The work of the Assessment Development Laboratory (ADL) at the University of Pittsburgh (Pennsylvania) in developing an assessment for identifying accomplished teachers of English language arts to young adolescents (aged 11 to 15 years) for the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) is reviewed. The assessment is meant to evaluate teachers' abilities to meet standards set by a committee of 12 professionals, most of whom are teachers with various areas of expertise, the Early Adolescence/English Language Arts (EA/ELA) committee. Problems encountered in the assessment development and standard setting are described, beginning with a discussion of how the generic propositions of accomplished teaching defined by the NBPTS influenced the attempt at standard setting. At least in part because of the generic nature of the developing standards, the ADL group ended up operationalizing standards in a way that differed little from the process that would have occurred if they had been given a set of general standards and the responsibility for operationalizing them. The ADL group, and not the standards committee, became responsible for selecting specific assessment tasks, identifying indicators of candidate knowledge, and identifying observable behaviors that would determine candidates' board certification. Two references are provided, and an appendix lists six EA/ELA dimensions of accomplished teaching. (SLD)
Defining Performance Standards and Developing an Assessment for Accomplished English Language Arts Teaching of Young Adolescents

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Introduction

At the Assessment Development Laboratory (ADL), we are developing an assessment for identifying accomplished teachers of English language arts to young adolescents (ages 11 to 15) for the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS). It is our charge to develop an assessment tailored to the teaching of a specific subject area at a specific level of student development. The assessment we develop is meant to evaluate teachers' abilities to meet standards set specifically for Early Adolescence/English Language Arts (EA/ELA) by a committee of twelve professionals, most of them EA/ELA teachers, who represent various aspects of expertise in the field.

We began our work with the assumption that, since the standards for EA/ELA were not yet drafted, we would be able to work collaboratively with the standards setting committee to develop the assessment exercises and a judging system. While they defined the standards, we hoped that the products we developed and the insights we gained might help them to refine those standards and that those newly refined standards would inform our development. The standards setting process would create a partnership that would allow the assessment to closely reflect a shared vision of the field. Although members of the ADL attended all of the EA/ELA Standards Committee meetings, the standards setting process that evolved over the past eighteen months resulted in an assessment development effort similar to what would have happened had we been handed a set of general standards and the responsibility for operationalizing them. In other words, as assessment developers, we, not the standards committee, were responsible for selecting the specific assessment tasks, identifying indicators of candidates' knowledge, and identifying the observable behaviors that would determine candidates' board certification.

To explain how we ended up with the responsibility for operationalizing standards instead of engaging in a collaborative effort, we would like to address the following questions:

How did working within the NBPTS propositional framework of accomplished teaching, as its presented in its document, Toward High and Rigorous Standards for the Teaching Profession affect the EA/ELA standards setting process and the standards?
How do standards set within the NBPTS framework affect the assessment development process and the assessment?

What do performance standards of teaching represent? What, in other words, do the actual standards set by the Early Adolescence English/Language Arts (EA/ELA) Standards Committee represent?

Developing The Standards

One of the most significant constraints on the standard setting work has to do with the way the five NBPTS propositions of accomplished teaching, as defined in Toward High and Rigorous Standards for the Teaching Profession (NBPTS, 1989) influenced the EA/ELA Standards Committee's conceptualization of standards. When the twelve members of the committee began to develop standards specific to the field of Early Adolescence/English Language Arts, they worked within the framework of the NBPTS five propositions which outline what Board certifiable teachers in all subject areas at all levels should know and be able to do. Those propositions are:

1: Teachers are committed to students and their learning.

2: Teachers know their subjects and how to teach those subjects to students.

3: Teachers are responsible for managing and monitoring student learning.

4: Teachers think systematically about their practice and learn from experience.

5: Teachers are members of learning communities.

As you can see, the propositions set-up a framework which segments and abstracts teaching into stages or steps in an imaginary linear process which begins with teachers considering students, knowing their content and how to help students understand that content, then actually performing in the classroom, and finally reflecting on that performance. Highly accomplished practice, however, plays-out, as the standards committee members were quick to point out, in an ebb-and-flow of specific, situated actions and a teacher's reasoning about those actions that is more akin to the creation of a woven tapestry, or a story, with many threads, than it is to stages or steps.
The task of writing standards began, then, for the committee with a tension between their trying to determine how general principles of EA/ELA teaching, as best as they could imagine them, fit into the five propositions and their desire to tell stories—what we will call their desire to create vignettes—of accomplished teaching from which they could draw standards. This tension continues to play itself out with this committee, although they have not yet been able to work from vignettes as they once determined that they would, because they took up an NBPTS charge of first determining how general principles of EA/ELA teaching could fit the board's five propositions.

Before going on to discuss the effects of this tension on the standards and exercise development, we want to raise again a set of questions here, questions that we consider to be very significant, questions that the standards committee did not have the occasion to ask and that we have continued to puzzle over. Why, we want to ask, should all disciplines create their standards in the shadow of five generic propositions of accomplished teaching, especially since it is possible that specific subjects organize themselves and their teaching in particular ways which may not serve as templates for other disciplines. And, as we posed the question earlier, what happens when a discipline, like EA/ELA, attempts to template standards to or from these propositions?

To begin to address these questions and to open a conversation that we think must go on about standards setting, we would now like to turn our attention to two brief examples of how the propositions influenced the committee's conceptualization of EA/ELA standards.

As the committee grappled with writing their EA/ELA standards within the board's propositional framework, the language of the propositions had a tremendous influence on the committee's work. The propositions segment and abstract teaching in very generic language, and they impose a frame which encourages the creation of standards of the same nature as the propositions. In some cases, the task of creating standards became one of translating generic statements of teaching into the language of English language arts. Sometimes the process resulted in standards that look as simple as the insertion of the name of the field into a generic statement. For instance, the statement, "They [teachers] act on the belief that all students can learn," which appears in Proposition #1, became EA/ELA Standard I-A,1 "Teachers are dedicated to the idea that all students can achieve success in English language arts." Although further delineations of the standards move to being slightly more specific, they also tend to still be quite general and not particular to EA/ELA teaching. For example, an element of Standard I-A

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1 All standards cited are from a 1992 draft version of the EA/ELA Standards document and are subject to change and revisions. They may not be quoted without the written approval of NBPTS.
which, attempting to further refine that standard, states that "Teachers help students overcome the societal and cultural barriers that inhibit equal access to the English language arts," seems to be a translation into ELA of the NBPTS statement that "As stewards of the interests of students, accomplished teachers are vigilant in ensuring that all pupils receive their fair share of attention, and that biases based on real or perceived ability differences, handicaps or disabilities, social or cultural background, language, race, religion or gender do not distort relationships between themselves and their students" (NBPTS, 1991, pg. 18). Definitions of standards, in other words, when they are "fit" to generic propositions tend to be very general like the propositions themselves, and, consequently, beg further definition. What exactly, for example, does a teacher do to "help students overcome the societal and cultural barriers that inhibit equal access to the English language arts"? What does that statement mean?

Proposition #2, to continue with another example of how the propositions influenced the standards, presented the committee with the particularly difficult problem of defining their sub-ject matter and how they teach it to students. The underlying assumption of this proposition is that within a discipline there exists a body of knowledge, or facts and skills, that teachers know and that teachers also have additional knowledge about how to convey that knowledge to students. The EA/ELA committee members could not separate out collections of facts or ideas that they felt they conveyed to their students, and instead, they created a process-oriented conceptualization of their subject—a conceptualization, that is, in which they envisioned accomplished EA/ELA teaching as the inseparable union of teaching students, for example, about writing by teaching them how to write. EA/ELA teachers, they thought, foster students' participation in the processes of reading, responding to literature, writing, and using oral language rather than give students specialized knowledge or information as proposition #2 appears to assume.

The result of the committee's struggle to conceptualize what EA/ELA teachers should know separate from what they know about how to teach is a mishmash of general principles of what teachers should know and directives for what they should do that attempts, unsuccessfully, we think, to represent the committee members' subject-specific thinking. Here's the most recent draft of a standard from proposition #2:

II-A Teachers know how oral and written language systems work, how to create a literate classroom culture, and how to help their students use language to fulfill personal goals and to participate effectively in society.
Teachers:

- develop an integrated approach to language arts instruction that enhances the learning of reading, writing, speaking, and listening;
- help students learn to use language in ways that are appropriate to different audiences and situations;
- understand how language varies in different social and cultural contexts;
- use language variation within the classroom community to examine and appreciate language use and diversity;
- guide their instruction through their knowledge of how social, linguistic, and cognitive development affects students who are learning English as a second language; and
- know the conventions of written language, how conventions contribute to the clarity of communication, and ways to teach these conventions.

A quick reading of this standard reveals its allegiance to the generic proposition and raises a number of questions that can, and should, be asked of standards like these. What, for example, does it mean to say that teachers know "how oral and written language systems work"? Is this a reference to a particular linguistic, psychological, or sociological theory or sets of theories? Certainly reasonable people for good reasons do not agree on how these systems work. And, on another matter, how do the elements of the main standard define it or make it more specific? What, in other words, are the observable behaviors by which one would know the assertions made in the italicized statement? These questions which are, of course, only a few of the ones we could ask of these standards, point to the tensions that exist when one begins setting standards by making generic assumptions about teaching and learning that cause standards to be conceived in the abstract space of general principles rather than in the contextualized space of stories or vignettes.

Standards from Vignettes: A Missed Opportunity

Throughout the development of the assessment, we have worked in tandem with the EA/ELA Standards Committee. We began our assessment development work at the same time the committee was convened. We attended their meetings and participated in their discussions. And because we needed a framework to guide our development of assessment exercises, we began to use what we learned from these meetings to experiment with how we might categorize the evolving standards to provide frames for collecting and analyzing evidence of candidates' performances. Although the document produced by the standards committee would serve as a public declaration of what the NBPTS would assess, we decided early on against
using the NBPTS propositions as the framework for our exercises and judging system, because the propositions, as we have already said, did not reflect the specialized aspects of EA/ELA teaching that we heard discussed at the standards committee meetings and because they overlapped too much with each other. But even given our deliberate decision, it was, as you'll see if you examine the EA/ELA Dimensions (see Appendix A) that guided our exercise and judging system development, virtually impossible for us to reconceptualize either the exercises or the judging, largely because the standards we were responsible for representing were, finally, created in the shadow of the NBPTS propositions.

But before the standards committee took up the NBPTS charge to develop its standards to "fit" the board's propositions, it embarked on a route that seemed to us to have the promise of grounding and situating standards in the particulars of EA/ELA teaching when committee members agreed that they wanted to first write stories or vignettes of accomplished teaching and to draw the standards of accomplished teaching from those stories. The committee in fact wrote a number of vignettes and actually began the process of deriving standards from those stories, but their plans changed midstream when it was clear that (1) the committee had embarked on a time-consuming process that would have taken, perhaps, longer than anticipated, and (2) the standards would in all probability not "fit" the board's propositions and, therefore, not be parallel to other standards being written by other standards committees. We think this change of agenda created an important missed opportunity, and even though it might still be possible for the committee to go back to the standards and pepper them with vignettes for illustrative reasons, the process of drawing principles from those vignettes has been lost unless the committee returns to it directly.

All through the early standards setting process, members of the committee exchanged vignettes, or narratives, about specific teaching events, both in their conversations surrounding the negotiation of standards and in written form. These stories provided us with the richest insight into the actual nature of the teaching valued by the committee. By listening to and reading these examples of what they considered to be instances of highly accomplished teaching, we were better able to infer, and in a number of instances actually coopt, the teaching tasks we might ask candidates to complete, the kinds of thinking that we might expect highly accomplished teachers to exhibit, and what we could learn about candidates, given the evidence provided by particular tasks. Based on our experiences, we began generating vignettes and asking other EA/ELA teachers for stories of particular teaching events, and we began to derive sample standards from the vignettes to present to the committee.

What follows here is an example of how we began with several teaching events that deal with EA/ELA teachers helping their students to
understand and learn standard written English. We start with two vignettes, the first describing one teacher's approach with an at-risk student and the second describing another's instruction for an entire class.

**Vignette One:** Tim was a seventh grade writer who typically in the first few weeks of school could produce only a few lines of text at a time, and those were virtually unreadable. In the fourth week of the term, Tim wrote a long story, but it lacked any end punctuation. He turned it in on time as a final draft. In an individual conference with him, the teacher discovered that he hadn't read his paper over after he had written his first draft. He seemed surprised that he was supposed to and disappointed that he had to work more on a story on which he had already expended a great deal of energy. The teacher told him that she had difficulty following what he had written because he had no periods and asked him to read it over, keeping in mind that when he paused in his mind he may need to put in a period. She had taught a mini-lesson on an editing technique in which students read papers backwards, from the last sentence to the first, with partners, as a strategy for isolating sentences for correction of end punctuation, but Tim wasn't ready to think of his text in this way. The teacher discovered through talking with him that he didn't understand how to break up his story this way. It had taken him a long time to write it, and it was difficult for him to break it apart.

When he resubmitted his paper, he had a few more periods, but the paper was still difficult to follow. Because the teacher knew that Tim had worked diligently on his paper, she accepted it and made a note to teach a different mini-lesson on working with a partner to find places where there may be problems which may be more suitable for Tim and others like him. In this second strategy, the student author reads his/her paper aloud to a partner and the partner listens and taps the author's arm and puts a check on the paper where he pauses. Then they check for punctuation where the checks are. She hopes that this strategy will be more aligned with Tim's abilities and help him to be more successful in using end punctuation in his next paper.

**Vignette Two:** The teacher has noticed that her seventh grade students use limited dialogue in their stories and when they do use it, it was usually not punctuated as such. From working with seventh graders in her school district in the past, she realizes that most of them focus more on plot when writing stories than on the details of human interaction associated with that plot. To encourage them to use dialogue, she designs a series of lessons about people talking which includes, among other things, observing and recording real dialogue and role playing. Then she has them read several published stories which utilize dialogue, asking them to be sensitive to the role that dialogue plays in the stories. Throughout the entire sequence, she has asked students to keep records of both real and imagined conversations in their journals, writing what each speaker says on a separate line. Students have published these dialogues as poems and received feedback from other students and the teacher about possible interpretations. Now she is asking her students to publish one of these dialogues within a story, and they have revised their dialogues to make them more story-like. Before they begin their final drafts, however, she has them reread one of the published stories that they read earlier, but this time, they are to read with a partner and to pay attention to how the dialogue is arranged on the page with its punctuation and to generate a list of patterns that they notice. The partnerships report to the whole class and the teacher asks students to think about why these conventions help people to understand dialogue. Students then use the lists they generated to edit their final drafts of their stories.

When we analyzed these vignettes, we could infer a set of principles that identify particular strategies, knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors as indicators of accomplished EA/ELA teaching. Both of these teachers, for
example, understand how young adolescent writers develop and how to help their students understand that conventions for written English are directly related to the meaning that a writer is trying to convey. They view writing as a social event that unfolds over time and with experience, and they capitalize on student interaction as a means for helping students to develop a sense of the role that conventions of written English play in various kinds of writing. Both teachers see that it is their responsibility to help students to set reasonable expectations for themselves, while providing information and support that enables students to be able to continually expand their knowledge of language conventions and their repertoire of editing strategies. Both teachers' goal is to help students develop more control over text conventions and expertise in identifying and correcting their own errors, not to generate perfectly edited text. They view deviations from standard written English as signs of development and opportunities for teaching. They realize that it is impossible for students to attend to everything at once in their writing and know how to help students focus on specific aspects of their writing at appropriate times in the writing process without isolating that aspect from the process of generating meaning.

Some of the standards that we generated from analyzing these two teaching events follow:

- Teachers help students learn the conventions of standard written English within the context of making meaning.

- Teachers recognize acceptable levels of deviation from written text conventions for adolescents and have a repertoire of individual and whole class strategies for helping students to identify and correct their own errors.

- Teachers communicate that text conventions, especially punctuation, have purpose and function in making meaning.

- Teachers know the conventions of standard written English and how their young adolescent students conceptualize them.

- Teachers discover why a student is making an error and, based on that knowledge, provide him/her with usable strategies for correction.

- Teachers unpack the editing process for students, providing them with doable editing tasks to perform on their own texts, within their ranges of cognitive ability and willingness to continue working on pieces of writing.

- Teachers know the patterns of usage of standard written English to expect in early adolescent writing.

- Teachers can distinguish between accidental error, the result of an oversight, and error caused by an insufficient knowledge base.

*These standards do not nest securely into the stages of teaching represented in the propositions, but instead cut across propositions #1, #2,*
and #3 and represent more the ebb-and-flow of situated teaching and
teachers' reflection on that teaching as they experiment with alternative
strategies for students and reconceive aspects of lessons, as Tim's teacher did.

If you compare this set of standards to the Standard II-A that we cited
above, you can see that working from vignettes might have allowed the
committee to develop standards that are particular and contextualized yet that
can work as general principles as well. It would have helped the committee
members to cluster standards in ways different from the NBPTS generic
framework, and it would have helped them help us imagine key exercises for
assessing groups of standards that seemed to cluster together, according to
their EA/ELA teacherly knowledge and practice--rather than according to the
predetermined generic framework.

Standards as General Principles and Beliefs

If we take the EA/ELA Standard II-A presented earlier as representative
of the standards in general, at first glance the standard, particularly the
statement in italics, appears to present an agreeable statement of what
accomplished teachers know and are able to do. If we step back and take
another perspective on standards, one that critically foregrounds the question
of what happens when they are deduced from general thinking (rather than
from specific teaching events) about accomplished teaching, and imagine
these standards as part-and-parcel of the process by which they were created,
then two critical issues emerge.

First, the standards seem to be value statements, beliefs, that is,
formulated by a particular group of teachers at a certain time in the history of
English teaching. From this viewpoint, the standards are statements of
beliefs about what teachers should know, be able to do, and value. As such,
they represent the consensus beliefs of the group of teachers responsible for
formulating them, and they are, therefore, ideologically situated. But, and
herein lies the second issue, these standards are not the situated beliefs of a
group of teachers; they are situated beliefs developed in light of a generic
framework for thinking about accomplished teaching in any subject. The
imposition of the framework has forced the creation of the standards into
a structure and language that is not the structure and language of the discipline
or of the teachers who created them, but is, rather, a generic set of
assumptions about teaching and learning that tries to account at once for all
disciplines.

The problem involving these two issues—that standards arrived at
deductively from general knowledge are essentially principles and beliefs and
that the EA/ELA standards in particular are principles and beliefs created to fit
a generic structure and language--has to do, then, with the fact that the
committee members who created the EA/ELA standards channeled their thinking in terms of the NBPTS generic propositions, and they did not publicly ask themselves if the propositions represented a framework appropriate to their discipline or if they might accomplish their task best by taking another route to thinking about EA/ELA standards as they did when they wanted to work from vignettes.

Putting these issues and the subsequent problem they make visible aside for a moment, we would like to return to an analysis of standards as general principles and sets of beliefs. One might make the case, it seems, that particular aspects of the standards can be grounded in research on English teaching, but that grounding would require a much more systematic, overt use of research to construct standards than the EA/ELA committee had time to undertake. It is more the case that the EA/ELA standards represent a consensus grounded in beliefs than conclusions drawn from research.

As consensus statements of beliefs, ideologically situated within a particular community of practitioners, it is quite likely, furthermore, that any standards deduced from general thinking about accomplished teaching rather than from specific teaching events will be generic statements. Standards, as general principles and sets of beliefs, to make one further point on this matter, become frozen as representatives of contextualized and evolving epistemological networks of beliefs, suppositions, and knowledge. Because standards framed this way are at best attempts at reaching consensus on sets of situated beliefs about teaching and teaching strategies within a discipline, they never represent all teachers or any one teacher's beliefs. They represent an imaginary community which has been brought into being by individuals attempting to reach consensus within a generic, abstract framework.

If, on the other hand, standards were represented by vignettes of accomplished teaching, and grounded in research as much as they could be, they would, in a real sense, defy generic statements and classifications, in part because they would always be organized, or clustered, within teacherly tasks rather than within abstract categories. They would represent EA/ELA accomplished teaching, then, through a series of contextualized narratives, from which principles and beliefs could be drawn—but drawn within the context of the vignette rather than within a predetermined generic framework designed for categorizing general principles and beliefs. The vignettes might have been developed, as our example earlier pointed out, to represent the primary areas of EA/ELA teaching—literature, language, composition, reading and writing—and the standards drawn from them would have had the advantage of (1) being grounded in visible contexts, and (2) being organized by the structures of English teaching rather than by the generic NBPTS framework.
Standards and Assessment Development

By not creating standards at what we would call a fine-grained level—as vignettes with principles drawn from vignettes and grounded when possible in research—at a level defined by such things as specific teaching strategies, particular definitions of knowledge (i.e., rather than by general definitions such as "know how oral and written language systems work"), and observable behaviors, standard writers leave the critical work of operationalizing standards for exercises and judging to the assessment developers. We, not the standards committee, designed the exercises to capture (1) teaching strategies, (2) particular manifestations of knowledge, and (3) observable classroom behaviors as we derived those strategies, indicators of knowledge, and observable behaviors from the general principles and sets of beliefs represented in the standards. We imagined the vignettes or examples of accomplished teaching, we attempted to ground the standards in research, and we think the standards committee should have been involved in the assessment effort to operationalize standards.

We designed the judging in the same way, from our interpretations of how the standards played-out in particular strategies, as knowledge indicators, and as observable teacherly behaviors. We would claim that we did the critical work of refining the standards, of transforming them from generalized principles to visible behaviors, because we, not the standards committee, operationalized the general principles and sets of beliefs. We did the critical work that defines the assessment, not the standards committee, and we can map our exercises and judging protocol back to the standards because the standards are statements of general principles and sets of beliefs, rather than statements of particular enactments of principles and beliefs. We designed the particular enactments, and although the enactments—the exercises—can be mapped back to the general principles stated in the standards, operationalizing the general principles and beliefs of the standards could have proceed in a number of directions, as we suggested with our discussion of the vignettes, quite different from the ones we took when we developed our exercises and judging system. And although the EA/ELA Standards Committee approved of our exercises and judging system, they did not get to see alternative exercises and judging system, as we did, when we operationalized the standards.

Conclusions

The issues that emerge from our work with the standards committee seem to us to be important ones concerning standards development. Perhaps we can best make them visible in the form of two sets of questions accompanied by our answers to them.
• Do individual disciplines and their teaching have sufficiently unique epistemologies to warrant the creation of standards within the concepts and practices of that discipline? Or, in other words, should standards be developed within the concepts, practices, and language of each individual discipline, as the creation of vignettes would have allowed, rather than in terms of a generic framework?

Clearly, we think that answer to this question lies in further experimentation with standards writing, but we also want to be clear that we do not think the generic approach works. We think that the EA/ELA Standards Committee would have created a very different, and more particular, set of standards if they worked from vignettes of accomplished teaching from which they could have drawn standards of accomplished EA/ELA teaching rather than from the NBPTS propositions.

• And, what happens to subject-specific standards for accomplished teaching when they are designed in the shadow of a generic framework for accomplished teaching in all subjects? Are the standards "true" to the discipline? the situated teachers who created them? the generic framework? some permutation of all of the above?

Although it is difficult to say exactly how much the propositions influenced the standards, especially since we don't yet have a set of finalized EA/ELA standards to compare to the propositions, it is clear that they had a substantial influence, and that the influence tended to lead the EA/ELA committee members to write standards that in all probability don't accurately represent the board's propositions, the discipline, or the teachers who wrote them.

We would expect, furthermore, that all of the subject-specific standards developed in the terms of the NBPTS five propositions will be quite similar and that they will give the illusion, because of the imposed generic framework, of verifying the existence of generic standards that hold true across all subject areas. It is likely, we would argue, that the similarities are more the result of the generic framework than of epistemological and pedagogical similarities across subject areas. Our predictions, particularly as they represent EA/ELA, are empirically testable, especially since other groups of professionals will be developing English/language arts standards for students and teachers in the near future. These standards, developed independent of the NBPTS propositions, should be compared for their content and constructs to the NBPTS standards.
References


Appendix A:
EA/ELA Dimensions of Accomplished Teaching

A. Teachers understand and respond to students' knowledge, beliefs, attitudes, and interests. (Knowledge of Students)

B. Teachers understand and respond to the nature of cultural diversity in literature, language, and society (including the classroom). (Cultural Diversity)

C. Teachers understand the diverse aspects of English language arts and the interrelationships among its various aspects. (Content Knowledge)

D. Teachers understand and use an integrated approach to the teaching of English language arts. (Integrated Pedagogy)

E. Teachers understand and use a coherent pedagogy in the teaching of English language arts. (Coherent Pedagogy)

F. Teachers understand and respond to professional concerns in English language arts. (Members of Learning Community)