either the character, whoever you're trying to be, in their shoes, and you're trying to imagine what it would be like for them, so then you can analyze the text better. (Allen, Interview)

Allen's response demonstrated a more complex view of analysis than Sam as he discussed approaching analysis through point of view, a life story, and lessons, but ends his response stating there is a need to put yourself in the characters shoes to conduct analysis. Allen's view of analysis aligned with Rosenblatt's transactional theory (1978); however Allen's written response and statements made early in his group discussion did not demonstrate putting himself in the characters shoes. Instead, in the small group discussion and written response he focused on responding to events in the plot and explaining the lessons he learned from the story.

Instead of connecting with the characters, the student's literal interpretation of the text caused dissociation between themselves and the text potentially leading to a focus on in-text character actions and plot events. For example, Allen stated a dissociation between himself and the text when responding to a prompt asking how the students connected to the text, "Like, it's a myth, you really can't relate to jumping off of a cliff, and, you know, escaping prison" (Allen, Discussion). This shows a divergence from his definition of reading analysis because when he could not originally put himself "in the character's shoes," he resorted to discussing how he had difficulty relating to the character's actions and other plot points. Allen, when he struggled connecting to the text, resorted in explaining why he did not connect with the text.

Another group discussion also resulted in students disassociating themselves from the text. While Ethan's group discussed if the text reminded any of them of their own life, Ethan noted, "It doesn't really remind me of any events from my own life" (Ethan, Discussion). Here Ethan could not identify an area of his life that connected to the plot, so he made a simple statement that answered the prompted question and moved on. In both Ethan and Allen's groups students were unable to come up with a connection to the text until I asked them to revisit the questions from a different angle. Only one student in one group, Katie, made an unprompted connection to her life that I detail in a later section.

Overall, in the early stages of reading analysis, most students in this study utilized the plot and characters as an initial point of analysis. This approach was affirmed in all four one-on-one interviews with each student as each of them responded to their definition of reading analysis in some variation of a focus on plot and characters (see Table 7). This approach highlighted that the students are analyzing texts at a superficial level, yet the more the students worked with the text the more in-depth analysis occurred.

During the small group discussions, two out of three groups initially finished in around five minutes. I prompted the entire class to look at the questions from another angle. Although I did not provide a specific angle for students to consider, this prompt motivated these students to move beyond plot and characters into higher level analysis of themes, personal connections, symbols, and discussions of human nature.

In summary, the students' initial approach to analyzing a text was very text-based, as advocated for in the CCSS. Students used the text itself and provided literal interpretations without identifying how they connected or why the text was meaningful. Most responses centered around how Icarus was careless, and how he should have listened to his father. Each of

these claims were supported with instances from the plot and character actions. Originally most students did not see themselves in this text or have much of an aesthetic response outside of times they directly answered how they felt. However, during the second half of the small group discussions the students began making connections about how the characters actions connected with their own lives and demonstrated the responsibilities of parents and the nature of children.

Analysis Through Connections

Stronger analysis from the students developed when they moved away from literal character and plot interpretations and began analyzing the text through connections to their lives. Students in this case study all shared a commonality in that they are all eighth-grade teenagers. This commonality in life experience potentially led the students to analyze the text through the lens of a child on the verge of adulthood and discuss their views of what parents are responsible for through the character of Daedalus, and what children act and feel like through the character of Icarus. Although their analysis was still based in character, bringing in personal connections allowed for more in-depth and meaningful analytical responses than their responses early in the study.

Connecting to Their Own Life. While no student made a connection between the text and their life in writing, Katie was the only student in the study who connected the text to her life in the early part of the small group discussion. The students in the study immediately thought Icarus died because he did not listen to his parents, but Katie went on to connect to a time she did not listen to her parents stating, “Like if your cooking, like at my house, if you don’t listen to your parents who tell you be careful you can burn yourself...” (Katie, Discussion). Katie did not explain what made her connection meaningful during the small group discussion, so I asked her to expand on this statement in her interview:

So I think me cooking in the kitchen relates to Icarus. So if I'm cooking my parents are like be careful, like if there's boiling water and it's splashing, I'm just like it's fine and then I burn myself with water. You would think I'd have to learn from my mistakes about not getting burned, so the next time I cook I won't burn myself. And Icarus, when he makes a mistake, he should learn from his mistakes, but I guess there's like, if I don't learn from my mistakes, I guess I can understand why he did it because I know if I burn myself when I cook I'm still probably gonna [sic] cook and I'll burn myself again. Icarus probably should have been more careful, but I think he didn't really learn from his big mistakes, but he knew something bad might happen, so I was like relating them to each other. (Katie, Interview)

With this response Katie went beyond Icarus's literal action of not listening to his parents and used her own experiences to explain why he did not listen. She surmised that children should listen to their parents when there is potential danger, but she realized she does not always heed her parents' advice, so why should Icarus? Katie's original response during her small group discussion connected to her life, but had limited meaning to anyone but Katie because she had not yet explained, but when I prompted her in the one-on-one interview to explain why she said she connected to Icarus through cooking, she was able to expand on her own life and the nature of children as it related to the text.

While Katie was the only one who connected the myth to her life without prompting, other students were able to make life connections after they were prompted in one of two ways. The two groups outside of Katie's did not start connecting the myth to their own life until I made a classwide announcement to look at the questions from a "different angle." I made this classwide announcement because two groups said they were done with their discussion in about

five minutes. Katie's group was not finished within five minutes, and her response prompted one of her other group members, Joe, to make a connection to his own life. As soon as students realized they connected to Icarus because they too sometimes do not listen to their parents, they began naming instances of connection. In his small group discussion with Katie and Sam, Joe was reminded of how he often does not follow his dad's safety precautions when working in the yard (Joe, Discussion). Similarly, Alexa reflected in her small group discussion with Allen and Mary:

...sometimes people don't pay attention to their parents. They think that they themselves are like all knowing already. And considering that they have been living for a less amount of time than their parents, it isn't always the case. You may want to study more or something like have more experience on something else, but you still won't have more experience on life then they have more experience in life. (Alexa, Discussion)

As the discussions unfolded, and after the students were prompted to look at questions from another angle, in-depth analysis and grappling with meaning started to happen among the students. When the students realized children, like Icarus, do not always listen, they started to examine just why children do not listen to their parents. I found the strongest student analysis came when they discussed parents and children. In the next sections, I discuss the students' analysis of how the myth and poem made them consider the role of parents and the nature of children.

The Role of Parents. The natural approach the students took to analyze the myth and the poem started with Icarus as a father. While most students did not connect the myth to their own life early on, students were able to discuss their view of Daedalus as a parent at early stages of the discussion and in their written response. The students brought up their view of Daedalus as a

father early in the analysis process. However, like the initial claims about Icarus, they were rooted in his actions and not fully developed at the written stage. For example, Joe, in his written response, called Daedalus a “fraud” for not fully taking precautions to protect his son (Joe, Writing). In his small group discussion, he pondered:

I feel like Daedalus also kind of overestimated his son. I know Daedalus probably knew Icarus was disobedient, but if he knew that, then why shouldn't he have took extra precautions too... if something did happen to him? (Joe, Discussion)

This response demonstrated Joe's view of the parents' role in protecting their children. The other group members, Sam and Katie, disagreed with him and cited moments in the text showing that Daedalus did, in fact, take precautions, and the fault was Icarus's (Sam, Joe & Katie, Discussion). I asked Katie during the interview to provide more context on the disagreement between her and her peers about whether or not Daedalus properly prepared and supervised Icarus, and who was at fault for Icarus's death:

So Daedalus, we were like, oh, maybe you should have been watching him, but originally I think he was, but then Icarus was behind him later before he like fell and started falling, so we were discussing that it was probably, we thought it was maybe Daedalus's fault for not watching Icarus because he's behind him and he knew that he probably wouldn't listen to him, but then it was, we were just like back and forth, so I was like...I'm not sure because I feel like Icarus, it might be Icarus's fault because he probably, he knew it was gonna [sic] happen. He knew that if he went too high, like probably at the moment he didn't, like he forgot, but it was gonna [sic] happen. If you float too high the wax was gonna [sic] melt and he was gonna [sic] die, so I think it might

be Icarus's fault. But Daedalus, you could say, there's some things that he did that were probably a mistake. (Katie, Interview)

Katie's response acknowledged that Daedalus's role as a parent was to watch Icarus, but quickly shifted to Icarus knowing better. She left open the possibility that it was Daedalus's fault that Icarus died, but appeared to conclude Icarus knew the consequence and flew too close to the sun anyway. Katie blamed Icarus because Daedalus provided Icarus the direction, and Icarus did not follow; however, by leaving open the possibility that Daedalus was at fault, Katie demonstrated a potential for multiple interpretations of this text.

Later on in the small group discussion, while conceding the father did try, Joe added, "They [parents] are just trying to take the best course of action for you and know that you are safe." (Joe, Discussion) By saying parents want to keep children safe, Joe is blurring text and real life, as using the term "they" refers to parents in general, not only Daedalus. Joe's views on Daedalus changed throughout the discussion. He went from pointing to Daedalus as a fraud because he did not protect Icarus at the beginning of the small group discussion to detailing the precautions Daedalus took to protect Icarus at the end of the discussion. This change of view is aligned with Rosenblatt (1978) and Fish (1976) where students' readings and transactions with a text change as they discuss the text or encounter the text in different ways. In this instance, Joe responded to the text through writing and through discussion, and his views changed during the discussion.

In contrast to Joe's original view of Daedalus, Matt wrote Daedalus was "a great father allowing his son to soar" (Matt, Writing). Matt and Joe had a different view of the role of a parent. While Matt did not expand on this statement, Matt seemingly valued parents giving

children tools to be successful while Joe valued a level of protection parents provide. In each of these instances, the students used the actions of Daedalus to make a claim about his character.

As the students continued their discussions, they shifted from talking about Daedalus specifically to the role of parents as a whole. After I announced to look at the questions from a different angle, students moved away from the text and started to make meaning in their own life. Allen reflected:

I feel like for my own life, I feel like growing up I always used to like think that my parents used to say stuff, and try to keep me from hanging out with friends and stuff, but then now that I'm getting older, I can understand their point of view. And in the story, the same type of thing, where he just thought his dad was trying to like prevent him and stuff, and now he regrets it. (Allen, Interview)

Here Allen started to move away from a text-based response and started to make comments on the role of parents in real life all while connecting his claim back to the story. This analysis highlighted Allen responding to the text in a transactional way.

Katie provided another example of the role of parents in real life noting “They want what’s best for you obviously” (Katie, Discussion). She said this in response to grappling with whether or not Daedalus should have let Icarus fly. Again “they” blurs the line between text and life and Katie made a claim that one role of parents is to want to do what is right for their child. In this instance, Katie viewed letting Icarus fly as the best way to give his child an opportunity in life; despite the danger, flying to escape was best for Icarus (Katie, Discussion).

Throughout the analytical process, the students initially provided their thoughts on Daedalus as a father, then moved into explaining why Daedalus allowed Icarus to fly and made broad claims about parenting in the real world. At this point in the discussion, students generated

various answers to what a parent should be including a caregiver and a protector. Students acknowledged that parents often tell kids what to do, but also appeared to recognize that it is their job as parents. Students voiced how parents telling them what to do frustrated them at times, but the students appeared to realize parents are trying to keep them safe, and overall want to put them in situations where they can be successful. Daedalus telling Icarus what to do, and warning him probably frustrated Icarus, but the students understood and connected with the idea that Daedalus did it because he cared for Icarus. Overall, a pattern of students' analysis of texts emerged, with students having started with text dependent analysis then moved on to real world connections. Once they progressed to real world connections, stronger and more in-depth analysis occurred. This in-depth analysis is potentially from both/and working with the text over time through writing and discussion or the students understanding the text through their own life. A similar trend emerged in student responses discussing the nature of children.

The Nature of Children. When students saw a connection to their lives, their analytical responses went from literal and plot-based conclusions to making real world meaning and gaining understanding about themselves and others. Students began to rationalize just why Icarus would fly too close to the sun despite his father's warning. When addressing why Icarus disobeyed his father Sam explained:

It is also good to take risks depending on what the risk is. He, Icarus, wanted to be free, and I'm not saying it was a good idea, but he felt that need. Sometimes I feel like that too. (Sam, Interview).

In this quote Sam connected emotionally with Icarus stating she has felt like Icarus did, and understood Icarus wanting to take a risk. Sam recognized Icarus's desire to be free led him to

disobey his father. Sam expressed that when a parent says a kid cannot have something the child wants, children feel the need to take a risk and go against their parent (Sam, Interview)

Alexa provided a detailed rationale behind a child's need for freedom that Sam alluded to. She rationalized why Icarus flew too high despite knowing the dangers:

It's like he experienced the little bit of freedom. The wind flowing through, flowing through him. Like the feeling of freedom that those few minutes, seconds, who knows how long of freedom in the air. He felt free and he would have, even if he knew what would happen afterwards, even if he knew that he would die. He would go through all that just to feel that little bit of freedom again. (Alexa, Interview)

This statement alone is a profound analysis on the ideas of freedom. Alexa is stating here that Icarus would take freedom at any cost for any amount of time because he saw the value of freedom. Alexa was not alone in recognizing the discussion of the topic of freedom in this text. While Alexa provided the most in-depth response, the three other student interviews brought up the topic of freedom, three of the written responses (including Alexa) brought up freedom, and two of the three groups spent time discussing the role a want for freedom played in Icarus's actions.

Alexa then went on to connect Icarus's want of freedom to her own life. She said:

Finding a way to freedom can be difficult sometimes... for me, finding the right time to do things on my own is difficult because every day is mostly very busy at home. Trying to walk the dogs, doing all these chores, wash the dishes, set the table. It's hard to get a moment for myself sometimes. (Me: And how's that connect to the poem or myth, can you make the connection?) It's like there's difficult things in both of them. Different types of difficulty. (Alexa, Interview)

Alexa posited that Icarus's mistakes came from a want for independence and time for himself, which she connected with because she has experienced a longing for time to herself. She detailed the stresses she experiences at home and how they prevent her from having time on her own. That time on her own is what she saw Icarus as achieving in her initial response above. In all, Alexa evolved her analytical understanding of the text over time and through discussion. She first mentioned freedom in her written response, raised it again in her small group discussion, and then created powerful and meaningful analysis surrounding the topic in her one-on-one interview. For comparison, Alexa's definition of reading analysis was "putting a story together like in a few words, in a few sentences" (Alexa, Interview). Yet, Alexa's analysis of Icarus's want for freedom does not appear to match her definition of analysis, as while she viewed analysis as text based and literal, her analysis was profound when she went beyond the text. When Alexa connected her own life to Icarus, she created a meaningful claim that considered the true nature of children and why they may try to take independence by not listening to their parents.

While the students' connections to characters seemingly went from concrete to abstract leading to stronger analysis, students also sought to find a lesson in the text. They used the plot and characters to consider what the text may be teaching. Theme, or lesson, was one of the students' earliest attempts at analysis beyond plot and character.

Analysis of the Theme

Students brought up the topic of theme, or lessons, in their analysis multiple times even though I did not ask students directly to find a theme at any point in the case study. Sam discussed the theme when I asked her why she would want to analyze a text. She said, "...it (analysis) helps you get the point of the story, theme, helps you break down what you're reading"

(Sam, Interview). While the students defined themes mostly as summary, Sam stated you can use the analysis to identify a theme (Sam, Interview). Two students, Mary and Matt, brought up the theme in their written responses, and two students Allen and Katie brought up the theme in the discussion and interview. Specifically, Mary wrote the theme of the myth was "...don't aim too high or too low, start at the middle." (Mary, Writing) In this case, Mary's stated theme is most likely a literal interpretation of what Icarus should have done when he was flying and is drawn directly from the text as Daedalus tells Icarus not to fly too high or too low. Similar to Mary, Allen brought up this theme during the small group discussion and interview:

...it's kind of saying that you know if you set your standards too high you may get like stress and anxiety and all this other stuff, but if you set your standards too low you may think, you may be worried, like hey, I'm not doing what I'm potentially for, so you want to stay in that middle where you can feel like you're making a difference, but then also not stressed or have any anxiety. (Allen, Interview)

Allen's explanation of the theme is much more developed than Mary's theme. He discussed why a person should not go too high or too low, and how the middle allows a person to be comfortable and be doing what they are meant to do in life. Also, Allen connected the theme to a person's standards and goals. It is possible Allen's theme may be more developed because he had already written about and discussed the text, and his statement above came during his third interaction with the text during a one-on-one interview. Mary and Allen took the same phrase about not going too high or too low and named it the theme but interpreted it in different ways. The responses of Allen and Mary demonstrate how two people can read the same text and come to different conclusions. However, these conclusions are not necessarily an actual lesson in the text. While Mary's claim was too literal to be a lesson, Allen's statement about theme definitely

demonstrated a lesson. Instead of applying the phrase discussing flying too high or too low back to the text, Allen removed it from the text and applied it to his own life.

Allen's theme also tied in stress and anxiety, two issues relevant to teenagers. As such, Allen's theme analysis could be an instance where Allen put his own feelings into the text in order to create meaning. While this may not be exactly what the author of the myth had in mind, it is an aesthetic response nonetheless. The text appeared to make Allen think about stress and anxiety, two emotions that would apply to a person trying to escape prison on a flying device over the ocean. He then took the topic, feelings of stress and anxiety, and melded it with the idea of not flying too high or too low. While his theme is not necessarily supported within the text, it is a lesson he took away from the text after experiencing the text. In sum, Allen worked in tandem with the text to create meaning.

Katie attempted to transact with the text to find a theme in both the small group discussion and one-on-one interview but did not identify one. Katie grappled with an area she thought had a theme but was difficult to pinpoint. During the small group discussion, she said, "There's probably different meanings in the story that's about wings and melting and dying and teaching a lesson." Katie recognized there was something the text had to offer that she could not identify. She pinpointed three text elements, the wings, the melting wax, and Icarus's death as the areas she thought contained deeper meaning. Her thinking demonstrated how she recognized the text has meaning beyond the text itself: when in the interview she elaborated:

I thought that the wings melting had a different meaning to it, but I didn't really know. I still don't really know what it is but I thought this story can't just be about a person not listening to their dad, and they're like wings melting and they die, so I thought like it had some other significance that you have to learn from. Like it could symbolize something

else, but I'm not really sure what it is. It could be because I think like these myths and these stories are meant to make you learn a lesson or like be taught something, and I think the story must represent something too if you think deeper into it. The story would mean something else and have a different, like symbolize something and teach you a lesson.

(Katie, Interview)

While Katie could not identify an exact lesson here, she said a few things about literary analysis. She acknowledged meaning goes beyond the plot and if she looked deeper into the text, she could possibly find more. Her idea supported how meaning is not found in the text alone but in tandem with the reader. She recognized that at this moment in time she did not know the meaning in the story, but demonstrated a knowledge of myths noting they teach lessons. This idea created a possibility that analysis may not only be coming to a final conclusion, but also a means to open inquiry. If she were to revisit this text again, she may have new insights that help her put together the pieces she, at the time of the interview, could not.

While Katie, Mary, and Allen did not seem to develop a theme that fully connected with the text, others in the study made statements about potential lessons. Sam said, "If you follow directions usually the adult in the situation is right even if you don't feel like it is. And if you follow directions, usually it will help you" (Sam, Interview). Sam's statement exhibited the theme of listening to your elders, and is a text based theme as Icarus did not listen, but the theme could go beyond the text with Sam's use of the second person instead of identifying only Icarus. In addition to Sam, Alexa also provided a text based theme, "I think it's important for readers to know that you should pay attention to what people tell you. Like if it's for them to take care of you. It's not for something bad. It's for something good" (Alexa, Interview). Like Sam's theme, Alexa did not refer solely to Icarus, but her response connected to ideas from the text.

Specifically, each student response (Sam and Alexa) acknowledged a need to listen to adults which most likely came from the text where Icarus ignored his father, the person who is supposed to take care of him. Sam and Alexa developed these similar themes from discussions about the nature of children and the nature of adults. By considering the role of children and the role of parents in the text, each of these students developed a universal theme going beyond the text.

These five student examples discussing themes in this section exhibit how students in the case studied sought to identify themes in literary analysis. While Mary's theme was too literal, Allen's theme did not directly connect to the text, and Katie wanted to find a theme but could not, the attempt at identifying the theme proved a consistent analytical approach for the students. These three students who grappled with identifying themes also demonstrated that there are areas for student growth in analysis.

Areas for Growth in Student Analysis

During the analytical process, many places showcasing a need for student growth in analysis emerged. In addition to some students struggling to identify a theme, many students were also quick to agree with each other, even if the information a student presented was seemingly wrong. For example, during the small group discussions the following exchange happened between Linda, Matt, and Ethan that demonstrated students' willingness to agree with each other:

Um it was just like meaningful. I would say how they spent the time together to make it all, and then at the end Icarus just like let go and just stopped trying. So it's like meaningful that they did so much together with the last little time because Icarus must of known that he was going to do it, so then instead of making it obvious that he was, he

spent time with his father before he did it, helping him build it in the tower, in the cell.

(Linda, Discussion)

Linda spoke first and told her group she thought Icarus knew he was going to die, so he spent time with his father. Ethan responded with a theme, and added Linda's claim on at the end of his remark:

For me what's meaningful is like a lesson. I guess it wasn't really avoidable because he wanted to be free and fly high, but you should like listen to people when they tell you like things that are important and use common sense. But also, if you're planning on doing something like that, spend time with your family or something. (Ethan, Discussion)

Ethan did not connect the two statements but added Linda's analysis of the myth showing an agreement with Linda. Linda and Matt each responded in agreement with Ethan. First, Linda said "Yeah, I agree" (Linda, Discussion), to which Matt responded, "Yep, yep, yep" (Matt, Discussion).

In the exchange above, Linda claimed Icarus gave up and knew he was going to die, so he spent time with his dad first. This logic is flawed in two ways. First, Icarus and Daedalus were in a cell together, so they were forced together. Second, there is not an indication in the text that Icarus wanted to die. Despite Linda's arguably incorrect claim, Ethan responded with his own lesson, a seemingly accurate one that aligns with other students who discussed the theme during the study, but then included Linda's at the end of his response. What is more, Matt simply agreed with both claims and said nothing more. Students agreeing without adding to the discussion no matter the claim made happened 32 times across the group discussions. Yet, students challenged another student's claim only seven times, with six of those instances occurring in one group on one topic. Ultimately, students were willing to agree with nearly anything their classmates said

without challenging their logic. This willingness to agree might be a result of the students wanting to finish the task, or it could be indicative of the social dynamics in middle school classrooms.

In connection with students wanting to finish quickly, two out of three groups finished the small group discussion question in under five minutes. The students were driven by a task and answered the questions early in the discussion in an answer and move on fashion. Only one of the groups took their time and discussed and debated questions (see Sam and Katie disagreeing with Joe in The Role of Parents section), but the other two groups rushed through questions. I attributed this rush seen in two groups to three possible explanations. First, it is possible the students were seeing the questions as tasks to complete, so once they had an answer for the question, even if it was not well thought out or fully discussed, the students moved on because they achieved the task. Second, the students thought their answers were strong, and they did not need more discussion. However, the students' abilities to resume discussion after I prompted them to look at the questions from a different angle exhibited that the students could provide deeper analysis, and if their answers were complete the first time, they would have had nothing more to say. Third, middle school students may not see discussing mythology as a preferred activity, so they did not feel a need to prolong it with more discussion. In my experience with eighth graders, they often try to finish things quickly so they can socialize or work on something more preferred. The students rushing led, at first, to surface level analysis.

In the study, students exhibited three areas of needed growth in analysis. First, not all students were able to convey themes that fully connected with the text. Next, students were willing to agree with each other even if they could have debated a statement made by a

classmate. Third, students rushed through analysis. Which was problematic because the students' analysis of the text grew stronger the longer they worked with it.

Conclusion

The purpose of the case study was to examine how eighth graders approached literary analysis. In this study, students approached analysis at first with an aim to understand a text. To understand the text, students utilized the plot and characters as a main function to gain comprehension. Students verified this approach of them starting with analysis through plot and characters because each of the students interviewed defined literary analysis in some variation of understanding the plot and characters. However, this surface-level definition of literary analysis was not a reality in student responses as student responses became more in-depth the longer they worked with the text, and the more opportunities they had to discuss the text.

When analyzing the text, students focused on plot and characters at first, but their responses developed into robust and meaningful analysis over time. When their responses started to take on a more analytical nature, students' valued attempts at identifying lessons and finding meaning in the story. When students went outside of the text and made connections to their lives, deeper meaning from the text arose. For example, the students grappled with the nature of children and the roles of parents. Despite instances of areas of needed growth in student analysis such as instantly agreeing with peers, making theme claims that seem to be unsupported by the text, and moving on from a question before it was discussed in depth, Alexa's discussion on a child's need for freedom demonstrated the level of literary analysis possible for eighth-grade students.

Eighth-grade students, when given the chance to work with a text in various ways (written, small group peer discussion, and one-on-one interview with a teacher), demonstrated an

analytical approach where the students started with the concrete and moved to the abstract. Their strongest analysis came when they examined the text through a lens in which they had a connection, the nature of children.

Comparing the Document Analysis and Case Study

The purpose of this simultaneous mixed methods study was to examine how the analytical approach of eighth graders compared to the analytical approach used to create the CCSS. In order to examine the analytical approach of each, I conducted a document analysis of the PSSA released items and a case study of an eighth-grade language arts classroom responding to the 2021 PSSA released texts.

In the document analysis, I concluded that PSSA scorers used an analytical approach that placed heavy emphasis on students' adherence to a task and writing quality as demonstration of their analytical understanding of a text. After task adherence and writing quality, PDE valued students using implicit and explicit details, making inferences, identifying main idea, and supporting answers with evidence to demonstrate student analytical understanding.

In the case study, I concluded that students viewed analysis first and foremost as summarizing and identifying character actions. However, as students engaged with a text over time and through both writing and discussion, their analysis of the text developed and became more robust as they analyzed through the teachable lessons in a text, and how the content of the text related to the real world. The students' strongest analysis came when they connected the text to their own life and considered the role of parents and the nature of children.

My overall conclusions show both connections and divergences in analytical approach between eighth-grade students and the CCSS (examined through the PDE's released items). In

the following sections, I compare the analytical approach of PDE through their released TDA sections to the analytical approach of eighth-graders.

What is Analysis?

In the case study I examined how students approached literary analysis. To help examine their approach, I asked four students to respond to the interview question, “What is your definition of reading analysis?” Table 7 provides (see Table 7) each student’s definition. This question allowed students to directly answer the research question: how do eighth graders approach literary analysis. In the table all content in parenthesis were follow up questions I asked the students.

Table 7

Student Definitions of Reading Analysis

Student	Definition of reading analysis
Allen	I would say reading analysis is like when you read a story it's kind of like I guess your point of view, and how you kind of like analyze the text, and like different parts of like I guess the whatever you're reading the analysis is like what you can take away from each part of like your life story that you're trying to read. (Me: So, what you said it's your point of view what did you mean by that?) When you're reading your book, a point of view can be like, you're trying to like put yourself in either the character, whoever you're trying to be in their shoes, and you're trying to like imagine what it would be like for them, so then you can like analyze the text better.
Alexa	For me reading analysis is um... it'd be like... putting a story together like in a few words, in a few sentences. (Me: Like about what? What do those sentences consist of?) Like about the whole story and how it developed.
Katie	I think like reading analysis like when you analyze what you're reading, and you look through what you think about what you just read, and think about from beginning to end and what just happened. That's what I think, like, reading analysis is.
Sam	Reading analysis? ...Kind of figuring out what the book or passage is saying. (Me: Saying in what way?) Like what it's about.

Note: This table depicts how each student defines literary analysis in their interview.

Most students' responses in the above table, with the exception of Allen, exhibit how students viewed analysis as being focused on what the text is about. Allen provided a much more abstract answer and connected reading analysis to a point of view in a person's life, but still referenced plot events and characters playing a role in reading analysis. This idea of point of view contributing to analysis also came up with Sam when she noted that "everybody saw it [the text] in a different point of view" (Sam, Interview). Sam and Allen pointed out that analysis changed based on point of view. Sam and Allen's stance on analysis aligned with Rosenblatt's (1978) reader response theory as both students recognized how a person's perspective could change how a person understands a text. Sam and Allen's thinking when they discussed analysis diverged from PDE's view of analysis, but many of the initial claims students made connected to how PDE described analytical understanding.

PDE's approach to demonstrating analytical understanding is somewhat aligned with student responses. During the scoring explanations of the TDA, PDE focused on adhering to the task and addressing the main ideas of a text. In the 2022 scoring rubric, PDE provided language explaining what they viewed as thorough analysis. Students achieved analysis through,

"Thorough analysis of explicit and implicit meanings from text(s) to effectively support claims, opinions, ideas, and inferences.", "Substantial, accurate, and direct reference to the text(s) using relevant key details, examples, quotes, facts, and/or definitions.", and "Substantial reference to the main idea(s) and relevant key details of the text(s) to support the writer's purpose." (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2022, pp. 28-29)

While PDE offered a more robust view of analysis than the students, most students and PDE had a similar thread in their responses that analysis is text based and does not take into account outside agencies (such as point of view) other than text. Overall, the students and PDE viewed

analysis as a focus on details from the text. However, a focus on details of the text led students to shallow analysis, but when the students went beyond the text, they began making more meaningful claims. Students' responses aligning with text-based analysis might be due to their want to adhere to a task as the PDE promotes. Using the text only in analysis could provide students something concrete, like a given task or prompt, to answer. While both PDE and students recognized analysis as text-based, PDE boosted task adherence as the main component of students demonstrating analytical understanding.

Task Adherence

As I stated and demonstrated in the document analysis section of this chapter, PDE made statements that task adherence demonstrated analytical ability. In the 2021 prompt, PDE asked students to analyze how nature played a role in the myth. As such, students who discussed and analyzed the role of nature in the document earned higher scores on the rubric.

When I distributed the written prompt, three students in the study raised their hand and stated they were unsure what exactly I wanted them to write. One student asked if I wanted a TDA. After the four questions, I made a whole class announcement that I wanted the students to try their best and write whatever they think they should. This exchange demonstrated a student's want to have a specific prompt in order to conduct analysis.

Students tried to adhere to a task during the small group discussions. Their task was to answer the questions, and moving through each question became the focus instead of spending time discussing each question. Students moved away from simply adhering to trying to answer each question when I asked students to look at the questions from a different angle (providing no direction on what that angle should be). After the prompt, students began to provide stronger analytical responses. As such, PDE viewed task adherence as a strength in analysis, and wanted

students to answer specific questions. However, I found when students used the question as a starting point of discussion, and moved between analysis through the text and their own life, their answers became detailed and meaningful; therefore, the task limited students in the case study. Matsumura et al. (2015) found similar results showing TDA prompts often led to summary instead of analysis. PDE's want for students to adhere to a task could limit the analytical potential of creating strong analytical responses.

Strong Analytical Responses

In the document, PDE provided examples of strong analysis and weak analysis. In discussion of a body paragraph in a student response, PDE wrote:

The effective introduction, development, and conclusion support the student's focus on the large role that nature plays in both the passage and the poem. In the introduction, the student provides a multi-part controlling idea (The avian way of flight was a main piece in the story, as well as the poem. The sun and water were also prevalent. All of these things connect with nature to help create meaning...) that both supports the focus and functions to organize the development of the response. (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2021, p. 31)

PDE began their statement discussing the organization of the student's response showing the PDE's connection of writing quality to literary analysis. PDE also noted the student's topic of the essay, and how it related to the prompt (the role of nature in the myth) showing PDE's focus on task adherence. PDE went on to write:

In the first body paragraph, development begins with effective analysis of how the avian way of flight plays a role in the passage and poem (Birds played a large role in Icarus and Daedalus because they were Daedalus's inspiration for his flying device), which is

supported by relevant text (Daedalus saw the seagulls outside the tower and used their feathers to build himself and his son Icarus wings. The development continues with more effective analysis (The birds represent freedom in the passage) coupled with well-chosen text references (Daedalus even refers to them as the “only creatures that were sure of liberty” and Icarus was compared to a bird many times after he flew out of imprisonment...). (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2021, p. 31)

Here the PDE discussed the student’s analytical claims the student made in their response. Primarily, the response revolved around the birds and their representation of freedom. PDE concluded this section of the scoring explanation writing:

The paragraph concludes with a melding of strong analysis and relevant text (Icarus even uses birds to justify not listening to Daedalus’s warning to not fly up too high by thinking “Are birds careful? Not they!”) that clearly shows the significant role that the avian way of flight plays in the story/poem. (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2021, p. 31)

At the end of the paragraph, PDE noted how the student recognized Icarus’s connection with the birds in justification of flying too close to the sun.

In this response PDE noted many areas this student responded to that the students in the case study also highlighted such as the birds representing freedom, Icarus not listening, and the sun melting the wax. However, PDE created the 2021 TDA prompt to focus on the role of nature. In the case study, the students did not organically highlight the role of nature as the main point of analysis. Instead, they focused on the role of the parent and the nature of the child. Students in the case study used similar symbols to the student TDA above (like the birds), but the students in the case study did not speak of the birds in their relationship to nature, and nature playing a role

in the myth. Instead, students in the case study used the birds in their analysis as a text element that provided them the topic of freedom. From there, students discussed ideas surrounding freedom, specifically in its connection to the parent child relationship. Students in the case study did not detail nature's role in the myth. Despite taking different angles, both the student TDA response and students in the case study discussed the idea of freedom.

The topic of freedom led students in the case study to one of the strongest analytical statements made during the case study (Alexa's discussion of a child's need for freedom); however, the topic of freedom alone was not identified as strong analysis by PDE. In a response earning a 2 that addressed freedom, PDE claimed, "The student's introduction identifies a controlling idea that is somewhat related to the texts (The way that nature had a role in this myth was by presenting the birds as freedom and liberty)." PDE did not go on to explain why the birds representing freedom and liberty are only somewhat related to the text. However, multiple students in the case study brought up the idea of freedom and liberty as a meaningful part of the text, and PDE noted freedom as "meaningful" in some scoring explanations while only "somewhat related" in others.

The only rationale for the change of view between the two responses PDE discussed, both connecting the birds to freedom, is the quality of the writing. The rubric utilized to rate student responses is holistic rather than analytical, and writing quality played a major role in the quality of the TDA. As such, the document did not provide a clear expectation of analysis without writing. In the case study, the strongest analytical statements came in discussion. Students' writing lacked the detail that their conversations achieved. The students demonstrated stronger analytical ability through discussion, but PDE scores student's analytical and writing aptitude simultaneously making it difficult to identify if a response is weak analysis or weak

writing. The example of the birds representing liberty are identical claims, yet one is effective and the other somewhat related. As a result, PDE ties writing to analysis and does not assess them separately in any open-ended formats.

Conclusion

In comparing PDE's approach to analysis (informed by the CCSS) and eighth graders approach to analysis, I concluded PDE focused on text based task adherence and writing quality to score the TDA section while students approached analysis first as text based but achieved stronger analysis when they worked in tandem with text and self. Most students could not achieve strong analysis without prompting to look at responses from a different angle, but once given freedom to explore their views, many in the study produced profound analysis. The students were at first seemingly limited in their analysis by wanting to adhere to a task, but once provided the opportunity to explore the text from other angles the analysis transcended the text.

PDE asked the students to focus on nature in their analysis, yet that was not an organic lens for analysis for the students in this study. Instead, they approached the text with a lens of the relationship between parents and children and a child's want for freedom. In the case study, timed writing was not the best indicator of a student's analytical approach or aptitude as it was often not developed or surface level. PDE assessed student analysis in a single writing prompt, created by adults, and some students were successful. The mean score on this PSSA writing prompt across Pennsylvania in 2021 was 1.88 out of 4 (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2021, p. 27). If I limited a demonstration of analytical approach and aptitude to the written responses alone, the students in this case study would have simply approached analysis as mostly summary and reactions to characters. Yet, providing an arena to explore the text with classmates, try different analytical statements with groups, and request students elaborate on ideas led to

profound analysis centered around student experiences they have had as children with their parents and their desire for freedom.

Chapter V: Discussion

In this chapter, I will summarize the research problem, questions, and methodologies I used throughout this study. Then, I will apply my results to my theoretical framework of reader response approaches and reflect on my findings through discussion and connections to previous research. Finally, I will conclude by detailing limitations and future educational and research implications.

Research Problem

Standardized reading scores have remained unchanged for at least the last 2 decades (Wexler, 2019) and reading achievement in America has not improved for 80 years (Thomas, 2023). To respond to this stagnation, researchers and educators have argued between whole language or phonics-based reading instruction (coined the “science of reading”) as the way to increase reading achievement (Castles, 2018). To date, multiple news media outlets are presenting a narrative that schools should embrace the “science of reading” for primary reading instruction, but this approach, like many other reading approaches from the past, does not seem to have any empirical evidence as a successful way to increase reading scores as it is arguably, and somewhat ironically, not fully based in scientific research approaches (Thomas, 2023). Other researchers disagree with Thomas (2023) and claimed the science of reading is “settled science” (Hanford, 2018).

Along with the disagreement in reading approaches, reading instruction and assessment in America was already complicated prior to the CCSS because states did not assess reading uniformly. To respond to the lack of uniform reading assessment, the Common Core State Standards Initiative (2022) created the CCSS to provide common standards across the United States to assess reading growth and achievement. Yet, when developing the standards, the writers

of the CCSS did not use any empirical research with school-aged participants to inform the creation of the standards (Dewitz & Graves, 2021; Hinchman & Moore, 2013). There was also skepticism amongst researchers that the CCSS focused more on future needs of businesses than the needs of school-aged students (Endacott & Goering, 2014). Prior to the creation of the CCSS, Brooks (2007) and Thein (2009) both promoted the centering of reading instruction and standards around students' current processes rather than future outcomes. To respond to Brooks (2007) and Thein (2009) researchers need to determine how students at each grade level approach reading and reading analysis. The purpose of this study was to compare how eighth-grade students approached literary analysis as compared to the PSSA's application of the CCSS to examine convergences and divergences in student approaches to reading analysis and PDE's expected approaches to reading analysis of students taking the PSSA.

Research Questions

This present mixed methods study examined the question: *How does the literary analysis approach of eighth-grade students compare to the reading paradigm utilized on the (PSSA)?*

Two research sub-questions guided this study:

1. *What reading paradigm do the text-dependent analysis questions align with on the eighth-grade PSSA?*
2. *How do eighth-grade students in a Pennsylvania middle school approach literary analysis?*

To answer these research questions, I employed a QUAL-QUAL simultaneous mixed methods study mixing document analysis and a case study (Stake, 1995). I analyzed the TDA section in the PDE released items from 2015, 2021, and 2022 (Pennsylvania Department of Education) to answer sub-question 1, and I conducted a case study in a suburban eighth grade classroom where

I analyzed students responding to the 2021 released TDA item through writing, discussions, and interviews to answer sub question 2. I then compared the results of both studies to answer the primary research question. In the next section, I summarize the methods I used to conduct this research study.

Methods

To conduct the document analysis, I created a deductive code list (Hseih and Shannon, 2005) from new critical reading approaches, reader response reading approaches, and the PSSA TDA. I then used constant comparative methods through the coding processes and in theme generation. I interpreted themes and code frequencies to examine the reading analysis approach PDE used creating and scoring the TDA section of the PSSA released items.

During the case study, I purposefully structured the research events to coincide with ideas in reader response approaches: students first responded to a text in writing, then small group discussions, and finally interviews. I used in-vivo coding during first cycle coding to center the students' voices and create a code list. In second cycle coding I applied the themes to the written responses and interview transcripts. I used the coded excerpts to generate themes to gain understanding of these particular students' approaches to reading analysis.

During analysis, I stored each data set in different databases until I completed the document analysis and case study thematic coding. I then compared the findings from each study to examine convergences and divergences in the analytical approaches students took as compared to the approaches PDE employed during the scoring response section of the TDA in the PSSA released items. I found the PDE centered their analysis around task adherence, writing quality, and text references, while student analysis started with concrete text references such as

plot and characters, but moved to deeper text connections and analysis when students viewed the text through personal experiences.

Application of Theoretical Framework to Findings

Throughout the study I made meaning of findings through my constructivist worldview (Creswell & Clark, 2017) and a theoretical framework consisting of ideas found in reader response theory (Rosenblatt, 1978). Within this framework readers create meaning through transacting with the text. Each text has an ideal reader and an actual reader (Iser, 1980). Most instances, readers are actual readers and meaning is made somewhere between the intended meaning of the text and the reader's interpretation (Iser, 1980). When value sharing groups come together to make collective meaning, that interpretive community can come to similar conclusions about a text (Fish, 1976). Finally, genres texts align with are social constructs that change based on reader, text, and context (Brewer, 2019). In the following subsections, I detail how these ideas from my theoretical framework connect to my findings.

Ideal Versus Actual Reader

Iser (1980) viewed texts as static and readers as diverse. When PDE scored TDA responses, PDE used a single rubric and single prompt. Each student responded to the same text, and answered the same prompt, making the text and prompt static, but the reader diverse. In the instances where readers had immense background knowledge on the topics of mythology, nature, or science fiction, those readers most likely fell near the pole of the ideal reader. The ideal reader would have a better chance at responding to a text in a way that aligned with the task (Iser, 1980), and that alignment may result in better scores. To clarify, Students with experiences aligning to the question structure of the prompt (such as a student who enjoys science fiction and understands the genre as it is constructed in American society) would fall closer to the pole of

the ideal reader. If PDE advocates for single, text-based interpretations of a text on the PSSA that many claimed the CCSS does (Cunningham, 2019; Hinchman & Moore, 2013; North, 2013; Shanahan, 2015; Sulzer, 2014; Thomas, 2018), then those students would be in a more advantageous position than their peers to demonstrate strong analytical understanding of the text. However, it is more likely the student better aligns with the ideas PDE wants expressed in the TDA response.

PDE does not provide any information on genre, context, or content of reading passages students will respond to each year on the PSSA test. Teachers have no ability to attempt to provide students the background experiences needed to move towards the actual reader pole. Depending on the text and prompt, some students will fall near the ideal reader pole, but many others will fall near the actual reader pole. By not providing content, context, or genre, PDE leaves analytical ability, in a way, up to chance. Those students who understand the context of the prompt and text, because they have experienced it, would align with the ideal, and connect with a text in a similar way as the author and prompt writer intended, potentially leading to analysis that coincided with PDE's expectation. To remediate this concern, states should consider providing genre, content, and context of analytical items so teachers can provide students needed background to better align with the ideal reader. Providing content, context, and genre, however, may be irrelevant as no reader can actually know where they fall between the pole of actual and ideal (Iser, 1980), genres are social constructs (Brewer, 2019), and different value sharing groups will come to different interpretations of a text (Fish, 1976). As such, single and isolated timed responses to literature may never assess clear analytical understanding of the masses, as administrators of standardized tests try to achieve because people make meaning through interaction, culture, and experiences (Rosenblatt, 1978).

Single response to literature done in isolation removes interactions, ignores culture, and assumes common experiences as all students learned under iterations of the common core standards. In this present study I implemented three different analytical experiences, writing, discussions, and interviews, and students were able to explain their point of view, discuss their opinions with peers, and let their analytical understanding develop overtime. The more students worked with and discussed the text in this present study, the more detailed and in-depth their responses became. States might be able to assess analytical understanding in a more equitable and natural way if it were assessed through multiple modes of demonstrating understanding and not just writing.

Value Sharing Groups Creating Meaning

Fish (1976) discussed how people make meaning in interpretive communities. Within these communities, people often share similar values and can find in a text exactly what they are looking to find. In the PSSA released items I analyzed in the document analysis, one prompt asked students to connect the story to elements of myth. In order to do this, a student would have to know the elements of myths. Further, they would need to come from a community that valued mythology enough to include mythology in the school curriculum, otherwise, a student might not know any elements of myths at all. Because genres are social constructs (Brewer, 2019), people within a community would also have to agree on the common elements of myths. When PDE asked students to discuss elements of myths, it seemed that PDE assumed students belonged to a certain interpretive community as they all attend Pennsylvania schools who design curriculum based on the Pennsylvania core standards. Yet, Fish (1976) explained that it is impossible to know who exactly does and does not fit within an interpretive community, so asking a question requiring students to draw on perceivably shared background knowledge could lead to ambiguity

in analytical understanding. In order to answer the prompt discussing how a text relates to aspects of myth, an interpretive community would need to agree on what constituted aspects of myths. Without clearly outlining the aspects of myths, students are left to analyze from a position of their own interpretive communities.

Student analysis through interpretive communities was also evident during the discussions in the case study. A single language arts class would arguably fall within the definition of a value sharing community, so students likely viewed similar parts of the text as important. For example, these students who all attended the same school and received instruction throughout middle school under the Pennsylvania core standards, viewed analysis as an understanding of the plot and characters. When the students came together to discuss the texts during the case study, some did not agree on the motives or actions of the characters, but through discussion, came to similar conclusions. The students then could all begin to see the text through the lens of the parent child relationship. PDE asked the students to respond to how nature played a role in the myth, but this interpretive community did not find nature's role valuable, as the students never explicitly discussed nature's role. This difference in analysis of the myth between PDE and students in the case could highlight how two different interpretive communities viewed a text with different interpretations.

Transacting with the Text

Rosenblatt (1978) posited readers transact with text through their experiences and emotions. During the case study, students drew on events from their life such as cooking, working in the yard with their dad, wanting time for themselves, and exploring why, at times, they did not listen to their parents. Through these experiences, students were able to connect with Icarus. They saw Daedalus as a typical parent and Icarus as a typical child even though the

characters in the text were in an extreme situation. When students focused on the text itself, they were not able to articulate a deep meaning from the text, and did not see themselves in the text at all. However, when they recognized that Icarus was not listening to his father, they connected to Icarus, even though they had never been imprisoned or constructed their own wings to fly.

Students in the study were connected emotionally with the text when they related the text to their own lives and saw how the text and their lives aligned. They approached the text through interpreting the role of a parent, and the way children behave. This analysis came over time and through multiple transactions with the texts. Some students even alluded to the idea that there was more to the text if they thought about it in a different way.

PDE did not seem to advocate for transactional responses in the PSSA released items as the prompts were mostly text based and did not ask the students to respond to their own life. As evident in both the document analysis and case study, students can make text-based efferent responses. When students were allowed to connect to the text personally, they could make aesthetic responses leading to deep and meaningful analysis. Students' understanding of the mythology genre also appeared to play a role in their analysis.

Genre as Social Construct

A reader's understanding of a genre's construct changes how a reader interprets a text (Brewer, 2019). The students in the case study were taught in previous units that myths often teach a lesson. As such, the students looked for a lesson in the myth. Their understanding of myths arguably had some influence on their interpretation. Students' understanding of a genre influencing analysis also occurred in the PSSA released items. A student responding to the 2022 prompt discussed multiple aspects of the science-fiction genre, then analyzed the story through a science-fiction lens. What constitutes science-fiction is determined by the socially constructed

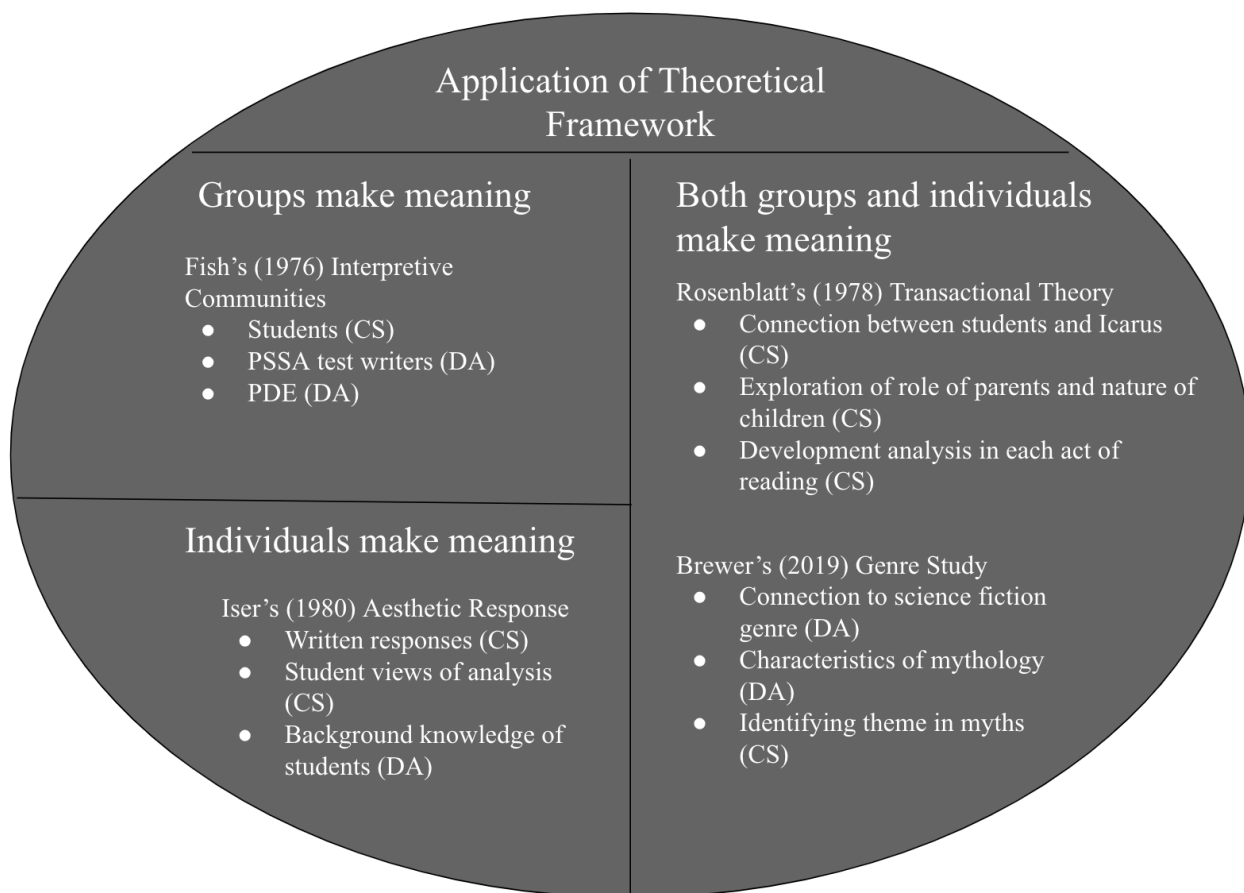
genre (Brewer, 2019). As the genre construct changes, texts can fall inside and outside genres.

When PDE said the 2015 text had aspects of myths, they connected the text to the mythology genre, and students used their socially constructed view of the genre to interpret the text.

Throughout the study, genre constructs appeared to help students with initial analytical entry points demonstrating some connection of the students' analytical approaches to reader response approaches.

Applying Reader Response to the Present Study

Instances of reader response theory transpired multiple times throughout the course of the study. Students fell somewhere between ideal and actual readers, groups worked together to construct meaning, student experiences influenced interpretation, and students used socially constructed genres to help analyze a text. Even in PDE's released items, I uncovered instances where student background and experiences influenced their responses, even though PDE did not appear to include reader response theories in standards or testing. Instead, PDE created the Pennsylvania core standards from CCSS, which many researchers claimed were reincarnations of new critical theories (Cunningham, 2019; Hinchman & Moore, 2013; North, 2013; Shanahan, 2015; Sulzer, 2014; Thomas, 2018). Rosenblatt (1978) designed reader responses directly against new criticism. Reader response theories emerging in students' responses raises the question as to why state governments implement iterations of the CCSS and assess analysis in single answer writing prompts and multiple-choice questions that arguably ignore student background and culture (Cunningham, 2019; Knoester & Au, 2017). In Figure 4, I diagram how the findings in this present study connected to my theoretical framework detailed in Chapter II (see Figure 4). In Figure 4 (CS) stands for case study, and (DA) stands for document analysis.

Figure 4*Application of Theoretical Framework*

Note: This figure provides a visual of the application of my theoretical framework to my findings.

In the top left section of Figure 4, I detail the interpretive communities within the study. In the bottom left section, I provided when students made individual meaning. In the right half, I provide areas where students transacted with the text, and applied their knowledge of socially constructed genres during analysis. Through an application of a reader response framework and constructivist worldview to interpret my data, I uncovered five areas in the results of this present study for reflection and future consideration.

Discussion of Results

In the following subsections I will summarize and discuss the results of this present study. I will detail the potential need to define literary terms within standards. Then, I will discuss how PDE approaching analysis through task adherence may align with future business needs. Next, I will discuss the student approach of analyzing literature through personal connections. I will then explain the issues teachers may have interpreting standardized TDA scores when PDE conflates writing and analysis, and I end with future classroom and assessment implications in response of my finding that student analysis developed over time.

Defining Literary Terms Within Standards

PDE did not provide definitions of any literary term within any of the released items I analyzed during the document analysis. What is more, PDE neglects to define any term utilized within their standards in any document developed for teacher use. The only instance of PDE defining literary terms I uncovered was in a study PDE and Center for Assessment conducted where they defined the term analysis (Thompson & Lyons, 2007, p. 4), but PDE chose not to include a definition of analysis in any other documents like the Pennsylvania core standards, or PSSA released items. A lack of definitions led me to complications in understanding what PDE viewed as analysis and how PDE applied literary terms.

During the document analysis I uncovered numerous instances in the document where PDE used literary terms such as implicit and explicit meaning and making inferences in inconsistent, contradictory, or ambiguous fashions. Standards which clearly define the meaning of words are important because cultural experiences and upbringing can change how people perceive the meaning of words (Aukerman & Schuldt, 2021). Pennsylvania has diverse cultural settings ranging from cities, to mountains, to farms. Within the state alone, students and teachers

grow up in different cultural contexts. If different cultural upbringing changes how people understand words (Aukerman & Schuldt, 2021), then teacher definitions of these literary terms could vary based on the cultural or geographical location a specific teacher is from.

In the released items, PDE did not provide a byline naming who wrote each scoring explanation, so it is plausible different scorers explained different student responses. Different scorers writing the scoring explanations could explain differences in use of each literary term within the document. Nevertheless, these inconsistencies in application of the literary terms happened in a small, controlled setting where PDE tried to explain how TDAs are scored, and then PDE published these documents. If PDE published documents that have inconsistencies in defining literary terms, it is highly possible there is inconsistency in teaching these terms from district to district, school to school, or classroom to classroom. How I define inference may not align with how my co-workers define inference; however, neither I nor my co-workers can look to the standards or released items, at this point in time, for clarification. PDE should release clear definitions of literary terms used within the standards and scoring rubrics. However, the students displaying their ability to make an inference may not be a priority for PDE, as task adherence seemed to hold extreme weight PDE's scoring explanations. PDE's focus on task adherence may be a focus on the needs of businesses over the needs of students.

Text-Based Approaches Focus on Business Needs

At the start of the case study writing prompt, students asked for clarification of what exactly I wanted them to write about and asked if I wanted them to write a TDA. When I asked students what analysis meant during the interview, they responded with concrete text features such as plot and characters. These two instances demonstrated the students' want for a concrete task. This aligned with PDE valuing task adherence over any other analytical measure. The

CCSS has potentially taught students in order to conduct analysis, someone must provide them a task. In consideration of why PDE focused heavily on task adherence, I saw a connection to the construction of the CCSS.

Endacott and Goering (2014) compared students to products created through our education system. Developers of the CCSS began the creation of the standards with career readiness outcomes and focused on the needs of corporate America rather than students (Carillo, 2019). PDE repeatedly demonstrated the importance of task adherence. Task adherence is arguably a priority in corporate America as companies want their workers to follow what is expected of them, and produce outcomes the company wants. Some claimed corporate outcomes are a priority in education (Dewitz & Graves, 2021; Hinchman & Moore, 2013). This line of thinking connects to Endacott and Goering's (2014) claim that the standards strive to produce people with business values at the cost of appreciation of art and beauty. The students in the case study did not mention either the myth or the poem as art and did not notice the beauty in the cadence and rhythm of the poem.

When students in this study began discussing ideas of freedom, undertones of the beauty in freedom arose in their analysis, but never once was beauty or art the forefront of their analytical approach. Instead, the students mostly discussed concrete examples from the text. The need for concrete task adherence arises with the purpose of states' administration of standardized tests.

States needed a positivist approach to assess reading outcomes in schools, and asking students to adhere to one task allowed for the standardization of testing. CCSS chose a positivist reading paradigm in close reading (arguably informed by new criticism) to allow for the quantification of reading ability (Sulzer, 2014; Thomas, 2018). While we have the ability to

quantify student reading ability, their ability has remained stagnant for over twenty years (Wexler, 2019).

Instead of assessing reading in a way that is task based for the purpose of quantification and accountability, education could shift to viewing reading on a spectrum of art and understanding while embracing multiple meanings stemming from culture and experience. Nevertheless, education maintains a practice in quantifying reading ability which has led to segregation in the school system, race data available on real estate sites, and issues in school funding (Humber, 2020; Schneider, 2018).

When students in this study focused on concrete task adherence, they produced shallow analysis; when they embraced connections to their lives and their worlds, their analysis took on new and deeper meaning. States should consider why testing needs to be standardized, and consider instead viewing analytical understanding in a way that connects with student experiences, background, and culture realized through students personal connections with the text.

Personal Connections During Analysis

While this present study did not overtly produce results reflecting students' culture, there were instances where students demonstrated analysis through their experiences and background. Daiute and Nelson (1997) found people make meaning of life through social scripts, and the scripts at first consisted of the idea of "me" and "not me." Students in the case study demonstrated this process in making meaning when they, initially, did not see themselves in the text at all. They had never been to prison, and never had to escape, so how could they connect to this? Their basis for analysis started at the "not me" script. Then, as they started applying instances where the "me" script applied, they started recognizing similarities between themselves

and the text. They discussed how their parents tell them what to do in order to keep them safe, and they, oftentimes, do not listen. Many students connected with instances from their lives, such as working in the yard, cooking, and chores, where they sought to do things their way instead of the way parents asked. When the students considered how these instances aligned with the text, many pointed to a child's want for independence as the rationale behind their defiant actions.

This form of analysis demonstrates students interpreting a text through a reader response framework. Each time the students encountered the text through the written response, small group discussions, and interview, their analysis took on new meaning or added a layer of complexity. At first, students approached the text in a way they were taught, looking for concrete ideas and text references. Many applied their knowledge within the genre of mythology that myths have themes, so they looked to find the theme. Rosenblatt (1978) stated readers have both efferent and aesthetic responses to texts. During the writing, the students analyzed the text in an efferent manner, and I connect their initial approach to both their education under the CCSS and their knowledge and expectations of myths. When they came together to discuss in an interpretive community, some of their views shifted towards their group members as members in a value sharing group are able to come to common conclusions about texts (Fish, 1976). Some instances students were even swayed to agree with classmates, even though the claim the student made seemed incorrect. In other instances, students debated views of characters until the group settled on an agreed upon outcome. During the latter parts of the discussion and in the interview, students analyzed the text through experiences, and made powerful claims about freedom and the roles of parents and the nature of children. Overall, their analysis developed the more they connected with the text; however, standardized testing has students respond to literature in one sitting.

Analysis Develops Over Time

When the students sit to take standardized tests, they do not have the ability to allow their analysis to develop. During the PSSA, the students must finish each section of the text in one sitting, and they are told they may not discuss any part of the test with classmates or teachers. The very nature of what made students' analysis develop during the case study, is banned during the test. Some students may not be able to achieve the level of analysis needed to earn a 4 on the TDA in only one sitting because their analytical process develops over time. Taylor (2011) agreed that analysis does not happen in one instance, but testing forces students to sit and produce an analytical response.

In the released items, PDE provided students one attempt to make meaning of a text through a single session writing prompt. Students in the case study did not make strong analytical claims during the writing portion of the study. This could be a result of the length at which the students in the case study had to respond (a single 45 minute period) compared to the untimed PSSA, but the students' analysis changed and developed as time went on, and as they interacted with others. Taylor (2011) stated meaning is made over time, and embracing Rosenblatt's (1978) reader response theory can help students reach new analysis in reading when students first examine a text through their background knowledge and experiences, then have their interpretation challenged by peers and classmates through interaction. This idea manifested during the case study where students brought conflicting views to their group discussion and they debated. It also arose when students at first did not connect with the text, but through discussion, saw how they connected with Icarus.

McGinley et al. (2017) claimed teachers could teach students to use lenses to analyze literature in an attempt to make outward facing citizens. Outward facing citizens seek to

understand and engage in the lives of others to gain compassion and empathy (McGinley et al., 2017). The students in the case study explored the relationships between children and parents, and rationalized why it might be that children choose not to listen. Through that analysis, the students recognized that while it may seem parents are giving children a hard time, they love their children and want to protect them showing the participants empathy towards the actions of parents. This exploration of human nature coincides with what McKinley et al. (2017) viewed as outward facing citizens.

Through personal connections, students in this study were able to look at a text through different perspectives to draw different conclusions. Students responding to the PSSA released items analyzed the text through the role of nature, while students in the case study analyzed the text through a want of freedom and through the relationship dynamics between children and parents. The meaning students made during the case study developed over time and led to profound thoughts about the world. This type of discussion could allow the classroom to be a space to learn about others as Park (2012) posited. However, PDEs positivist approaches to assessing reading analysis seemingly prevents the students the ability to have time to develop their analysis. This issue is further exacerbated when the PDE pairs an assessment of analysis and writing quality in the same rubric without separation.

Conflation of Analysis and Writing Quality

In an article PDE published on the PDE webpage, Thompson and Lyons (2017) detailed a study conducted during the inception of the PSSA under the CCSS standards:

During the 2011-12 school year, a proof of concept study was developed to determine whether responding to a text dependent analysis (TDA) prompt draws solely on reading

comprehension and writing skills, or if it is a new construct that combines those two skills with a third analytic skill. (p. 4)

This excerpt from an article Center for Assessments published in tandem with PDE confirms the TDA assess both analysis and writing. I could not locate the original study as Thompson and Lyons (2017) did not name who conducted the study or include a reference page (Although I can infer from Thompson and Lyons (2017) that it was Center for Assessment or PDE). However, Thompson and Lyons (2017) did include a brief summary of the study:

Three rubrics were developed: one for reading comprehension, one for essay writing ability, and one for analysis. The teachers were divided into three groups and assigned one of the three rubrics to use for scoring student responses. Each group scored student work based on the descriptors found in the rubric assigned to them. The scores were then analyzed to determine if there was a relationship between these three skills. The results showed a strong relationship between analysis and reading comprehension scores, but only a moderate relationship between analysis and writing scores. At the time, however, it could not be determined whether these results were an artifact of the scoring rubrics developed to support the study or something unique to the TDA construct. (pp. 4-5)

During the proof of concept study, the unknown researchers utilized three separate rubrics to assess student writing for comprehension, analysis, and writing quality. The researchers found a strong relationship between comprehension and analysis and a moderate relationship between reading and writing. The researchers could not determine whether or not the relationships between writing, comprehension, and analysis were a result of the rubrics or the TDA construct. Thompson and Lyons (2017) did not detail a follow-up study to identify which variable caused the results, and I could not locate a follow up study due to Thompson and Lyons (2017) lack of

citations. The findings Thompson and Lyons (2017) discussed are problematic when applied to my data for two reasons: (a) the scorers using the rubrics could be viewing comprehension as analysis, and (b) the rubric holistically combines writing and analysis.

First, the study Thompson and Lyons (2017) referenced found a strong relationship between comprehension and analysis. The students in my study first viewed analysis through comprehension of the text citing plot and characters, and were seemingly not actually conducting analysis at the early stages of the study, but were able to conduct analysis as they worked with the text overtime. My finding would align with Thompson and Lyons (2017) as students in my study, for the most part, were able to comprehend the text and analyze the text. I attribute this connection between comprehension and analysis to Shanahan's (2014) claims that reading tests do not actually assess reading ability but background knowledge. If reading analysis is a higher-level skill than comprehension (Matsumura et al., 2015), then it stands to reason some students could comprehend but not analyze. With the strong relationship between comprehension and analysis, the assessment of analysis runs the risk of being only an assessment of comprehension. PDE demonstrated this idea when PDE referenced students stating explicit plot events as strong analysis in the scoring explanations. The claim that standardized reading tests are actually testing background knowledge (Shanahan, 2014) is demonstrated through PDE recognizing deep understanding of the science fiction genre as analysis and knowledge of elements of Greek myths as analysis. In sum, a strong connection between comprehension and analysis could indicate the TDA is not assessing analysis at all, but background knowledge and comprehension.

The second problem arising from Thompson and Lyons' (2017) claims is that the TDA proof of concept study found writing to have a moderate relationship to analysis and comprehension. However, all three variables are assessed simultaneously on the TDA rubric.

Thompson and Lyons (2017) did not provide any more information as to how the single rubric assessing the three areas simultaneously came to fruition, but, as recent as 2022, Center for Assessment and PDE stated:

There are multiple dimensions to a performance on a TDA prompt—which encompasses Reading Comprehension, Essay Writing, and Analysis — and therefore a single student will often be at different levels within the same response depending upon the underlying component and criteria being examined. For example, a student may demonstrate that they are at the meeting level for both criteria under Reading Comprehension, but at the beginning or emerging level for the criteria under Analysis, and at the developing or meeting level for the criteria under Essay Writing. Getting at this fine-grained analysis of student work will allow teachers to differentiate instruction and create flexible small group instruction that meets the specific needs of students. (Center for Assessment & Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2022, p. 3)

In this excerpt, Center for Assessment and PDE detail the reality of a student scoring at different levels in reading comprehension, analysis, and essay writing, and posits that teachers need an understanding of a student’s level in each area in order to differentiate for students. Yet, PDE does not provide this “fine-grained analysis of student work” to teachers or districts when scoring the PSSA. Instead, “the TDA response is scored using a holistic scoring guideline on a 1–4-point scale” (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2022, p. 2). PDE is not providing the level of analysis of students work they claim teachers need.

Tomas et al. (2019) detailed two types of rubrics, holistic and analytical. The current holistic rubric PDE provided in the PSSA released items I examined in the document analysis clearly conflated writing and analysis, and PDE made multiple claims in scoring explanations

where they linked analysis to writing quality. By providing student scores based on this holistic rubric, PDE gives teachers data that is hard to interpret. Teachers cannot possibly know if their students are struggling in writing, analysis, or comprehension based on their TDA score, and PDE stated teachers need “fine-grained analysis of student work” (Center for Assessment & PDE, 2022 p. 3). PDE could go to an analytical rubric separately assessing comprehension, analysis, and writing when scoring the PSSA TDA to provide teachers with a detailed score for each of their students. Center for Assessment and PDE even provide an analytical rubric separating comprehension, analysis, and writing in their “Text Dependent Analysis Learning Progressions” (2022) article. Tomas et al., (2019) posited rubrics itemizing different mechanisms within student writing (such as comprehension, analysis, and writing quality) are analytical rubrics instead of holistic rubrics. Analytical rubrics provide stronger feedback and higher inter-rater reliability, but holistic rubrics are cost effective (Tomas et al., 2019). PDE providing teachers a score based on the analytical rubric Center for Assessment and PDE designed (2022) could provide teachers clearer indications of student abilities in the areas of analysis, comprehension, and writing, but analytical scoring would most likely be time consuming and expensive, and testing companies are often for profit (Delevingne, 2015; Thomas, 2018). Instead, PDE provides teachers with an inferior scoring breakdown with their holistic scoring rubric. PDE could provide an analytical rubric for teachers to have a further understanding of their students’ reading abilities; however, student analysis in the case study developed over time, and I could not fully understand students’ analytical approach without the triangulation of data through writing, discussions, and interviews. In this present study, timed writing in one sitting did not show the extent of the students’ analytical abilities, but PDE assesses student analytical ability in a one-sitting writing prompt and uses that writing to help determine a student’s proficiency level.

Limitations of the Study

Throughout this study I experienced multiple limitations in methodology, analysis, and generalizability.

Limitations in Methodology

Researchers stated multiple interpretations can arise from texts when students from different cultural backgrounds read similar texts (Cunningham, 2019; Knoester & Au, 2019). Also, Cunningham (2019) claimed standardized reading assessment erases the epistemology of students outside of the mainstream capitalist American culture. This particular case did not possess vast amounts of cultural diversity, and took place at one school, in one classroom, during one period. Most of the students at this school demonstrate high reading achievement on standardized testing. A more diverse group of participants in culture, school district, and standardized reading ability could provide insights on how students from different cultures or interpretive communities might approach analysis in different ways than the students in this present study.

The absence of multiple schools, reading levels, or cultures stemmed from a single case design. A multi-case design would allow for a wider range of student cultures and abilities taught at various school districts across Pennsylvania. Also, implementing a multi-case design would allow researchers to compare student analytical approaches within and across cases to gain a broader view of the students' analytical approaches. Because I used a single case design, I could not compare one case to another; however, this limitation falls within Stake's (1995) view of a case study, as case studies help researchers learn about specific cases.

Another limitation of this study is that teachers at this site taught these particular students with a curriculum developed using the Pennsylvania core standards which PDE adapted from the

CCSS. Teachers implementing instruction in close reading could have influenced students to respond in the text-based fashion they illustrated. Researchers studying a case of students who participated in instruction outside of the CCSS, such as a school who approached reading instruction through reader response theory, could lead to different or more in-depth results.

Last, students responded to short passages over three days. Park (2012) or Pope and Round (2015) demonstrated longer analytical experiences that could lead to a more in-depth understanding of how students approach reading analysis. Using book-length readings, instead of small passages, would require students to fill more analytical gaps, provide more characters and situations with which readers could connect, and provide more time to observe students' analysis develop. In addition to these limitations in my methodology, there were also limitations in my analysis.

Limitations in Analysis

This present study had two limitations in analysis. First, I was the only coder making meaning of the data. Including multiple coders could bring forth other perspectives of the data and further confirm or refute my coding process and interpretations. As a single coder, I made all judgements about what constituted each code.

I also had a biased view of reading approaches as a result of my constructivist worldview and advocacy of reader response theory. Researchers with other worldviews could provide other perspectives in analyzing this data and illuminate other findings that either add to, confirm, or refute my own findings.

Limitations in Generalizability

Results in this study are not generalizable to other cases or other documents detailing the PSSAs. First, I did not perform a document analysis on the entirety of the released items, I

focused on the TDA sections as those areas provided scoring explanations of open-ended analysis. Further, the released items are samples of the actual PSSA. I cannot confirm if these questions were actually used widely across testing, or if PDE provided more content or context about the passages on the complete test. Performing a document analysis on a complete version of the PSSA could yield more in-depth results.

The results of the document analysis are also not generalizable to the analytical approach used to write the CCSS. While test makers created the PSSA to assess the Pennsylvania core standards, which PDE adapted from the CCSS, I did not perform a document analysis on the standards themselves (I analyzed the PSSA released items), so I cannot generalize the findings from this study directly to the Pennsylvania core standards. Therefore, future researchers should conduct a document analysis of the standards, and compare the findings to the present document analysis. Also, many claimed the CCSS are reincarnations of new criticism. My document analysis did not support this finding in regard to the PSSA.

The results of the case study are also not generalizable to other cases as I studied a small case within one class of one school. This case's standardized test results are higher than the Pennsylvania average, so this group is not a representation of the average standardized reading ability within a Pennsylvania school. This school also does not represent the average socioeconomic status or racial makeup of Pennsylvania. As a result of these limitations in both the document analysis and case study, researchers cannot generalize these results to other cases, standardized tests, or state standards.

Implications for Educational Practice

This study leads to future implications for educational practice. First, state education agencies like PDE should consider the structure of standardized testing and consider assessing

analysis over time. Students demonstrated an ability to make meaning over time, but current practices force students to respond in one sitting. Also, the prompts PDE asked students to respond to on the PSSA may not align with students' analytical approach as no student in this present case study discussed nature's role in the myth. PDE changing testing approaches to allow student analysis to develop over time might be time consuming and costly, but could provide a clearer picture of student analysis and further information as to why reading scores have been stagnant for two decades and beyond (Thomas, 2023; Wexler, 2019).

Second, rubrics scoring analytical ability through reading and writing must separate the two areas. PDE scoring analysis and writing simultaneously makes using the data from the PSSA difficult for teachers to use to inform instruction. When conducting the document analysis, I could not determine whether student responses were strong based on analysis or based on writing qualities, especially because strong and weak student responses made identical claims. Test writers separating writing and analysis into two separate rubrics or categories could help alleviate some of this confusion.

Last, states should consider the purpose of teaching reading. As it is now, reading instruction is monolithic (Di Leo, 2020) in order to assess reading in a positivist fashion with standardized tests (Sulzer, 2014; Thomas, 2018). However, embracing pluralistic readings of texts could allow students to learn about others and see literature as art. Through discussions of literature as an artform with multiple meanings, students can learn about themselves, their world, and others. Discussing the role nature plays in a myth, or how a story displays characteristics of myths is certainly quantifiable, but is it meaningful? When literature is treated as art, teachers and students can use literature in the classroom to expand experiences, connect differences, widen worldviews, and "...learn to learn" (Greene, 1987, p. 20). Students in the case study

demonstrated the ability to conduct transactional and pluralistic readings of texts, much like middle school students in previous studies (Del Nero, 2017; Park, 2012; Pennell, 2014; Spring, 2016).

Implications of Future Educational Research

This study also leads to multiple implications for future research. First, researchers should analyze standardized test scoring practices specifically in explanation frameworks. The scoring explanations in the PSSA released items were difficult to understand, used terms interchangeably, and provided examples in ways that made it unclear for me to determine what skill the student excerpt demonstrated. If state education agencies are going to provide educators examples of scoring guidelines, those examples should be clear and purposefully structured. Researchers could study scoring explanations to create a framework for the creation of scoring explanation sections.

Second, more research is needed in how student responses develop overtime. As it stands now, the PSSAs test students in single session analytical writing. Students may need more opportunities over time to develop responses (Taylor, 2011). Researchers can continue to study how students develop analytical responses in order to inform the creation of future educational standards and assessments.

Third, educators could benefit from further research in creating prompts that garner analysis. Matsumura et al. (2015) found TDA prompts often lead to students identifying parts of the text to summarize literature rather than analyze literature. If educators want students to analyze effectively, teachers, curriculum writers, and assessment writers should ensure the prompts will lead to analysis. Researchers can help determine the best ways for educators to construct prompts that lead students to analytical responses.

Finally, researchers can examine the impact of reader response instruction on student analytical ability. Multiple scholars claimed reader response instruction has positive and verifiable classroom results (Del Nero, 2017; Park, 2012; Pennell, 2014; Spring, 2016), but as a result of the new critically-designed standards, teachers are almost forced to avoid reader response approaches in the classroom. This idea could not be more evident than when school administrators put a stop to Del Nero's (2017) study because reader response frameworks do not align to the common core. Researchers should gain more understanding on how reader response frameworks in the classroom impact reading instruction as no reading instructional practice to date has garnered different results on standardized scores (Thomas, 2023).

Summary

Reading test scores in America have remained stagnant for over two decades (Wexler, 2019), and dropped as a result of the pandemic (Associated Press, 2022). In the literature review I outlined how new critical practices, business agendas, racial inequities, and meaning making processes all complicate the issue of assessing standardized reading. Under ESSA, states are mandated to report the school level results of state tests such as the PSSA, and this score reporting has exacerbated segregation in the school system, issues in school funding, and the availability of race data on real estate sites (Humber, 2020; Schneider, 2018). If states must report test data under ESSA, then it stands to reason this data should accurately depict student analytical ability.

To understand how standardized reading standards approach literary analysis, I conducted a QUAL-QUAL simultaneous study to compare eighth graders' reading analysis approach to the analysis PDE used on the PSSAs in application of the CCSS. In analyzing the data I collected during the study, I found the PDE valued task adherence, writing quality, and

text references as demonstration of analysis. Students in the case study first viewed analysis as text based, but transformed their analytical approach over time to use their background and experiences to explore the role of parents and the nature of children.

As it stands now, reading practices in education lead to monolithic outcomes due to the new critical nature of the CCSS. However, students in this case study craved freedom in life, so why should educators withhold their freedom to explore literature as a pluralistic artform. Alexa (a case study participant) showcased the depth and power of students' analytical ability when she spoke of Icarus's flight:

It's like he experienced the little bit of freedom. The wind flowing through him: the feeling of freedom that those few minutes, seconds, who knows how long, of freedom in the air. He felt free and even if he knew what would happen afterwards— even if he knew that he would die— he would go through all that just to feel that little bit of freedom again.

(Alexa, Interview)

It may be time to move on from the two decades of stagnation in reading and embrace literary instruction in schools as an artform to help our students "...learn to learn" (Greene, 1987, p. 20). Art is not something that can be reduced to positivist approaches; readers must transact with art (Rosenblatt, 1978). Give the students the freedom to explore, experience, debate, and respond to literature through aesthetic approaches, not answer to it.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Discussion of Standards

Note: In this appendix, all quoted content under the question and standards boxes is quoted directly from (Standards Aligned System, 2022). Standards Aligned system (2022) did not provide page numbers. The bottom row of each box is my interpretation and discussion of the standard.

Question (Standards Aligned System, 2022)	Standards (Standards Aligned System, 2022)
“How does one develop and refine vocabulary?”	“Analyze the influence of the words and phrases in a text including figurative, connotative, and technical meanings, and how they shape meaning and tone.”
<p>While many argue for systematic teaching of vocabulary (Allington, 2011), this standard seems to allude to readers being able to develop vocabulary through reading alone. The question asks how readers develop strategies, but the standard does not provide any insights to educators on how to teach students to develop vocabulary. The standard makes it seem like if the reader pays attention to the words and phrases in the text, they will develop vocabulary.</p>	

Question (Standards Aligned System, 2022)	Standards (Standards Aligned System, 2022)
“What strategies and resources do I use to figure out unknown vocabulary?”	<p>“Acquire and use accurately grade-appropriate general academic and domain-specific words and phrases; gather vocabulary knowledge when considering a word or phrase important to comprehension or expression.”</p> <p>“Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words and phrases based on grade-level reading and content, choosing flexibly from a range of strategies and tools.”</p>
<p>These standards also allude to students gaining vocabulary through paying attention to words and phrases in a text, but the standards also state students can use strategies to determine the meaning of words. The standard does not define the strategies students can use and does not take into account words having different meanings based on a person's culture, experiences, or worldview.</p>	

Question (Standards Aligned System, 2022)	Standards (Standards Aligned System, 2022)
<p>“How do readers know what to believe in what they read, hear, and view?”</p>	<p>“Determine an author’s point of view or purpose in a text and analyze how the author acknowledges and responds to conflicting evidence or viewpoints.”</p> <p>“Cite the textual evidence that most strongly supports an analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences, conclusions, and/or generalizations drawn from the text.”</p> <p>“Analyze how a text makes connections among and distinctions between individuals, ideas, or events.”</p> <p>“Determine a central idea of a text and analyze its development over the course of the text, including its relationship to supporting ideas; provide an objective summary of the text.”</p>
<p>Discussion of standards In this set of standards each alludes to referencing the text itself. These standards also discuss a need to analyze how the text develops over time and makes connections within itself. These standards connect to Di Leo’s (2020) definition of viewing the text as a unified whole, none mention the need for context, but one standard does mention drawing inferences and conclusions; however, readers should draw the inferences and conclusions from the text. These standards stray slightly from Di Leo’s (2020) definition because they reference the author providing information to the reader; however, the standard focuses heavily on the text itself.</p> <p>None of these standards, although associated with the reader knowing what to believe, mention the reader’s worldview, experiences, or personal connections to the text helping confirm or challenge beliefs.</p>	

Question (Standards Aligned System, 2022)	Standards (Standards Aligned System, 2022)
<p>“How do strategic readers create meaning from informational and literary text?”</p>	<p>“Analyze the structure of the text through evaluation of the author’s use of specific sentences and paragraphs to develop and refine a concept.”</p> <p>“Evaluate the author’s arguments, reasoning, and specific claims for the soundness of the arguments and the relevance of the evidence.”</p> <p>“Cite the textual evidence that most strongly supports an analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences, conclusions, and/or generalizations drawn from the text.”</p>
<p>These standards also allude to readers using the text itself to create meaning. Each of these standards has heavy language in referencing the reader's need to use the text to create meaning through structure, arguments, and what the text says. Again, inferences are referenced, but the reader must draw them from the text.</p> <p>In the standards describing how readers create meaning, none reference the reader using their own experiences in tandem with the text to create meaning.</p>	

Question (Standards Aligned System, 2022)	Standards (Standards Aligned System, 2022)
<p>“How does interaction with text provoke thinking and response?”</p>	<p>“Evaluate author’s arguments, reasoning, and specific claims for the soundness of the arguments and the relevance of the evidence.”</p> <p>“Evaluate the advantages and disadvantages of using different mediums (e.g. print or digital text, video, multimedia) present a particular topic or idea.”</p> <p>“Analyze two or more texts that provide conflicting information on the same topic and identify where the texts disagree on matters of fact or interpretation.”</p>
<p>These standards start to discuss the possibility of texts being dualistic rather than monolithic with an acknowledgement that form helps create meaning. These standards also seem to view the text as a unified whole. A new addition arises in these standards with connecting two texts, but the standards seem to refer to comparing what is explicitly in each text and not where the reader’s world views connect to the text.</p> <p>This question seems like a place for the standards to incorporate the readers’ world views and experiences regarding the text. The question asks the reader to think and respond, but the standards do not mention the reader as a meaning-making entity even when the reader is constructing a response.</p>	

Appendix C

Small-Group Discussions

Directions: As a group, discuss the following prompts. Make sure you are allowing each group member to speak, and answer the questions in detail. Stay on topic; all discussion should be related to the myth and the poem.

1. Each group member individually read your response from yesterday out loud. While your classmates are reading, think about how your classmates' responses were similar to yours, and how they were different than yours.
2. As a group, discuss the similarities and differences in your responses. Out loud, try to identify at least 3 things similar in your responses, and three things different.
3. Discuss if the myth and poem remind you of any events from your own life or other texts you have read. What are they, and why were you reminded of them?
4. Each group member identify one important quote from the myth or the poem. Share the quote with the group, and, as a group discuss why you think it is meaningful.
5. As a group, discuss what you think is the most meaningful takeaway from the myth and the poem. Why is this takeaway meaningful?

Appendix D

Interview Protocol

1. What is your definition of reading analysis?
2. What are some reasons you would want to analyze a text?
3. When you are reading knowing you'll be asked to analyze a text, what are some things you do while you are reading?
4. What did the myth and the poem make you think about?
5. In your written response/group discussion you said, (participant text here). Can you explain that to me in more detail?
6. In your written response/group discussion you said (participant text here). Why did you find that meaningful?
7. What are some ways you connect the myth and the poem to your own life?
8. What do you think is important for readers to notice about the myth and poem? Why?
9. Is there anything else you were thinking about while reading, writing, or discussing the myth and the poem?

*Questions 5 and 6 may be asked multiple times with different text segments.

Follow-up Interview Protocol

1. In our first interview together you said (participant text here), can you explain this further?
2. In the writing prompt you wrote (participant text here), can you explain this further?
3. In the small group discussion you shared (participant text here), can you explain this further?

*Appendix E**Document Analysis Deductive Code List*

Code	Description
Text Evidence	When a response uses direct information from the text to support a claim
Aesthetic Response	When a response references opinions or emotions evoked
Efferent Response	When a response references ideas, meanings, or facts taken from the text
Analytical Understanding	When a response interprets a text to create meaning
Explicit meaning	When a response iterates something directly stated in the text
Implicit meaning	When a response iterates something implied by the text
Literary devices	When a response references the use of literary devices like metaphor or personification
Text structure	When a response references the structure of a text
The text itself	When a response creates meaning within the text itself
Transaction	When the reader creates meaning through both the text and themselves
Background knowledge	When a response makes meaning using background knowledge not found in the text
Culture	When a response references a cultural view
Experiences	When a response references past experiences of the reader
Addresses task	When a response addresses a specific part of a prompt
Supporting ideas	When a response recognizes parts of a text

	that support ideas within the text
Making inferences	When a reader makes an inference within a response.

Appendix F

Inductive Case Study Code List

Code	Description
Parenting <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Parenting in text ● Parenting in life 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● When a student discusses responsibilities of the parent in the text ● When a student discusses a parent's responsibility in real life
Nature of children	When a student discusses how children act or what they want
Characters <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Character thoughts ● Character feelings ● Character actions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● When a student discusses the thoughts of a character ● When a student discusses the feelings of a character ● When a student discusses the actions of a character
Freedom <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Liberty ● Child independence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● When a student discusses the idea of freedom ● When a student discusses a child's want for independence
Point of view <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Character point of view ● Reader point of view 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● When a student discusses a character's perspective ● When a student discusses the reader's perspective
Transactions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Connections to life ● Connections to texts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● When a student makes a connection to real life ● When a student makes a reference to another literary text
Theme	When a student discusses the lesson
Writer's purpose	When a student discusses why the author wrote the text
Text evidence	When a student intentionally references the text to support a claim
Text structure	When a student discusses the structure of the text

Imagery	When a student discusses what they saw in their head
Emotions of the reader	When a student discusses how the reader felt
Literal interpretations	When a student takes something at literal value
Dissociation to text	When a student discusses how they cannot relate to the text
Summary	When the student provides a summary of the text

Appendix G

Parent/Guardian Consent Form

Project Title: New Criticism or Reader Response: A Simultaneous Design Qualitative Study Exploring the Common Core Literary Standards

Investigator(s): John Phillips; Heather Schugar

Project Overview:

Participation in this research project is voluntary and is being done by John Phillips as part of his Doctoral Dissertation to explore how eighth-graders approach literary analysis and compare their approach to the literary analysis approach of the PSSAs and common core standards. Your child's participation will take about about 120 minutes over three days During that time your child will read a myth and poem from the PSSA released items, answer an open-ended writing prompt, participate in recorded small group discussions, and possibly be selected to complete a one-on-one interview discussing their analytical approach. Risks for this study are minimal but include possible loss of confidentiality, loss of academic time, loss of free time, discomfort with the content of questions, discomfort with the content of reading passages, discomfort with responses of other participants, mild anxiousness when answering questions, and mild embarrassment from perceived incorrect answers. Participants in this study may benefit from an opportunity to practice reading and writing skills in a low-stakes environment without the pressure of grades, allowing me to gain insight into their thinking during the analytical process to help inform future instruction and lesson plans, and is an opportunity to discuss reading with peers. This research benefits society as this exploration can help inform future reading paradigms and instruction built around students' thought processes.

The research project is being done by John Phillips as part of his Doctoral Dissertation to explore how eighth-graders approach literary analysis and compare their approach to the literary analysis approach of the PSSAs and common core standards. If you would like to take part, West Chester University requires that you agree and sign this consent form.

You may ask John Phillips any questions to help you understand this study. If you don't want to be a part of this study, it won't affect your child's language arts grade or in-class experience at XX. If you choose to be a part of this study, you have the right to change your mind and stop being a part of the study at any time.

1. What is the purpose of this study?

- To explore how eighth-graders approach literary analysis and compare their approach to the literary analysis approach of the PSSAs and common core standards.

2. If you decide to be a part of this study, your child will be asked to do the following:

- Read a myth and poem
- Answer an open-ended writing prompt
- Participate in recorded small group discussions
- Complete a one-on-one interview

- This study will take about 120 minutes of your child's time occurring during the regular school day.
3. **Are there any experimental medical treatments?**
- No
4. **Is there any risk to my child?**
- Possible risks or sources of discomfort include: possible loss of confidentiality, loss of privacy, loss of academic time, loss of free time, discomfort with content of questions, discomfort with content of reading passages, discomfort with responses of other participants, mild anxiousness when answering questions, and mild embarrassment from perceived incorrect answers
 - If you become upset and wish to speak with someone, you may speak with John Phillips
 - If your child experiences discomfort, you have the right to withdraw at any time.
5. **Is there any benefit to my child?**
- Benefits to your child may include: the opportunity to practice reading and writing skills in a low-stakes environment without the pressure of grades, allowing me to gain insight into their thinking during the analysis process to help inform future instruction and lesson plans, and an opportunity to discuss reading with peers.
 - Other benefits may include: Helping inform future reading paradigms and reading curriculums built around students.
6. **How will you protect my child's privacy?**
- The session will be recorded.
 - An audio recorder will be placed in the middle of the table during the small group discussion and the one-on-one interviews.
 - Your records will be private. Only John Phillips, Heather Schuger, and the IRB will have access to your name and responses.
 - Your name will **not** be used in any reports.
 - Records will be stored on a:
 - Password Protected laptop
 - All collected writing samples will be stored in a locked file cabinet in XX
Written responses will also be scanned and kept on a password-protected laptop. All participant identifying information such as names and locations will be changed to codes like "student 1" and "group 1"
 - Records will be destroyed three years after study completion
7. **Do I get paid to take part in this study?**
- No
8. **Who do I contact in case of research-related injury?**
- For any questions with this study, contact:
 - **Primary Investigator:** XX
 - **Faculty Sponsor:** XX
9. **What will you do with my Identifiable Information?**
- You or your child's information will not be used or distributed for future research studies.

For any questions about your rights in this research study, contact the ORSP at 610-436-3557.

I, _____ (your name), have read this form and I understand the statements in this form. I know that if I am uncomfortable with this study, I can stop at any time. I know that it is not possible to know all possible risks in a study, and I think that reasonable safety measures have been taken to decrease any risk.

_____ Subject/Participant Signature Date: _____

Appendix H*Child/Minor Assent Form*

I, _____, understand that my parents or guardians have said it's okay for me to take part in a project about the literature analysis approach of eighth-graders under the direction of Mr. Phillips. I am taking part because I want to. I have been told that I can stop at any time I want to and nothing will happen to me if I want to stop.

_____ Subject/Participant Signature

Date: _____

Appendix I

Recruitment Email

Hello Parents and Guardians,

I am John Phillips, XXXXX. I am currently working on my doctoral dissertation at West Chester University, and you are receiving this email because I would like to obtain your consent for your child to participate in a research study exploring how eighth-grade students approach literary analysis and how that approach compares to the reading expectations of the PSSAs.

All the data collected in this study will occur during the typical school day, and your child will not have to miss any class time to participate. The study centers around learning activities such as reading, writing, and group discussions that regularly take place in our classroom. This protocol has been approved by the West Chester University Institutional Review Board, IRB-FY2022-376.

If you choose to allow your child to participate, you are giving me permission to use one writing sample from your child for data analysis, audio record your child's participation in one small group discussion about a text, and possibly participate in one to two one-on-one audio-recorded interviews with me.

Participation in this study is completely voluntary, and you can withdraw your child at any time. Your child will be bringing home two copies of an informed consent form providing further detail about the study and you and your child's rights. Please keep one for your records and have your child return one to me in the provided envelope by the end of the week.

If you have questions, an optional informational Zoom meeting will occur on 10/13/2022 at 6:00 pm. Please click this link to join:

XX

If you cannot attend the zoom meeting but have questions, please do not hesitate to ask. My email is XX

Thank you!

Sincerely,
John Phillips

Appendix J

Student Explanation Script

I will explain the study to the students using the following script:

Hello students,

I am working on getting my doctorate at West Chester University. As part of the program, I get to carry out a research study. I have decided to study how eighth-grade students make meaning from the stories they read. To be a participant, some things have to happen.

Today, I will send home an envelope with you for your parents or guardians. Your parents and guardians have already received an email about this envelope. It explains the study and has two forms, one for them to keep and one for them to sign and return, letting me know if they give you permission to participate. If they give you permission, you will then fill out something called an assent form saying that you want to participate.

The most important thing to remember when deciding whether to participate or not is that participation in this study is completely voluntary. It will not have any impact on your grade whatsoever. Also, if you agree to participate and decide you no longer want to participate, you can stop anytime. Does everyone understand this? (Allow for response)

Okay, since you all understand the study is voluntary and will not impact your grade, let me tell you what I plan to do for the study.

First, everyone in the class will read a myth and a poem and respond to the myth and poem in writing. Everyone in the class participates in this step, even if you are not participating in the study. Then, you will discuss the myth and the poem in small groups. All of you will participate in these activities whether you are part of the study or not, whichever choice you make.

If you are part of the study, I will use your writing the study for analysis; your small group discussion will be voice recorded so I can listen to what you and your group said over again. The only people who will hear your recording are me, my supervisor, Dr. Schugar, and possibly a member of something called the IRB, which is a group that makes sure all research is being done in a way that benefits the people involved and does not harm anyone.

Then, I will select 4 of you to participate in an interview with me about how you made meaning of the readings. The interview will happen during CE or lunch. I might also do one additional interview if there is anything that comes up I need to ask you more about or clarify. These interviews will be recorded, and the same people, me, Dr. Schugar, and a member of the IRB, will be the only ones who hear them.

Whatever I use in the study will have all your names or any other identifying information removed, so people reading the final report will not know who you are.

If you are not part of the study, you will be in a group with other students not part of the study, you will not be recorded, and none of your writing or responses will be used.

This is my first time doing a research study, but Dr. Schugar is a veteran researcher and will be helping me along the way.

So, overall, all of us will be reading, writing, and discussing in small groups. If you volunteer to be a part of the study, and your parents or guardians sign permission, you will be recorded in your small group, your writing will be used in the study, and you might partake in an interview. What questions do you have?

Appendix K

IRB Approval



Office of Research and Sponsored Programs | West Chester University | Ehinger Annex
West Chester, PA 19383 | 610-436-3557 | www.wcupa.edu

Aug 9, 2022 5:07:14 PM EDT

To: John Phillips
Literacy, University College

Re: Expedited Review - Initial - IRB-FY2022-376 New Criticism or Reader Response: A Simultaneous Design Qualitative Study Exploring the Literary Analysis approach of Eighth Graders

Dear John Phillips:

Thank you for your submitted application to the WCUPA Institutional Review Board. Since it was deemed expedited, it was required that two reviewers evaluated the submission. We have had the opportunity to review your application and have rendered the decision below for New Criticism or Reader Response: A Simultaneous Design Qualitative Study Exploring the Literary Analysis approach of Eighth Graders.

Decision: Approved

Selected Category: 6. Collection of data from voice, video, digital, or image recordings made for research purposes.

7. Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies.

Sincerely,
WCUPA Institutional Review Board
IORG#: IORG0004242
IRB#: IRB00005030
FWA#: FWA00014155

Appendix L

Document Analysis Code Application

Note: Table created using Dedoose.

Media	Codes		
	2022 PSSA	2021 PSSA	2015 PSSA
Totals	72	10	10
Addresses Task	27	35	10
Aesthetic Response	4	4	
Analytical Understanding	26	46	17
Explicit meaning	2	4	8
Implicit meaning	6	6	8
Background Knowledge	3	3	3
Culture		3	
Efferent Response	5		
Experiences			
Literary Devices	14	4	
Main Idea	19	15	13
Supporting idea			
Making Inferences	14	12	4
Text Evidence	24	24	8
The text itself	10	2	1
Text Structure			
Transaction		1	
Writing Quality	9	17	18
Totals	159	176	90

Appendix M

Case Study Code Application

Note: Table created using Dedoose.

Media	Codes																															
	Agreement	Characters	Character actions	Character feelings	Character thoughts	Disagreement	Dissociation to Text	Emotions of the Reader	Freedom	Child independence	Liberty	Grappling with Meaning	Human Nature	Imagery	Literal Interpretations	Nature	Nature of Children	Parenting	Parenting in life	Parenting in text	Point of View	Character point of view	Reader point of view	Summary	Text Evidence	Text Reference	Text Structure	Theme	Transactions	Connections to life	Connections to texts	Writer's Purpose
Written Responses		19	14	9	1			15	3																							
Interview: Sam		5	3	4	1				2	1	2	1		1			1	4	1	3	1	1		2				3	3			
Interview: Katie																																
Interview: Allen.docx		1			1																											
Interview: Alexa																																
Group 3: SA,KA,JO																																
Group 2: ALL,ALE,MAR		9	7		2	1			4		4		1		2		6	10	3	8								8	8			
Group 1: ETL,LMAT	13	9	6	5		2			1		1	3					2	3		3			1		4	1	1	2	1			
Totals	32	57	41	23	8	7	8	21	15	2	14	11	7	1	20	4	32	33	9	26	11	8	5	21	14	7	5	32	19	15	4	