

An Eight-Year Longitudinal Study of an English Language Arts Teacher's Developmental Path through Multiple Contexts

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This eight-year longitudinal case study follows one high school English teacher from her practicum and student teaching through three subsequent job sites, with one year off due to prohibitive job stress. To study the developmental path of Caitlin, the teacher, we rely on the metaphor of the twisting path, which comes from Vygotsky's attention to socially mediated concept development. This development is reliant on engagement with obstacles that promote growth and conceptual synthesis, with some obstacles becoming prohibitive and discouraging and with the path proceeding in a serpentine rather than straightforward way. Our principal data source is a series of biannual interviews conducted either in person or via video-conferencing platforms. We trace Caitlin's developmental path by attending to her encounters with competing perspectives, policies, and practices informing the English curriculum, especially as they were enforced by different stakeholders. These obstacles were at times internal to her own thinking (e.g., the tension between relational, student-centered instruction and the belief that students need guidance to reach their potential), at times local in terms of English department and schoolwide tensions (especially, contentious battles over canonical versus relational and contemporary teaching), and at times from distant sources in the form of community pressures and externally created policies affecting instruction (in particular, imposed standardized teaching and assessment in conflict with instruction predicated on relationships and teacher judgment). These conflicts were virtually nonexistent in the fourth school she taught in, an alternative school where test scores were far less important than establishing supportive relationships with students through which they experienced care and cultivation. This eight-year longitudinal case study contributes to research that investigates how school contexts affect teachers' persistence and attrition, with attention to which sorts of environments provided obstacles that benefitted Caitlin's development, and which were prohibitive.

In this study, we trace an early-career high school English teacher's experiences through a series of four school settings in the Southeastern US over a span totaling nine years. Between the third and fourth schools, the teacher, Caitlin (a pseudonym, as are all names of people and places) left teaching for a year in frustration before finding a school that matched her personality and her

value regarding care. We thus refer to this study as encompassing an eight-year span of teaching. We investigate a problem experienced by many beginning and experienced English teachers in the US and elsewhere: how a constructivist teacher who cultivates a relationship-oriented classroom—a disposition encouraged in her teacher education program—functions within settings where the administrators and their faculty allies enforce doctrines of standardization and canonicity, reward complicity, and punish dissent.

We use this case to theorize the notion of teacher development in relation to factors in the environment, relying on and extending Vygotsky's (1987) formulation. Vygotsky challenged the assumption held by many psychologists of his day that human development follows primarily from the aging process, which presumes that people tend to develop in much the same ways, regardless of their social situations. Vygotsky instead argued that people become who they are through their cultural experiences, suggesting that development in different contexts produces different ways of thinking. Vygotsky further used the idea offered by Hegel and adopted by Marx that social life is a dialectical process in which people continually must resolve contradictory ideologies and practices in order to reach a higher conceptual level. This perspective is relevant to the study of teachers' developmental pathways through the endlessly contradictory settings of schools. These environments are situated within broader warring ideologies and competing demands conducted well beyond the bounds of what teachers have the agency to influence.

Our goal is to provide a developmental account that might enable educators to consider the factors affecting one teacher's career path. We assume that she is similar enough to other graduates of progressive and constructivist teacher education programs to allow for limited generalizations to the broader teaching field, a profession now plagued by high levels of attrition (Gabryel, 2022). To detail Caitlin's development within conflicting environments, we ask the following questions:

- What sorts of tensions and conflicts in the teaching of English characterized each of the four school settings experienced by Caitlin over time?
- What consequences did differential power positionings have for Caitlin's job satisfaction and feelings of effectiveness as a teacher who is oriented to care and relationships as they teach literature, composition, and language and, implicitly, life skills?
- Which obstacles were prohibitive to her development of a relational teaching philosophy (valuing caring relationships with students), and which could be negotiated and resolved within her system of values as an English teacher?

Theorizing Teacher Development

Feiman-Nemser and Floden (1986) made the case that “At present there is no full-blown theory of teacher development” (p. 521). Historically, much longitudinal research on teacher development has relied on general stage theories, in the tradition of Piaget (1936) and exemplified by Gilles et al. (2001), Fuller (1969), and Ammon and Hutcheson (1989). However, stage theories of human development and of teacher development have been criticized (Wilson, 1999). As Watzke (2007) argues, a stage theory “deemphasizes its complicated and multi-dimensional nature” (p. 119) by oversimplifying developmental sequences and the overcoming of obstacles through which people mature. Stage theories of human development and teacher development also tend to individualize conceptual growth with insufficient attention to the environmental factors that provide specific challenges to teachers in different settings.

One important yet insufficiently investigated environmental factor in theorizing teacher development concerns the sorts of relationships with others that may strongly influence a teacher’s developmental trajectory. Power dynamics and social positioning also come into play, per Davies and Harré’s *positioning theory* (Davies & Harré, 1990). McLean and Price (2019) reference Remmik et al. (2011) to view professional identity development as a form of argument “where identity positioning involves making claims about holders of given social roles. ... (Acker & Armenti, 2004; Gergen, 1994)” (pp. 3–4). The resulting narrative creates an *identity trajectory* (McAlpine & Amundsen, 2011) through which teachers emplot (Ricoeur, 1983) their various experiences into a coherent narrative that typically justifies their teaching decisions. Such fluid dynamics disturb the assumptions behind the theorizing of general stages of teacher development.

In order to explore teacher development, longitudinal research is needed. Yet longitudinal research takes years to undertake and is typically limited to around two years, often through limited methods such as surveys. There are some exceptions (e.g., Grossman & Thompson, 2008; Martell et al., 2024) that involve observations and interviews over greater spans of time. Given how rarely studies produce rich data beyond a two-year span, it’s likely that the field still awaits a robust theory of teacher development and more specifically, English teacher development as situated within institutional contexts.

Our study is designed to contribute to the theorizing of contextualized teacher development. We extrapolate from Vygotsky’s principal attention to children and adolescents in order to apply his concepts to the maturation of adults undertaking teaching careers (Smagorinsky, 2020). Vygotsky (1997) argued that growth requires obstacles to overcome, i.e., those barriers that stand in the way of progress toward the achievement of equilibrium or homeostasis, which is argued by Damasio (2021) to be a key developmental goal. Without an obstacle to overcome, there would be nothing to develop against, and development would cease (Smagorinsky, 2024). This need for obstacles suggests that the achievement of equilibrium as an ideal subjective state might be understood as a

goal that is always out of reach as long as development is underway. Yet a deeply unbalanced life may follow when obstacles are too great to overcome.

Current rates of attrition in the teaching profession suggest that the obstacles to a satisfying teaching career are extraordinary and becoming more so (Morgan, 2022). Standardization, micromanagement, parent efforts to control schooling, funding shortfalls, and countless other impediments to satisfaction are thinning the ranks and making the recruitment of new teachers difficult and their retention increasingly unlikely. Yet at the same time, less onerous, more productive obstacles may provide the impetus for growth into a more sophisticated stance and understanding. Further, obstacles are interpreted rather than fixed, such that the same obstacle that might deter a teaching career in one person in one situation might present a useful dynamic in another.

Teachers' development in relation to environmental obstacles resembles a *twisting path of concept development* (Smagorinsky et al., 2003; Vygotsky, 1987) more than an invariant sequence of stages. The inevitable contradictions within the environments of teaching further increase the likelihood that a teacher will adopt contradictory beliefs such that their instruction will lack an epistemological center. This phenomenon is less troublesome than it might appear because people in contradictory environments inevitably think in inconsistent ways (Bickmore et al., 2005; Smagorinsky, 2020). These contradictions in turn produce different subjective assessments of the same teachers, leading one teacher to be judged differently by different stakeholders and observers (Goe et al., 2008). Further, the "twisting path" metaphor has been critiqued and revised by Smagorinsky (2013) to account for the ways in which social concepts have no single definition and thus no clear destination, instead embodying different ideologies and assumptions, complicating the idea that teachers' twisting developmental paths all lead to the same place. As our study shows, "good teaching" is defined and assessed differently by various stakeholders, some with far greater power than others, making the path not only twist but do so toward a continually shifting destination.

The Teacher's Background and Philosophy of Teaching

Caitlin is a white, heterosexual, cisgender, able-bodied woman who is a middle-class native of the state in which she attended college. Caitlin got certified to teach as an undergraduate in a large, comprehensive Southeastern US university, graduating from college four years after completing high school. She had played high school sports in her state's largest classification and had dreamed of becoming a teacher since age seven. She was thus among those teachers described by Lortie (1975) who return to schools with a strong sense of affiliation and good sense of fit with how schools are organized and conducted. Such people tend to have a "jock" identity shared by students who find school to be a place where their academic careers and social traits are cultivated and rewarded, in contrast to the "burnouts" who are more oriented toward jobs and other nonscholastic affinity groups. This "jock" disposition is shared not only

by athletes but by all who embrace school and its official functions as a major part of their academic careers (Eckert, 1989). Caitlin's athletic orientation thus accompanied her broader feelings of identity with the school institution.

We introduce Caitlin in her own words, taken from her undergraduate portfolio submitted to complete her education degree:

I entered this profession not simply because I wanted to share my love of English, but because of whom I wanted to share this love with. After being inspired by some wonderful teachers in my own high school experience and after participating in a practicum experience during my senior year [of high school], there was no doubt in my mind that I wanted to teach high school students. ... I am a "people person" and so I value the connections I make with students as my sole measurement of success. From the beginning of August [of my year of practicum and student teaching], establishing relationships with my students was my one overarching goal. I learned their names as quickly as possible and tried to converse with them, ask them questions, and take a genuine interest in them as people, not simply students. ... This overall understanding of my students as people helps me create meaningful and relevant lessons, and it also helps with classroom management.

This orientation to students as her primary instructional and relational focus emerged as a pervasive focus across the interviews. This disposition was not always shared by her colleagues and administrators, producing conflicts at her work sites. She also experienced internal conflicts when her emphasis on care did not produce growth in her students' literacy work, creating a tension between what she considered her students' socialization and habits and her own vision of what would serve them best in life.

Method

The methodology employed case study and narrative approach. Given space limitations, the methodology can only be briefly presented below. Please see Appendix B for an elaboration of the methodology (available on the RTE website - <https://ncte.org/resources/journals/research-in-the-teaching-of-english/>).

Research Span

The study followed Caitlin through five settings over a period of nine consecutive years, one of which was spent away from teaching, leading us to characterize this study as encompassing eight years. Serendipitously, data collection ended shortly before the COVID pandemic, coincidental with the first author's retirement, removing that complication from the analysis undertaken with the second author, which took several years. Caitlin had already been among the groups of students studied in the first author's research during the class she took her second year of college (Smagorinsky & Lang, 2023), along with a separate

doctoral study conducted by a student not associated with the present research (Shelton, 2019), suggesting a readiness to be a research participant.

Researcher Roles and Subjectivities

All interviews were conducted by the first author, who got to know Caitlin during her second year of college when she enrolled in his elective service-learning course. Caitlin volunteered to participate in the study. The analysis was conducted by the first and second authors. The first author is a white, heterosexual, cisgender male university professor (now emeritus) whose research program had previously included a set of two-year longitudinal studies of teachers' concept development within the settings of teacher education and first jobs. The second author is a white heterosexual cisgender woman who, as a doctoral student, served as transcriptionist and co-analyst of all interviews; her own doctoral research was on a separate topic (Long, 2022). The analysis extended through the first years of her first post-doctorate job at an educational consulting firm in another state, conducted on a video conferencing platform.

Data Collection

Data collection began in Caitlin's third year of college, when after responding positively to a request for volunteers for the research, she took courses required for certification. Data from this first year, when she did no teaching, are not included in this manuscript for reasons of space allocation. References to her teacher education program include information extracted from interviews during this first year and are presented summatively in conjunction with statements made in later interviews.

The 60–90-minute interviews took place at the end of most academic semesters across the duration of the study. They followed a general protocol in which Caitlin was asked to provide the contexts for her teaching, review her experiences from the most recent semester, reflect on why she had taught as she did, and report on how she knew to teach in that way. For example, during the interview conducted in January 2013, covering the first semester of her first year of full-time teaching, the interview opened with a question designed to provide the school-and-community context for her teaching: "What is the community like? What's the student body like? How big is the school? Just give me the lay of the land of where you're working now." As Caitlin provided the setting, the first author posed more extemporaneous questions designed to elicit details either to build on or fill in blanks from Caitlin's response, e.g., "Is there any Latino¹ or Native American or Asian population, or is it pretty white?" After she confirmed the white demographic of the community, the interviewer followed with, "In terms of SES, is it a wealthy community? Is it rural poor? Does that characterize the levels of affluence in the community?" After establishing the setting through such questions, the interviewer said,

Keep in mind that if there is an overriding question I try to look into in these talks, it's, "How are you teaching, and why do you teach that way, and how did you learn to do that?" ... And you did go to school here [at the university], maybe you picked up some things here [in the teacher education program], we hope. If you are not doing anything that you were taught to do [at the university], that's also part of what I try to understand. ... So, talk about the school site and what of the school site, whether it's the curriculum or a mentor teacher or the English department or something, that in a sense shapes your instruction.

We rely on Caitlin's recall of past events, which in some cases shifted over time, suggesting a reconstruction of prior experiences to fit with Caitlin's emerging narrative about her development as a teacher. Her recall of her mentor teacher, for instance, shifted from primarily negative to somewhat appreciative as her experiences in schools helped her see that he and she were aligned in key ways, if different in many. Without accompanying observations or interviews with other school personnel, we cannot confirm or contest the accounts of the schools in which she worked, and we are cognizant of the ways in which people "don't replay the past as it happened; [they] do it through a lens of interpretation and imagination" such that identities are "built on shifting sand," making "memory more like a painting than a photograph. There's often photorealistic aspects of a painting, but there's also interpretation" (Ranganath, in Marchese, 2024, n.p.; cf. Ranganath, 2024). We thus base our study on Caitlin's account of her teaching and her political life in schools, including both narratives of her teaching and commentaries on her experiences.

Data Analysis **Analytic Method**

Using Atlas.ti software, the first and second authors collaboratively developed codes specifically for each interview. (See Smagorinsky, 2008, for an account of how emergent collaborative coding, rather than independent coding, provides reliability and the opportunity to modify the scheme throughout the process.) These codes were developed inductively through discussion between the first and second authors, varied across the interviews depending on how Caitlin reported her experiences, and were revised during the analytic process when necessary to account for refined understandings.

Table 1 (see Appendix A, available on the RTE website - <https://ncte.org/resources/journals/research-in-the-teaching-of-english/>), for instance, details the codes applied to the first interview used in this study. Given the recency of the teacher education program in Caitlin's experience and thus her references to its courses and instructors, *University Courses in Teacher Education* served as a superordinate code, with subordinate categories developed for each course taken, co-identified by the instructor (all names are anonymized). A second superordinate category was *Field Experiences in Teacher Education*, with subordinate categories for the school and community context, the mentor

teacher, and the students. The third superordinate category was *Personal Projections, Dispositions, and Experiences*, including Caitlin's projected teacher identity (i.e., the image that provides teacher candidates with their idealized understanding of the sort of teacher they hope to become; see Kessler, 2021), her personal dispositions (e.g., a relational, student-centered approach), and her own experiences as a high school student, each of which she referred to during the interview.

The fall interview for her third and final year at her first job (Table 6, see Appendix A available on the RTE website - <https://ncte.org/resources/journals/research-in-the-teaching-of-english/>) in contrast produced different categories in relation to the concerns and experiences she shared yet in response to the same broad interview questions. *Curriculum and Engagement* codes were salient as she detailed the sources of her curricular decisions and the degree of relevance and engagement the curriculum afforded. She also discussed her students' *Character and Work Ethic* in relation to what she considered low expectations within the district and the disadvantages that they would produce when students entered the workforce if they lacked a strong work ethic. The *School and District Context* was pertinent to Caitlin: a conservative ideology at large in her school and community, a hostile and micromanaging school administration policing her instruction and her conduct during faculty meetings, what she considered a low value on education in the school and community that created challenges in the classroom, and the role of standards and standardized tests in creating an accountability climate that she found frustrating, continually shifting, and too narrowly focused on test preparation. The final superordinate category in this interview was broadly named *Life and Education* and included subordinate categories for references to what Caitlin learned during her university teacher education program, her professional plans to leave the school in the spring and return to her home state the following year, the influences of mentors from prior experiences, and reflections on her apprenticeship of observation as a high school student.

These two coding summaries indicate the inductive nature of the coding, with categories generated from the analysis of the interviews rather than having been established *a priori*, even as some categories emerged across multiple interviews. Tables 1–14 (see Appendix A available on the RTE website - <https://ncte.org/resources/journals/research-in-the-teaching-of-english/>) provide complete accounts of the codes for each interview included from the whole set of interviews conducted across the span of the research, with Caitlin's year at the health spa reviewed briefly and some semesters lacking an interview when she was not available. Appendix B (available on the RTE website - <https://ncte.org/resources/journals/research-in-the-teaching-of-english/>) provides an elaboration of methodological challenges that arose in the collection and analysis of data and in presenting an eight-year study in a manuscript of suitable length for a journal article.

Findings

We begin our report with the second year of data collection, when Caitlin's student teaching began, which we refer to as Year 1. We have chosen a chronological approach to reporting the study rather than taking a categorical approach. Her experiences built on one another, making a categorial report insensitive to the cumulative impact of the recurring tensions that Caitlin experienced across settings. The page limitations for a journal article do not allow for extensive quoting from the interviews; our resolution has been to summarize, for the most part, her interview data. We thus provide, broadly speaking, an overall narrative of her unfolding career, interspersed with analytic commentary based on our coding and inferences.

An analysis and report on the whole corpus cannot be reported in one journal article, so we narrow our attention here to the tensions following from Caitlin's emphasis on classroom relevancy and relationships and how it recurrently came in conflict with more powerful agents in the school who valued conformity and faculty obedience to leaders' priorities, which were oriented to canonical literature, standardization, and testing. This value on care and relationships became a source of internal conflict for Caitlin when, in the alternative school in which she taught at the close of the data collection and after having a child of her own who needed her care and attention, she began to question a full-blown relational emphasis when it did not produce stronger academic work and when she began to feel overwhelmed by investing so much emotional labor in both students and her baby. This study thus centers on Caitlin's efforts to grow as an English teacher in schools that, for the most part, discouraged the direction she believed she needed to take in her development as a teacher; and how, once in a school with which she strongly affiliated, she took on new concerns as she sought a workable balance between cultivating relationships and having high academic standards defined from outside the domain of test scores. She needed to balance these work demands with family responsibilities that affected her full devotion to teaching, especially in ways that involved caring for students with high emotional and material needs.

Year 1: Polk County HS Practicum and Student Teaching **Fall Semester, Year 1: Introduction to Political Divisions and Student Engagement**

Caitlin's Fall Semester Practicum (see Table 1, Appendix A available on the RTE website - <https://ncte.org/resources/journals/research-in-the-teaching-of-english/>) took place in the only high school in a rural county near her university campus. Polk County HS was larger than most rural schools, which average just under 500 students (Showalter et al., 2019). PCHS enrolled about 1,400 students, roughly 95 percent of whom graduated, according to the Public School Review. The "diversity score" provided by the Public School Review was .49 in a state whose average was .7, with about 70 percent of the students white, 13

percent Hispanic,² 10 percent Black, 3 percent Asian, and 4 percent mixed race. The class size of her mentor teacher, Travis Mann, topped out at 35.

The students' performance on standardized tests led to the school's assignment of NI-5 status, i.e., "needs improvement" for five years running, which put the school on notice for potential oversight and reorganization if test scores did not improve. Caitlin reported believing that her students were not well oriented to school as a site for learning, describing the ninth graders in Travis's class as not knowing "how to deal with high school yet, and they can't handle the responsibility." They functioned poorly not only on standardized tests but also in literature circles during her opportunities to teach toward the end of the semester. Caitlin believed that the students needed external structures to promote school learning, acknowledging her disposition about "being anal about the structure thing."

She thus exhibited a tension that recurred throughout the study: simultaneous beliefs that relationships and student-generated learning opportunities were paramount and that the students weren't oriented enough to academic work to take it seriously and didn't know how to function in open-ended learning opportunities. This conflict of priorities created an internal contradiction of Caitlin's own making, one in which she hoped to cultivate students' agency but perceived that they lacked the initiative or socialization to exercise it in school. This internal conflict persisted throughout the course of the data collection across four schools, and became amplified in the care-oriented alternative school that provided the fourth of the settings we review in this study.

Travis's teaching assignment included British literature, which Caitlin felt was hard for her and her students to relate to because of the archaic language and chronological presentation that began with some of the most remote, challenging reading in the canon for a 21st-century teenager. This curriculum was well aligned with the faculty faction oriented to canonicity and formalist standards. Caitlin reported that she needed to think creatively about how to teach British literature in ways that students found relevant to their lives, using student-oriented approaches she had learned on the university campus such as thematic teaching, reader-response journals, Young Adult Literature (YAL), student-created assessments, participatory discussions, purposeful instructional planning, attention to students' emotional response to instruction, differentiated instruction, reflective practice, and an ethic of care. Yet as she learned during her unsuccessful effort to use literature circles, the students required socialization and reinforcement in responding to progressive methods, which were not used throughout the faculty.

On several occasions, Caitlin projected a teaching identity, that is, she envisioned what she would ideally do as a teacher in the future (Kessler, 2021). She hoped to have greater autonomy after being liberated from the restrictions in Polk County. *Relationships* was the most frequently coded value in her projected teacher identity, requiring care and encouragement for students such that they felt wanted as people beyond their test-score production. A recurring

theme in her interviews across the research was that she taught kids more than an academic discipline. In these projected identities, she saw herself as a teacher who undertakes a variety of pedagogies to make her classroom meaningful and useful to her students, with an emphasis on relating the literature curriculum to their personal lives in hopes of promoting engagement with her class.

Travis's mentorship was both difficult and affirming. Caitlin described Travis as a loner and an introvert who, in his 20s, was already jaded toward both her and his students. Yet instructionally he attempted to connect kids' lives to the literature by relating it to popular culture, aligning him with Caitlin and others in the faculty faction that sought to engage students with a relevancy-based curriculum. He thus modeled both what she considered to be admirable instruction and a forbidding classroom and mentoring persona.

At this point, the main opposition that Caitlin faced, beyond what she considered to be Travis's harsh personality, was her realization that the students in her class did not respond well to the constructivist, relevancy-oriented methods that she had learned in the university program, nor did they embrace the structures that she imposed and the academic ends toward which she hoped to use them. These student dispositions were, she believed, a consequence of the dominant culture of the faculty in which a minority of teachers emphasized relationships and pop culture. The faculty factions had not yet become immediate to her experiences in the classroom, even as they manifested themselves in the British literature curriculum's canonical focus. Her vision was primarily local, focused on the classroom and the students, without achieving distance (Sigel, 1970) that over time broadened her attention to the political environment of the school and the state. This context affected how teaching was shaped by standardizing and assimilative forces from outside the classroom that continually impeded her development into a relationship-centered teacher.

Spring Semester, Year 1: Entering the Political Environment of the School.

In this interview (see Table 2, Appendix A, available on the *RTE* website - <https://ncte.org/resources/journals/research-in-the-teaching-of-english/>), Caitlin described her relationship-driven conception of herself as an English teacher, indicated by codes for caring, connections, empathy, relevance, and engagement. These personal values were challenged by demands at the school coded as accountability, status, and accreditation. Moving from observer with some instructional opportunities in the fall to student teacher in the spring made Caitlin more aware of the tensions produced by these competing, often unresolvable ideological differences among the English faculty and between her faculty faction and the administration.

Caitlin described her teaching persona as personal, bubbly, and welcoming to her students. She hoped to meet students halfway in spite of their differences, to develop a culture of camaraderie in her classroom, and to extend unconditional and nonjudgmental love, even as on occasion she perceived her students to lack an academic stance. Her work with students, she said, was based on trying to understand their lives so she could teach to their interests and

developmental needs. Caitlin tried to help students make personal connections to the British literature curriculum with texts from students' experiences. For example, she connected the knight in *Don Quixote* to the animated character Shrek. She further used *The Onion*, *Saturday Night Live* sketch clips, and YouTube videos for contemporary texts and news articles of current events to help students see the relevance of old stories.

This relational orientation to the curriculum was supported by Travis yet was met with resistance in the Department of English. Caitlin described a divide between the department head, who championed a classical and analytic emphasis, and her faction in the department, who argued for a more contemporary and personal approach. As Caitlin put it,

I like pop culture. I'm sort of a pop-culture junkie, and I think, well, I would say almost all of our students are as well. So I think it's kind of dumb to ignore what's going on now when you're teaching anything. ... I know some people kind of frown upon it just because it's not high-end or something, but that's just not my belief. ... [Travis] used pop culture. He loved to modernize things, so we were completely on board with that. My department head at Polk County, however, ... was what I like to call a Classics Nazi.

Caitlin was also critical of the testing mandates, which were supported by the department head and that Caitlin characterized as making burdensome demands on teachers and students, eating up valuable instructional time. The school administration was not entirely devoted to canonicity. Caitlin talked about her positive impression of the PCHS principal, who, she said, placed a great amount of value on care, both for the students and the staff at the school, creating a community with a "small school, rural vibe" and "family home kind of environment." He was engaged with students and listened to faculty. Caitlin felt that the principal made her feel like she was a "part of something." Yet he did operate in paradoxical ways, emphasizing standardized assessment such that administrators observing classes would quiz students on the standards they were being taught.

The department head, however, was rigidly canonical. She believed that British literature should be taught chronologically, and the faculty was expected to work in unison, requiring Caitlin to attend five planning meetings per week to produce instructional uniformity and in turn reach absolute agreement in planning, with dissidence strongly discouraged. The school's NI-5 status provided an imperative for data management required by the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) and defined by Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) criteria, undoubtedly contributing to the principal's emphasis on both caring relationships and standardized instruction; just as teachers and others exhibit contradictory values and actions when immersed in contentious environments, so evidently do administrators. Accreditation mandates created the need for weekly data team meetings in addition to the three team planning meetings per

week. In addition, the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools accreditation agency required that all teaching must include essential questions linked to the lesson and based on the standards. These demands, at this vulnerable point in her career, were not amenable to challenge or question for Caitlin.

This interview found Caitlin focused on relationships, the relevance of the curriculum to students' lives, care for others such that classrooms function as supportive learning communities, intentional curriculum decisions that built on students' interest in popular culture and current events to help them relate to the curriculum, her ongoing experiences as a learner along with her students, and empathy as a central value in teaching. She remained steadfast in maintaining this relational orientation, with the department's contrasting canonical emphasis serving to clarify her own values in relief. If acquiescence, accommodation, and resistance to an established curriculum represent three stances a teacher may adopt during disagreements with policies (Smagorinsky et al., 2002), Caitlin stood somewhere short of resistance yet only acquiesced on the surface. She thus appeared to accommodate the school's formalist emphasis during student teaching, a site that did not figure into her future-oriented thinking, while finding openings for a more relational pedagogy and quietly resisting its impact on her emerging teaching identity.

Caitlin found that implementing a caring, constructivist curriculum in a school setting may encounter barriers from colleagues, policies, and mentors who see other purposes for schooling. Engaging with these obstacles at this point appeared to have the productive outcome of clarifying for her the value she placed on relational teaching. As a student teacher, she was not a major player in the factional dispute that divided the faculty. Student teaching ended with this truce between her values and those of a powerful group within the institution and mandates from outside the system, and this standoff set the stage for her first job, which she hoped would liberate her from these conflicts. Yet once again, the same tensions characterized life on the faculty.

Year 2: First Job, First Year at Argos HS

Fall Semester, Year 2. Caitlin took her first job at Argos HS, a small high school enrolling about 600 students in a rural mill town in an adjacent state. (See Table 3 in Appendix A, available on the *RTE* website - <https://ncte.org/resources/journals/research-in-the-teaching-of-english/>). College attendance was low for the school's graduates, with many going straight from school to entry-level jobs in local businesses. Many of the faculty were from the county and had attended Argos HS, and according to Caitlin, many of them attended the same church, producing what she felt was an insularity that created social barriers to outsiders like her. The community had many of the challenges facing rural working-class towns: Industries were few, there was high drug and alcohol use, the teen pregnancy rate was high, and there were no recreational spaces such as movie theaters or bowling alleys. Her students, she said, were mostly white,

“very conservative, very Bible Belt,” whom she professed to love without sharing their conservative politics. The students’ families’ conservative religious and political values limited discussion topics and reading assignments. The small size resulted in Caitlin teaching 70 percent of all tenth graders and allowed her to know her own students along with many others in the school in what she called a tight-knit community.

Caitlin reiterated her value on popular culture in her students’ education, which she felt produced both rigor and relevance, acknowledging that her sense of “rigor” at this point was vague and under development. She found herself again on a faculty faction valuing relevance, working against a faction devoted to formalism and standardization. These problems were exacerbated by an assessment environment that was in transition from an old set of state curriculum standards to the Common Core State Standards (CCSS). This move, she reported, was resented and resisted by the faculty, who were concerned about how their evaluations would affect merit pay, because they had taught to a test that had been jettisoned and replaced by standards and assessments that they hadn’t taught. This problem was compounded by the fact that the state graduation writing test was not aligned with CCSS.

The official goal for teaching thus continually shifted, producing frustration and confusion on the faculty about what they were teaching toward. At times, Caitlin found the administration’s evaluations of her teaching disconcerting because changes in the rubrics produced different criteria for different evaluations during the spotty transition from the old standards to CCSS. The disequilibrium that Caitlin described throughout her time at Argos HS reflected an environment in constant contradiction with itself, one that provided obstacles that could not be surmounted and thus were prohibitive impediments to her development as the teacher she hoped to become.

The transition to the CCSS required staff development meetings that Caitlin found unnecessary. Caitlin’s teaching was subject to two levels of observation: from school administrators and from her official mentor teacher. She also took on an unofficial mentor from the school with whom she felt aligned. Although Caitlin said that she liked being evaluated as a means of support, she felt that the administrative observations were generally unhelpful and focused on superficial and nitpicky details. Administrators were primarily concerned with order and structure in classroom management, which left Caitlin feeling uneasy that they would interpret her activity-based classes as chaotic.

Within these broader structures, Caitlin taught units that her unofficial mentor teacher guided her through. Caitlin regarded her unofficial mentor as a “superhero” and inspiring exemplar. The mentor was, she said, daring. She took risks with controversial texts and topics in this conservative community, was hands-on, and linked instruction to contemporary issues. Caitlin gravitated to this mentor’s approach, teaching *Bless Me, Ultima*, a novel that was controversial because of its setting in a Catholic rather than Baptist community, and because it included Native American spirituality, voodoo, and witchcraft and

thus required parents' permission for students to read. The second unit centered on Tim O'Brien's *The Things They Carried*. She built in the required research project to meet a CCSS emphasis and integrated the requirement with writing process instruction on drafting and peer editing, attention to source evaluation and incorporation, and scaffolding of the research process.

From a developmental standpoint, Caitlin was able to maintain the identity that she brought with her, and her projected identity provided a destination to work toward. She named three major obstacles to teaching according to her personal values: the community's conservative beliefs and how they worked against teaching contemporary issues, the standards-and-assessment climate caused by the shift to the CCSS, and the formalist and canonical opposing faction on the English faculty. None was prohibitive at this point, and each appeared once again to allow Caitlin to clarify her instructional values and strengthen her commitment to relational teaching in the face of ideological opposition.

Spring Semester, Year 2: The Conflicts Intensify. Caitlin's teaching assignment during this semester included four tenth-grade and one eleventh-grade preparation. Caitlin referred back to the university program as an abiding influence on her teaching through student-centered instruction, student choice, students as individuals and not numbers, relevant topics, individual learning pathways, student decision-making, instructional relevancy and student choice, students' socialization in homes and classrooms, her students' maturity and developmental stages, and the challenge of classroom management. Her teaching was designed to get students to believe in themselves and do things they couldn't do before, often through "projects" undertaken over time and incorporating multiple elements into a complex text.

Caitlin's values continued to clash with the school's curricular structure and her own conflicting priorities. The eleventh-grade American Literature curriculum, for instance, employed a chronological approach, and Caitlin felt pressure to abide by that organization even though she found it problematic, for reasons similar to her concerns with British literature the year before. Yet she found ways to teach that met both her requirements and those of the school. She borrowed a research assignment, known as the Collection Project, from a colleague, and taught it with only minor adjustments. The project was designed to allow students to undertake in-depth investigations of prescribed topics, such as Puritan poetry, the Founding Fathers, the Ravages of War, and Native American Literature. Students could do it in pairs or individually, with the task of taking a historical period from the curriculum timeline and preparing a presentation on it for the class's edification. The Collection Project, she felt, enabled relevance because the students chose their own topics within the curricular framework and then researched them and taught them to the class.

Caitlin experienced tension between the established curriculum and her own value on making school relevant to students. Part of her challenge, she said,

was that the students had been socialized in school to passive roles and had to reconceive how to participate in her classroom in order to view themselves as active agents of their own learning. Caitlin said that in spite of her resistance to the chronological approach, American Literature was her niche, in part because she and her students could connect to the literature as the students awakened to their social and political surroundings.

The school's emphasis on test preparation provided an obstacle that frustrated Caitlin in many ways. Even though the administration valued her teaching for the test scores her students produced, and although the scores provided her with job security, she felt they were unimportant and said she hated herself for devoting class time to test preparation required by her administration and enforced by "idle threats." The accountability system, she said, was poorly managed because the tests took place in the spring. Her fall semester students took no English second semester, yet she was held responsible for their spring semester scores. She felt that colleagues and administrators could "crush your spirit" with excessive conflicting demands that made it difficult for her to make the difference she hoped to make in students' lives.

Caitlin experienced another tension, that between her students' small-town religious socialization and her belief that living a parochial life was limiting. Her notion of expanding students' horizons was influenced by a Gifted and Talented training session, where the leader emphasized how teachers should expose children and youth in provincial communities to new experiences and perspectives. If teachers don't take on this role, the session leader said, the students will never break out of their established and reinforced patterns and beliefs. This tension put Caitlin in the position of deciding on students' behalf what should be relevant to them, placing her in potential conflict with parents, colleagues, and administrators who would contest her effort to redirect her students' development toward an expanded worldview.

It also contributed to her internal conflict between being student-centered and believing that her students' choices did not always produce academic growth. Caitlin thus continued to exhibit contradictions between her advocacy for student choice and her belief that students need to broaden their horizons through exploring texts and issues that she believed would extend their thinking.

Year 3: First Job, Second Year at Argos HS

Fall Semester, Year 3: Limited Freedom in Pursuit of Shifting Goals.

In this interview (see Table 5 in Appendix A, available on the *RTE* website - <https://ncte.org/resources/journals/research-in-the-teaching-of-english/>), Caitlin reported that she had all-new teaching assignments: tenth-grade world literature and a class in her new role as yearbook faculty advisor. Caitlin was especially concerned about the impending adoption of the CCSS, which she felt produced a lot of wasted time and emotional energy. Her increasing independ-

ence from mentors and other supports fed her frustration with the patronizing way in which the administration treated teachers.

Caitlin's environment was both restrictive and empowering in her instructional choices. She had leeway in her curricular design and implementation within the confines of the departmental structure and faculty turf. Latitude, she said, enabled her to develop toward the teacher she wanted to be. She was provided with a textbook but didn't use it, instead choosing her own texts and teaching at her own pace. The curriculum was not mandated, although teachers were expected not to teach texts that were the province of other grade levels. Caitlin had options in her selection of texts, such as when she determined that Shakespeare would not fit her students' interests or preparation and so could be jettisoned. Caitlin could teach strategies for engaging with literature and included books with unusual plot structures, multiple narrators, and other devices that, she said, broke kids out of their comfort zones.

Caitlin tried to make their projects relevant and interesting to promote "excitement" in order to address the disengagement she found in many of her students. She believed that they had learned throughout their schooling to hate the discipline of English: "They automatically hate you because they hate the things that you teach them, because of all these terrible perceptions that they have had for years." Caitlin again exhibited a conflict between drawing on students' stated needs to drive instruction and making decisions about what she felt they needed, such as teaching writing because kids would need it throughout their lives.

At times, Caitlin's students exhibited boredom and disengagement, which Caitlin felt invalidated her teaching. She wanted to know why they were disengaged so she could adjust her teaching through reflective practice, in turn redirecting her students' attention. Caitlin employed formal devices such as surveys, through which she hoped to understand what they said they had learned while doing projects, how they responded to her as a teacher, and which interests they hoped to pursue. These measures and others led Caitlin to tell her students that she was learning from them as much as they from her and that their feedback informed how she taught in important ways.

For instance, she supplemented the established curriculum with what she determined to be appropriate texts, such as when she included Paul Fleischman's YAL novel *Whirligig* as a companion to Elie Wiesel's *Night*. Their project involved conducting research on US states possibly visited by *Whirligig's* protagonist following the novel's conclusion to produce a persuasive research report in which they role-played being travel agents persuading a client to go to a destination. When the travel project produced trivial reports, and when Caitlin learned that her students loved to play games (Kim & Johnson, 2021), she revised it to include a competitive dimension, with students trying to win the travel agency contest, which she believed produced greater commitment to and investment in their projects.

The anticipation of the shift to CCSS produced a data-driven environment that required teachers to submit monthly reflections on an assessment from their teaching; yet, she said, the administration never read her reflections, making the exercise empty. Caitlin felt, in her second year, jaded over requirements to collect and analyze data. Good teachers, she insisted, don't need data charts to track formative assessments. The accountability measures, she felt, were particularly inappropriate for what the school called "at-risk" students, such as the way in which all African American students were automatically classified as "at risk," placing them in remedial roles by default and requiring a "Response to Intervention ... to help them pass standardized tests." Caitlin felt that such generalizations were too broad to help personalize instruction so that her students' individual potential could be developed, and both punitive to students if they were Black and presumptively approving of students if they were white.

The semester thus concluded with Caitlin finding both liberating ways of teaching and institutional structures creating obstacles to using student-centered methods wholeheartedly and without interference. She reported becoming frustrated and at times cynical because of the district's approach to data, which reduced her students to numbers and her teaching to their standardized test scores. These pressures distorted what she felt was important in teaching and learning. They further occupied vast amounts of time that she considered wasteful in and of themselves, prevented her from spending time on planning what she believed to be more authentic instruction, undermined her efforts at reflective practice, required her to teach in ways she found at odds with her instructional priorities, and put her and her colleagues in the confusing path of shifting standards and assessments. These growing concerns about these fixed obstacles undermined what she believed to be her more ideal developmental pathway into a teacher of a relevant curriculum undertaken in service of her students' growth, both academically and personally, if not entirely according to students' interests.

Spring Semester, Year 3: The Political Pressures to Conform Increase. This interview (see Table 6 in Appendix A, available on the *RTE* website - <https://ncte.org/resources/journals/research-in-the-teaching-of-english/>) revealed tensions between Caitlin and her administration and also within the Department of English. The dispute centered on conflicts between the formalist orientation associated with standards and standardized assessment, a perspective supported by her department head, and a constructivist, relational, process-oriented approach to English practiced by Caitlin and others in her department. These tensions produced political fallout directed at Caitlin and her factional colleagues. This punitive opprobrium followed from the hierarchical structure of the school and the department head's affiliation with the administration and

the department head's stance and threats against teachers who raised questions about how decisions were made.

The school administration came across to Caitlin as antagonistic, causing her to question her future at the school because they provided an obstacle too great to overcome. The principal silenced Caitlin by telling her that second-year teachers don't have valid opinions and threatened to revoke her certification if she didn't change her attitude. Caitlin reported that she was labeled a "troublemaker," and the principal reprimanded the whole Department of English for opposing their policies and for complaining that they had no voice in school decisions, saying that they were insubordinate to challenge school leaders. The department head, Caitlin said, "ratted us out" to the administration and "claimed that we bullied her into causing a ruckus ... she felt like our English department was just getting out of hand, and we were troublemakers. So, I had basically an hour-and-a-half meeting with my principal in December when I cried the whole time." Caitlin felt that the adversarial work environment had a negative impact on her. She did hold some optimism for the future, given that both the principal and department head were planning to leave their positions.

The school curriculum was highly problematic for Caitlin, in part because it kept shifting in relation to the state's unstable assessment systems. The tests, when they did assess writing, focused on formalist genres such as the five-paragraph essay. The state's vacillation over the curriculum produced confusion about the end toward which instruction should be directed. The standards were the same across CCSS and ACT curricula, but the assessments were different, and it wasn't clear how to use the ACT in the guidelines provided by the district. The ACT curriculum, Caitlin feared, would lead to even more degradation of her autonomy and judgment because of its scripted nature.

This semester produced tensions that began to affect Caitlin's belief in her future at the school. The administrative pressures to conform to a data-driven orientation went against her beliefs, and her lack of commitment to their agenda left her constructed as an agitator with little job security in a state ranked among the nation's lowest in teacher union strength (Northern et al., 2020), leaving her with little recourse to authoritarian management. Her student-centered values were increasingly in conflict with the test-centered priorities of the school, bolstered by an administration that viewed disagreement as rebellion.

Year 4: First Job, Third Year at Argos HS

Fall Semester, Year 4: Security, Insecurity, and an Impending Departure.

In this interview (see Table 7 in Appendix A, available on the RTE website - <https://ncte.org/resources/journals/research-in-the-teaching-of-english/>), Caitlin talked about how, although she was becoming established at Argos HS, she was also considering returning to her home state. Her reasons for leaving were both personal—a yearning to be closer to her family and begin

her own family—and professional in terms of her dissatisfaction with the conservatism governing the school and community and the autocratic way in which the school was run. Caitlin continued to exhibit a contradiction between her emphasis on student agency and her belief that they were exercising it in limiting ways. She felt that the students' work ethic was interfering with their academic achievement and that both school and home were structuring students' lives to mitigate against their taking schoolwork seriously. The ideology of the school and the community increasingly limited what Caitlin could teach and muffled any dissonant perspectives she might bring to curriculum development. She was required to focus on test preparation and the CCSS at the expense of what she saw as meaningful instruction designed to foster good character and the literacy and workplace skills the students needed for the future.

Caitlin reported that the community's tendency to shut down ideological challenges restricted her teaching options, leaving her feeling "weak" and "fearful." She connected her own feelings of apprehension to a colleague's experience of being petitioned to remove *Bless Me, Ultima* from her curriculum when parents objected to the book without having read it and then threatened a book-burning because of its magical realism. School policies tended to align with parental values, such that the administrators "counteract[ed] a lot of things I do."

The school's testing regime remained both imposing and confusing. Caitlin was required to teach toward a tenth-grade exit exam that may have already been abandoned by the state. The district had recently eliminated End of Course (EOC) tests, i.e., those evaluated by a district-wide exam, and the state was in the process of developing new ones. Caitlin remained frustrated by the absence of a clear instructional destination as measured by tests. Meanwhile, the school was doing professional development aligned with the ACT, which the state was not adopting. Although she followed her administrators' expectations regarding preparing her students for the expected tests, she was frustrated by the constant change in high-stakes assessments, thus obscuring the end toward which she was expected to be teaching and upon which she would be evaluated.

Caitlin maintained her commitment to relevance within the bounds of her projection of the future needs of her students. She taught with a mixture of contemporary texts such as music videos and song lyrics and longer, book-length texts to explore themes across genres.

Caitlin learned about her students' growth and needs through pre- and post-assessments of their learning that she developed. She saw grading as a form of evaluation that would help prepare students for the workforce. She believed in the value of negative consequences when students didn't complete assignments or meet academic and behavioral expectations. However, Caitlin said that she also ensured that when students failed, they still had the possibility to recover their grades and were supported as they worked toward success.

Caitlin continued to be concerned about the orientation of her students toward school, feeling that the students' work habits were negatively affected by lax expectations, rules, and consequences, leading her to say that she was more concerned with students' work ethic than she was for their literacy skills. This self-created tension between her value on respecting students' self-identified needs and interests and her belief that they lacked an academic orientation and thus needed guidance, incentives, and disincentives, continued to force her to clarify her conception of being a relationship-oriented, student-centered teacher for students within a context that encouraged little reciprocal commitment from them.

Spring Semester, Year 4: Resignation and Liberation. Caitlin's final semester at Argos HS was characterized by her discontent and conflicts with the school's administration, who acted with what she considered abuses of power, micromanagement, surveillance, and the suppression of dissent, all of which produced feelings of impuissance among teachers. (See Table 8 in Appendix A, available on the RTE website - <https://ncte.org/resources/journals/research-in-the-teaching-of-english/>). Caitlin described how the administration led teachers to feel powerless against their hierarchical positioning. Teachers, she felt, were doing the most important work in the school yet were continually diminished in power and voice, both individually and collectively, and were the lowest-paid people on staff. The district had become about "bull crap," she said, rather than students.

Caitlin's classroom was interrupted by administrators who would enter at their own convenience to monitor instruction and for non-academic purposes. The superintendent had a surveillance system involving cameras through which he could, from his office, monitor who was doing what in the school. The administrators were primarily men, and the English teachers were all women. The male administrators, she reported, acted improperly toward women teachers, including inappropriate touching, crude jokes in women's presence, and various forms of verbal sexual harassment.

Before the end of the semester, Caitlin decided to resign at the conclusion of spring classes. Her decision relieved her of much of the pressure to conform, allowing her to explore gender issues in literature more deeply than before. She felt liberated to take curricular risks, such as adding supplemental texts like *The Hunger Games*. She promoted critical, balanced thinking that looked at both sides of issues, and she encouraged the students to think for themselves rather than accepting conventional wisdom in the community. She also tolerated administrative mistreatment because she was leaving and had no stake in what happened after her departure.

Caitlin thus left Argos HS with mixed feelings, glad to be out of the school's political conflicts, saddened by leaving her students behind, and looking forward to starting fresh in a new school back in her home state. The obstacles she faced at the school were non-negotiable, leaving little room for growth at Argos HS. In her final semester, she was able to ignore those impediments and

teach according to her own beliefs and values; her resolution to the authoritarian school governance was to leave the school altogether in hopes of a more liberating environment closer to her family. The political impediments at the school largely served to reinforce the values she had entered with, even as she had begun to recognize that idealistic conceptions of youth should be tempered to produce more realistic understandings of how their socialization affects their school readiness and how broader social factors help to produce the disaffection with school that she found so greatly in opposition to her own beliefs about a quality education.

Year 5: Second Job, First Year at Bulloch HS

Fall Semester, Year 5: A Homecoming Ending in Despair. Caitlin accepted a position at Bulloch HS, which was housed in the same building as the one in which she had attended middle school in her youth in this rapidly growing county (see Table 9 in Appendix A, available on the *RTE* website - <https://ncte.org/resources/journals/research-in-the-teaching-of-english/>). She had hoped, prior to the beginning of the school year, to experience a homecoming: “It does feel like I’m coming home, and I walk down the hallway sometimes and feel like I’m in seventh grade again.” These hopes were dashed promptly once the year began, with Caitlin saying that within this environment she could not be “who I am.” She ultimately felt disheartened by the corporate environment that the district imposed on its schools, and she resigned from her position before the end of the spring semester. The district, she said, “is one of the highest paid counties in the state. On paper it looks like it’s a really good place to be.” Yet she found its approach oppressive and stultifying.

Bulloch was similar in socioeconomic status to her previous school, but the demographics were much different, with most students from non-white racial groups. As a new school, it was at the end of the line for resources in comparison with the district’s more established schools, some of which had been in service for nearly a century. Caitlin described how the school attendance zones within the district had been drawn so that the most established schools enrolled the most affluent students: “There was a lot of, dare I say, gerrymandering when the redistricting efforts came about, when they drew the lines for Bulloch HS. And it’s obvious, blatantly obvious. Our students are really, really poor” in contrast with more established schools just a few miles away, including the one she had graduated from as a high school student. Collusion came from “the builders that are building these neighborhoods [who] are lobbying to go to [a different school] because they’re afraid that they won’t get their money’s worth” when their homes were put up for sale. Bulloch had higher student-to-teacher ratios than other schools yet was expected to be competitive in test score comparisons with the county’s more affluent, better resourced schools.

The school district made bureaucratic demands on teachers to record and report data well beyond their instructional duties, with students treated like numbers and the county awarding merit pay based on students’ test scores

rather than on teachers' credentials, regardless of students' school readiness. The district office monitored each school daily to keep track of its numeric data. It controlled faculty mobility and compliance by requiring three years of service before a teacher could request a transfer within the district. Teachers who resigned were banned from future employment in the district. Nonetheless, the district had won awards for its approach and was among the state's highest-paying districts.

Caitlin taught two sections of journalism that produced the school yearbook, two classes of twelfth graders, and two classes of ninth graders, with one planning period. The yearbook classes enrolled 70 students in two classes that never met together, with the result that the final product was assembled from the work of two separate groups. Teachers had little autonomy in planning and instruction; all were required to teach the same scripted curriculum. Texts were selected at the district level, and instruction followed the same calendar across the county's many schools. Caitlin felt that the scripted curriculum made students tune out from their learning. She felt "robotic" and resistant as one who was "not a scripted person." In addition to what was required federally, testing was imposed at the state, district, and school levels, all in standardized modes. The state required a writing test whose five-paragraph-theme rubric Caitlin needed to teach. Because the writing test wasn't administered until the end of tenth grade, teachers reduced writing instruction and focused instead on what would be tested.

Even within this restrictive environment, Caitlin found ways to subvert the structure and, when wiggle room was available, make adjustments to her teaching when things weren't working to her satisfaction. She undertook reflective teaching practices to enable this recognition of what needed improvement. She also attempted to make the curriculum interesting and relevant by including activities based on popular culture and by teaching by theme rather than genre. She took extra time when it was required for students to understand a text, such as in her instruction in Elie Wiesel's *Night*. She included literature circles to promote discussion, a method of which she said, "Nobody else [on the faculty] did that. Everybody else opened the textbook, read the textbook, answered the questions at the back, and gave a multiple-choice test" as prescribed by the district.

The school provided additional insurmountable obstacles to building and sustaining relationships. Teaching on alternative days on a block schedule, especially in classes of 40 producing a total load of about 200 students, including a no-credit "Academy" assignment that required considerable time and effort³, made it hard to learn the students' names and personalities. Caitlin began to question her commitment to teaching because the large numbers worked against her priority on developing relationships. She struggled to provide feedback on nearly 200 essays, which undermined the enjoyment she took in teaching writing.

Caitlin decided to resign in the first semester. She felt out of place at the school and in the district, her former home. The district's corporate emphasis undermined the humanity that she sought as a person who valued relationships with her students. Her homecoming thus was met with a dramatic refutation of her assumptions, which led to a feeling that she had been betrayed. Her expectations of an idyllic teaching career back home, where she had experienced success and happiness as a student, led to a letdown when she found that she had landed in a very different sort of place.

Spring Semester, Year 5: In Search of a New Life. Caitlin's experiences in the district were a crushing disappointment (see Table 10 in Appendix A, available on the *RTE* website - <https://ncte.org/resources/journals/research-in-the-teaching-of-english/>). She found that most of her time was spent on producing paperwork, planning for and administering standardized tests, sitting through data-oriented meetings, managing the no-credit Academy assignment, and participating in other non-instructional meetings and responsibilities. The class size of over 40 students compromised her value on giving individualized, personal attention to her students. The excessive numbers were especially burdensome with students who were not engaged with school, the ones who needed attention the most. The curriculum was scripted down to the vocabulary words she taught her students and the multiple-choice tests she was required to administer, leading Caitlin to say that "I felt I was nothing."

Caitlin's decision to resign prompted in her a number of emotional responses. She felt let down, disappointed, and deceived. Resigning made her feel like a failure and a quitter and left her feeling guilty that she had let down her university professors. The obstacles to happiness, however, were so powerful that she felt she could never become the teacher she envisioned in this setting. As a backup plan, she renewed her teaching certificate in case she decided to return to the classroom. But she left Bulloch HS without a solid employment plan or strong inclination to return to teaching eventually, frustrated in her developmental quest by the rigid contours and oppressive administrative weight of the county system.

Year 6: Gap Year at Health Spa

Caitlin secured a job in human relations in a spa that was a four-minute commute from her home and did not schedule her day according to bells, allowing her to take bathroom breaks when she needed them and not between classes. She enjoyed helping people and serving others, finding the parts of the job that involved interacting with and assisting people to be very fulfilling. She found herself less anxious to the point that she no longer cried about work. The job allowed her the sort of life outside work that teaching had denied her.

And yet this achievement of relative equilibrium left Caitlin feeling unchallenged and unfulfilled. She said,

After I got the hang of a new job, it wasn't challenging anymore. And I will say teaching, no matter how long you teach, is always challenging. It's always hard. There's never a day where you're like, "Damn, that was really easy." Even if everything goes well, there's always something that needs to be done. So, I just got bored. I didn't feel like I would be stimulated intellectually, and that was hard for me.

She missed working with teenagers and decided to return to teaching, applying for jobs and being hired at Davenport HS, a decision that, she hoped, would allow her the growth she sought through engaging with youth over a meaningful curriculum and developmentally appropriate instruction.

Year 7: Third Job, First Year at Davenport HS

Fall Semester, Year 7: "Last Chance Academy" Is "The Most Caring Place on Earth". Caitlin's time at Sidney County's Davenport HS (see Table 11 in Appendix A, available on the *RTE* website - <https://ncte.org/resources/journals/research-in-the-teaching-of-english/>) came within national and state contexts that she felt worked against the possibilities for teaching effectively. Such an environment, she said, "beats the learning out of kids" and creates apathy. Within this broadly discouraging educational environment, Caitlin found Davenport to be anomalous and welcome. It served as an untracked alternative school that emphasized credit recovery for students who had failed classes in prior semesters in the county's non-alternative schools. The students were roughly 40 percent Hispanic, 30 percent African American, and 30 percent white. Many were from families employed in the local poultry plants. These families were often itinerant in residence and in flux due to Immigration and Customs Enforcement raids and deportations. Davenport was known to many in the district as "Last Chance Academy."

Caitlin felt validated at Davenport HS because the administration respected her and trusted her to exercise her own judgment about what her students needed. The county, she said,

wants to be the most caring place on Earth. And our superintendent, who I truly respect and admire, which has never happened, got up and spoke to us on the first day of orientation. No notes, just truly off the cuff from his heart, and spoke about kids. He didn't talk about test scores. He didn't talk about, I mean, we of course discussed what good instruction looks like, what pedagogy should be, but he talked about students. And I had never been, I'd never been in an orientation where that was our primary concern.

The superintendent, she said, "loves kids" and backed up the faculty, making them feel supported. This ethos figured into the administration's reasons for hiring Caitlin and was a principal factor in her taking the job.

Caitlin especially valued the way in which the school allowed teachers to disagree with one another and with administrators. She said, "This school is

so different from anywhere I've ever been, that it was just immediate culture shock." The school's co-principals were a welcome part of this culture shock, with Caitlin relating that they said to her,

The relationship is the most important thing. You love your kids, you care about your kids. The test scores are going to come and go, our test scores at our school have never been high. When they come in, we know that these kids most likely aren't going to pass those state standardized tests, and that's okay. That's not our only objective.

Her alignment with the school was strong, even as she was occasionally out of step. Caitlin's main area of misalignment came in what she called her own "Type A" and "control freak" personality. The students' itinerant lives resulted in unstable attendance and enrollment, and the school did not require attendance as a concession to the students' demanding lives, which made planning difficult. The students often were not prepared for class or attentive to teachers, burdened by what Caitlin called "real-life concerns." Many of them lived in poverty; many had housing insecurity that left them living nomadic lives; some lived on their own; some worked opposite shifts from their parents and so had little direct parental supervision; some could not read at all or read at elementary school levels; some were teen parents who were able to place their children in the school's nursery so they could care for them during the school day; virtually all were behind in credits; most were recipients of free or reduced lunches; some had been recently incarcerated; and some needed to work full-time to support themselves and their relatives.

These factors often called for an empathic view that took into account the students' disengagement from school. Students rarely finished the classes they were originally enrolled in because they dropped out, transferred to another school, or had to work to support their families. Caitlin responded to these circumstances both affectively and structurally. She found herself drained from becoming attached to and responsible for students in need of her emotional support. Her relational stance toward students therefore had a downside of inviting fatigue and attendant burnout when engaging with the emotional labor of extending support as they navigated the challenges of their lives.

Liberated from standardization and testing, Caitlin was granted authority to determine what was best for her students and to design instruction to meet their needs. The sorts of obstacles she faced were generative more than discouraging, enabling her to deepen her understanding of how to teach relationally, including the perils of becoming too involved in her students' lives and thus experiencing a new form of emotional labor and exhaustion. Davenport provided, then, a setting in which Caitlin's development toward the identity she had projected for herself might be realized, with that identity modified by the challenges of caring so much that she became drained by the effort and with accommodations necessary to account for her students' life circumstances.

Much of this interview concerned the overall ethos of the school and district and the characteristics of Caitlin's students. She did summarize some of her English teaching, prefacing her review by restating a recurring refrain from the interviews, "I don't teach English, I teach kids," and saying:

I have three preps, but really I have like eight preps [because I teach each class differently]. But I teach multicultural literature, ninth-grade literature, and world literature. ... It's an EOC course [End of Course class with required exam]. There are standards. You teach *Romeo and Juliet*, you teach *To Kill a Mockingbird*. You teach whatever, you know, like the typical classics. My ninth graders read on a third-grade reading level. Some of them on a sixth-grade reading level. Again, some of them don't speak English. Some of them come from homes where their parents never read to them. Maybe their parents don't know how to read, you know? It's just, it's a totally different set of students than I've ever had before. So, I had to rethink the way I taught English, because you can't read *To Kill a Mockingbird* if you can't read a sentence. I mean, you can't write a research paper if you can't write a paragraph. Yeah. So my ninth-grade English class did not write a paper, because we learned how to write paragraphs. We learned how to construct a paragraph and do that well. And for me it was like, holy crap, what am I doing? But you, I mean, you can't, if you don't have the foundational building blocks, can't do those things. You just can't. And it's not because those kids, I don't ever, ever, ever want anybody to say, well, you don't have high expectations for your students. No, that's bullshit. I have, I have very high expectations for my students. And I believe that they can learn at high levels, but you can't go from third grade to ninth grade in two days. You just can't.

During this first semester at the school, Caitlin was largely concerned with adapting to this new context, one that was well aligned with her focus on relationships but whose students' lives required her to adjust her teaching to her students' academic readiness and availability to attend class. She thus faced the obstacle of teaching students who needed, she believed, "foundational building blocks" for literacy development along with caring and accessible adults, relying on her knowledge of instructional planning to provide them with sequences through which they built their literacy skills toward academic norms.

Caitlin was unavailable for an interview after the spring semester. We therefore jump ahead a year to the interview that followed the first semester of her second year at Davenport HS.

Year 8: Second Year at Davenport HS

Fall Semester, Year 8: The Challenges of Emotional Labor. In her second year at DHS (see Table 12 in Appendix A, available on the *RTE* website - <https://ncte.org/resources/journals/research-in-the-teaching-of-english/>), Caitlin taught ninth-grade English and world literature and was rewarded with a nomination by her colleagues for the school's Teacher of the Year award, which she later won. Caitlin continued to wrestle with how much care to extend

to her students, who placed emotional demands on her that she began to realize she couldn't take home with her. She felt good that she mattered to them but recognized that she could not play the role of their mother. She had originally felt a heavy emotional burden in carrying the weight of their lives, but she began to moderate the degree to which she took on their struggles. Caitlin got great emotional fulfillment from her students, however, and felt that with small classes of students with unrealized potential, she could make a difference at Davenport. Perhaps the greatest obstacle she faced was her own disposition and set of values, which produced a deep commitment to relational teaching that began to wear her down emotionally. Finding a work-life balance thus began to emerge for Caitlin as a critical element of her development of a teaching identity, especially as she and her husband began to plan their own family.

Year 8: Second Year at Davenport HS

Spring Semester, Year 8: Returning From Maternity Leave to Chaos. The next interview (see Table 13 in Appendix A, available on the *RTE* website - <https://ncte.org/resources/journals/research-in-the-teaching-of-english/>) covered a semester during which Caitlin returned from maternity leave. Caitlin continued to describe Davenport HS as the most accepting place she'd ever been, and she appreciated the administration and its effort to "do right" by the students. Caitlin described teaching as her calling, saying, "It is what I was made to do." She reported that the faculty viewed the administration as trusted, accessible, and respected. Her faculty, she felt, were there "for the right reasons," with several entering teaching as a second career undertaken for altruistic reasons.

Within this affirming environment, Caitlin returned from maternity leave to find her class in chaos. Her classes had been taught by a long-term substitute who, as reported to her by students and colleagues, had exhibited callous disregard for students. Caitlin acknowledged that she is "a little OCD" and "very organized," making any disruption difficult, and she felt that her classes had become a "circus" in which 70 percent of her students were failing. The substitute taught according to her own canonical literary interests and never developed a rapport with the students, often using sarcasm to control their behavior, and in the process demonstrating a lack of care that Caitlin felt they reciprocated by giving up on the substitute.

Caitlin considered her return to be a wake-up call, such that in the aftermath her commitment to teaching kids rather than the curriculum was confirmed. Caitlin wondered if some of the students who had dropped out during her maternity leave would have stayed had she been there to sustain the relationships. Caitlin's motherhood left her reevaluating her work-life balance. She felt conflicted between her love for her baby and her love for her job, and she was no longer willing to sacrifice the whole of her personal life for her work life

without compromising her fundamental dedication to providing them with care and understanding.

Caitlin's curricular latitude allowed her to assign high-interest literature such as Richard Connell's "The Most Dangerous Game," Roald Dahl's "The Landlady," part of *The Odyssey*, Sherman Alexie's *Absolute True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* (which she assigned before Alexie was revealed to have engaged repeatedly in sexual harassment), Ryan Red Corn's poem "Bad Indians," and Gary Soto's poem "Oranges First." She felt that such multicultural literature was flexible and well suited to her teaching and her students' interests, with themes that included race relations, popular culture, and current events.

Caitlin also undertook what we coded as reflective practice. When her students failed her class, she felt it was her responsibility to change her teaching rather than judge her kids to be failures. She said that if she thought her students didn't learn anything on a day, then it was her fault, not theirs. She reflected more broadly on her students' demographics, recognizing that she had never been hungry as a student, unlike the kids she taught. She needed to take into account the needs and cultures of her students, which she felt was especially important in a credit-recovery school where dropping out was always a possibility. The school's caring ethos valued this disposition, which Caitlin embraced to the point that the emotional labor of caring began to wear her down.

Spring Semester, Year 9: Tensions Between Personal Care and Academic Care. This interview (see Table 14 in Appendix A, available on the *RTE* website - <https://ncte.org/resources/journals/research-in-the-teaching-of-english/>) served as the closing interview of the longitudinal data collection. Caitlin had become increasingly concerned about her students' low literacy rates. Her sense of teaching success followed from her students' literacy development, realization of their human potential, and achievement of a high school diploma. Yet she felt frustrated by the fact that some of her 18-year-old students were reading on what she called a second-grade level, and she had little preparation for teaching such basic skills as sounding out words, given that her university reading course had been concerned with how to engage students who could already read with literature.

A major tension emerged as she wondered if the school's relational emphasis came at the expense of her students' development of life skills tied to literacy. She believed that people need to have "basic" skills such as grammar and paragraphing to have functional literacy. She felt a tension between raising her students' reading and writing levels and meeting the standards of the curriculum. She also felt torn between helping her students become successful citizens of their chosen or given worlds and helping them become literate for broader social participation in the opportunities of the world as she had experienced it.

Caitlin tried to engage students with literacy tasks by choosing texts and themes that resonated with their lives. She selected the contemporary Angie Thomas YAL novel *The Hate U Give* because she felt that students would find its

events and themes relevant to their lives. Caitlin reported that the novel enabled critical discussions of relevant social issues that were typically not taught in schools. When they would read it aloud daily in class, they often “begged” her to continue even after the bell rang. The story captured the poverty, drugs, gangs, family traditions, pressures, neighborhood environment, and lack of options experienced by many of her students. The students’ engagement with the novel fit with Caitlin’s priority on developing the human side of her students as her number-one priority, even as she had begun to fret over their underdeveloped literacy skills.

The data collection thus ended with Caitlin at several crossroads. She finally found a school where her values were aligned, in spite of broader mandates for testing and accountability. She retained her commitment to relational teaching while finding the students’ needs so great that she had to moderate her caring tendencies and seek better balance between home and school. She was able to teach according to the themes that she found resonated with her students’ experiences while realizing that she needed to modify her teaching to account for her students’ unpredictable attendance. She was happy at Davenport HS and respected her administrators, colleagues, and students, yet she was concerned that she was never doing quite enough to help her students develop the academic and workplace habits and skills she believed they needed to live satisfying lives beyond school.

Discussion

This study follows one high school English teacher through four school systems over the course of eight years of teaching, with one additional year away from the classroom. We trace her navigation of a variety of work conditions that both supported her efforts to become a relationship-oriented English teacher and nearly drove her out of the profession. We have termed these conditions “obstacles” that she faced across different dimensions of her teaching experiences.

Caitlin’s case provides evidence that learning to teach is indeed a twisting developmental path, if one whose destination might shift continually. Vygotsky (1987) made this point largely based on his clinical studies of children and youth. Smagorinsky et al. (2003; Smagorinsky, 2020) have applied this metaphor to adults’ developmental progression, with an emphasis on beginning teachers’ development within the conflictual contexts of teacher education and full-time teaching. This development comes about through the intersection of, on the one hand, preexisting beliefs, values, preparation, and practices; and on the other, obstacles presented in schools and how they are administered. These obstacles may be imposed from without when they involve other people, policies, and practices, and may emerge from personal contradictions following from competing values within one’s own conceptions.

As Caitlin’s experiences show, some obstacles produce stress so great that teachers leave the profession, at times temporarily, at times permanently. The

sorts of impediments that push teachers out of the classroom may appear in the form of distantly created policies and standardized curriculum and assessment that take teachers away from what they believe to be effective, student-centered teaching. They also may, as Caitlin experienced at her first full-time job, follow from an indecisive, chaotic policy and administrative environment where curriculum, instruction, and assessment continually shift and may be out of alignment with one another, causing fear and frustration among the faculty.

More local political obstacles may follow from different traditions serving as battle stations that pit teachers against one another and align some teachers with administrative demands and leave others in defensive, compromised positions within schools. When administrators and powerful or compliant faculty members aligned with them attempt to dominate how the subject of English is taught and to dominate insubordinate individuals to assert their power, a school can appear hostile and antagonistic toward those teachers whose beliefs are epistemologically different and whose careers are threatened by authoritarian enforcement of preferred practices.

The particularities of Caitlin's experiences are both unique to her and shared by the many teachers who have become disaffected with their careers during the decade of this study's data collection and into a new decade. This study helps clarify that obstacles are ever-present, some of which may induce productive growth and some so discouraging as to cause an exit from the teaching profession. Understanding what comprises a developmentally enhancing challenge and what represents a forbidding obstacle may help illuminate the problems that have produced the current crisis in teacher retention. If teaching is best undertaken by people who feel valued, educators benefit from recognizing the sorts of environments where challenges produce growth and not dead ends.

Ward (2022) reports that among the leading factors in teacher dissatisfaction and attrition is bad student behavior. Caitlin professed throughout the duration of the data collection that her students were the ones who kept her in the classroom, even as she was often concerned that the habits they learned from adults limited their academic growth. Rather, the most discouraging aspects of teaching to her followed from battles between adults at the local level and insensitive fiat from outside the building that placed barriers between her and her students.

A focus on one teacher cannot speak to the experiences of all teachers. Yet a case study may allow for limited generalizations to those whose traits and settings are similar to those of the focal participant. Many teachers are quitting the classroom and not returning. This study suggests reasons why teachers who are disposed toward the constructivist, student-centered values often promoted in teacher education programs find the conditions of teaching to be prohibitively oppressive. It also identifies productive tensions and obstacles that are less onerous and more conducive to growth, such as the tensions that Caitlin felt in her internal contradictions. These discrepant feelings and beliefs were

not resolved at the conclusion of the data collection yet were mitigated by the relational emphasis of the alternative school on whose faculty she remains, even amidst a broader crisis in teacher retention.

This school—without the prestige of other schools of her experience, without the status associated with high-achieving students, and also without the pressure to meet the demands of standardization and high-stakes assessments—finally provided a setting where she felt she could teach effectively and within the bounds of her values, carried out with students in need of care and nurturing. Even as she experienced personal stress over how to balance care for herself and her own family with care for students living under challenging circumstances, she found teaching in the alternative school to be fulfilling and worth persisting in. If creating schools that promote teachers' persistence is healthy for students and communities, then understanding these factors ought to inform how people in authority construct the environments in which education takes place.

NOTES

1. This interview took place before ungendered alternatives to “Latino” were in wide circulation.
2. We use the terms provided by the Public School Review and commonly used by schools in the state.
3. The district required college and career “academies” to ideally promote, according to its promotional materials, on-time graduation and student engagement that allow students to connect school learning and real-world responsibilities to equip them with tools for future success in college and career pathways considered high skill, high wage, or high need. In Caitlin's interviews, she described the academy class she taught on top of her 200 students as onerous and unproductive.

AUTHOR NOTE

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APPENDIX A

TABLE 1. Practicum and Student Teaching, Fall Semester Codes

UNIVERSITY COURSES in TEACHER EDUCATION	
ASSESSMENT (PROFESSOR GREENE)	
<p>Assessment Qualities: Assessment must be thoughtful, tied to what’s been taught; daily, not just on tests; involve a variety of formal assessment types used appropriately because one test does not evaluate all kids equally well; all kids are different and need different means of instruction and assessment (Stiggins)</p>	8

(Continued)

TABLE 1. (Continued)

UNIVERSITY COURSES in TEACHER EDUCATION	
Curriculum Standards: Compare state standards to CCSS, but use state standards because school uses them; standards are a necessary evil; state standards are inchoate until broken into segments; state standards as assessment guides for student work; state standards for student learning manifested in own teaching portfolios; standards chapter aligned with her beliefs about standardization; graduation/EOC tests not best means of assessing students' knowledge (Assessment prof, SL prof)	7
Practical Assessment Dilemmas: Course and field placement worked dialectically in assessment; question right of teachers to grade kids' work; hated at first (technical) but eventually felt useful; multiple choice quiz/test does not assess students' ability to apply knowledge, yet well-constructed multiple choice tests may have some value (Stiggins)	5
FIELD SUPERVISION & READING COURSE (TA: WANDA)	
Connections: Connect texts to everyday life; Rosenblatt helped connect classic literature to kids' interests via themes; begin reading with readers' interests, Freire recommends reading world before word, making connections	4
Engagement in Classroom Process: Journals for response to reading to promote engagement; student involvement in creating assessments to make them accountable for own learning; reading aloud can embarrass some kids; genuine conversation in classroom	4
Struggling Reader Pedagogy: Beers helped understand how to support struggling and gifted readers; Beers's methods for assessing struggling readers; learned to assess reading levels without invasiveness or public embarrassment	3
Differentiation: Vary books according to reading ability; wide range of reading abilities and interests among students; Beers taught differentiation and adapting lessons for diverse readers	3
Reflective Practice: Encourages self-reflection through questioning about teaching effectiveness; encourages the projection of a teaching identity by studying MTs	2
Care: Honest with feedback out of care for success; encouraging; nurturing; validating	2
YOUNG ADULT LITERATURE (TA: ADAM)	
Professor's Negative Example: "Abstract" thinking a problem of articulation and results in confusing instruction; class gets off topic due to lack of structure and lack of faculty cognitive discipline; did not hold students accountable so they didn't do the work; frustrated by having to figure out what the class expectations were; lack of class structure meant much assigned reading was not discussed, so Caitlin stopped reading it; vague expectations and structure	7
YAL Pedagogy: Establish YAL classroom library; kids value YAL but schools might not include them in the curriculum; learned how to value and use YAL; learned to help kids find appropriate YAL; learned to incorporate YAL into her classroom; philosophy positive and encouraging if highly abstract; YAL helps make connections with kids	7
TEACHING WRITING (TA: SHELY)	

(Continued)

TABLE 1. (Continued)

UNIVERSITY COURSES in TEACHER EDUCATION	
Expectations & Assessment: Expectations and assessment must match; high expectations in relation to belief that all kids can achieve; articulate for self and students why they are doing an assignment; rubrics manifest expectations and are hard to develop; assessing creativity is problematic	4
Relationships: Loves her students; fun but businesslike	2
Pedagogy: Teacher does assignment as model for students and to demonstrate its utility; make all assignments meaningful and useful so kids want to do them	2
FIELD PLACEMENT (TA: MELANIE)	
Reflective Practice: Maintained reflective blog that documented her teaching and got feedback from 2 TAs	2
ACROSS CLASSES	
Lesson planning	1
Multi-genre tied to learning styles through project options	1
FIELD EXPERIENCES IN TEACHER EDUCATION	
CONTEXT	
School Characteristics: 75 percent graduation rate; biggest class size of 35; 13 special ed; rural but not small (1400 students); county's only HS; NI-5 status threatens teachers into accountability fears; building old and facilities outdated; few gifted and AP courses; limited curriculum	7
Standards: Sees need and role for standards in planning and assessment; standards affect teaching decisions; standards produce need for data teams to meet daily to study student progress via pre/post comparisons; tension between need for standards and need to address diversity and individuality	5
Classroom/Curriculum Factors: Co-taught class with SPED teacher in accommodating, pleasant, and productive ways; curriculum thematic; survival unit using nonfiction texts fit; November Unit fit within ninth grade curriculum nonfiction requirement but time constraints of November Unit limited teaching and learning	4
Contrastive Experiences: Caitlin's county of origin had over 20 HSs, many enormous, and white/high SES students	2
MENTOR TEACHER	
Dispositions: A loner/introvert who took on a student teacher, why?; in 20s yet already jaded; lacks charisma and openness; not always attuned to the culture of the classroom; smart but not always in tune with kids	6
Pedagogy: Negative: Assigns busywork; claims kids like easy assignments; likes worksheets; reads to kids; assigns no homework; Caitlin disapproves; teaches according to his preferences more than kids'	4
Mentoring: Does not especially shape Caitlin's teaching, which she thinks is good because they're so different; gives feedback but little encouragement; provides little guidance or positive reinforcement; suggests improvements that Caitlin doesn't always agree with	4

(Continued)

TABLE 1. (Continued)

UNIVERSITY COURSES in TEACHER EDUCATION	
Pedagogy: Positive: Connects kids’ lives to literature; uses YouTube videos, music to connect to kids	2
Context: Constrained by departmental pressures and policies	1
STUDENTS	
Organization & Structure: Ninth graders lack responsibility and need structure; importance of clarity and structure in assignments and expectations; ninth graders not ready for literature circles; choice and fun are available within structured teaching	4
Relationships: Relationship with students most important part of job; students won’t care if they can’t relate literature to their lives; British literature is hard for kids to understand and connect with	4
Critical Perspective: Unfathomable how kids get to HS without reading, suggests teachers are to blame; kids lack educational resources at home, both rudimentary and electronic	3
PERSONAL PROJECTIONS, DISPOSITIONS, AND EXPERIENCES	
PROJECTED TEACHER IDENTITY	
Relationships: Relationships require caring about students; greets kids at door; encouraging; makes kids feel wanted; interested in kids as people; knows and loves kids on individual basis; knows students personally; takes interest in each one’s life; invested time in student learning; created cohort community; taught how teaching is hard but rewarding; learned where diverse kids come from [pos. ex. , SL prof, TA1 /Field Placement, TA3 Reading, Assessment prof, ninth grade English teacher, SGA advisor, Teacher Ed faculty, Teachers (general)]	10
Expectations & Assessment: Make expectations clear; structure classroom clearly yet flexibly so students understand process and expectations; clear, detailed instructions reduces questions for clarification and student stress; nice but means business; holds students accountable by disappointment in lesser efforts [pos. ex. , Assessment prof, 9th grade English teacher, TA3 Reading; neg. ex. , TA2 YAL]	9
Pedagogy: Book Club approach, interactive classroom; useful assignments; bridge gap between YAL & classics; connect lit to kids via outside world; will help kids relate literature to lives; incorporate pop culture into classroom [pos. ex. , SL Prof, TA3 Reading, SGA advisor]	5
Organization & Structure: Organization and planning can be insensitive to some kids’ needs; organization and differentiation can come in conflict; disorganized classes are frustrating; highly structured class; keep class on pace with reminders; organized class with agenda [pos. ex. , Assessment prof; neg. ex. , British literature Prof from Y3]	4
Engagement: Relates to students by recalling boredom over uneducational worksheets; teacher reads all texts to students, who never read [neg. ex. , MT]	2
Outlook: Fresh and unjaded; always learning about teaching and getting doctorate to learn more [pos. ex. , SGA advisor]	2
PERSONAL DISPOSITION	

(Continued)

TABLE 1. (Continued)

UNIVERSITY COURSES in TEACHER EDUCATION	
Pedagogy: Values enjoyment as part of education; believes all schoolwork should be meaningful; believes in homework to keep brain active outside school	3
Critical Perspective: Not reflective by nature because it means admitting mistakes; tends to question educational practices of MT and other mentors	2
Organization & Structure: Self-diagnosed obsessive-compulsiveness produces need for structure; values structure while wishing for more innovative and flexible thinking	2
Expectations & Assessment: Responds well to clear and high expectations and strives to meet them	1
EXPERIENCES AS STUDENT IN HIGH SCHOOL	
Critical Perspective: Affluent HS she attended didn't emphasize standards because students met them anyhow, so validity never questioned; difference between that and site of student teaching	3
Expectations & Assessment: Athletics highlights need for explicit feedback and expectations because of immediate corporal response	2

TABLE 2. Student Teaching, Spring Semester Codes

STUDENT TEACHING: PEOPLE	
ADMINISTRATION	
Relationships: Principal's value on care allowed Caitlin to have relationships with students she didn't teach; principal cared about students and staff; principal created "family home kind of environment"; principal fostered community with "small school rural vibe"; principal involved with students	5
Curriculum & Instruction: Principal demands standardized instruction across all grade-level student; British literature required for graduation; British literature taught chronologically; tied to standardized assessment; principal may quiz students on which standards teachers are teaching	5
Faculty Engagement: Principal involved with staff; weekly meetings; principal made Caitlin feel she was a part of something	2
FIELD SUPERVISOR (TA: WANDA)	
Critique: Criticism not personal and so supported Caitlin's ego; criticisms designed to help Caitlin generate alternatives; criticisms offered gently and supportively; identified teaching behaviors (e.g., distracting students) Caitlin wouldn't have noticed; Caitlin learned from reflecting on observation feedback; provided encouragement not available from MT	6
MENTOR TEACHER	
Mentoring: Provided critique but little encouragement; criticized Caitlin in front of kids; has ultimate authority in Caitlin's classroom; greater affiliation with MT now than before because they were aligned against the administrative orientation to classics	4
Curriculum: Gave assignments above regular track kids' heads without scaffolding their learning; assumed kids shared his values when giving	3

(Continued)

TABLE 2. (Continued)

STUDENT TEACHING: PEOPLE	
assignments; MT compatible with pop culture and other modern connections to texts	
Relationships: Intelligent loner who related poorly to kids; intimidated students with correction; dry sarcastic humor	3
SCHOOL FACULTY	
Tensions: Tensions exacerbated by need for absolute agreement in planning for alignment; varied teaching styles incompatible with imperative for standard teaching; “some people” disapprove of using pop culture because it’s “not high-end” culture; collaborative planning difficult because of generational/experiential differences (old-school vs. new-school [pop culture] approaches); goal-setting became competitive over pass rates; ninth-grade faculty meetings tricky and a mess because alignment was required among people with profound disagreements (different from DH going own way in twelfth grade); alignment for pre/posttesting complicated by differing definitions of literary elements (e.g., soliloquy); department head’s emphasis on classics at odds with Caitlin & MT’s value on pop culture and relevance; department head has latitude to go own way when differing from team, against mandate for alignment within grade level instruction	8
Collaboration: 5 planning meetings per week (2 for ninth, 3 for twelfth grades); collaborative planning approach designed to produce instructional uniformity	2
STUDENTS	
Demographics: Rural school of 1,400 students; 90 percent white, 10 Black students in Caitlin’s 4 classes, few Asians and Hispanics in whole school; non-affluent agricultural community; obvious which students had money, which didn’t; students of color least affluent	5
Graduation: Graduation rate 78 percent; diploma increasingly necessary for work; increasingly recognize the need for HS diploma; principal emphasizes graduation; some teachers think graduation is too low a standard for kids	5
Post-Graduate Destinations: Most students not college-bound; postsecondary ed mostly juco or vocational school; postsecondary destination often blue-collar jobs; postsecondary ed for some via athletic scholarships	4
Attitudes Toward Curriculum & Instruction: Can text all day but hate writing; not fond of British literature; pop culture junkies	3
STUDENT TEACHING: EXTERNAL MANDATES & INFLUENCES	
NATIONAL	
AYP Status: NI5 status produces imperative for data management; NI5 status produces push for new measures of student “achievement”; NI5 status requires pre/post-test grading for every unit, plus unit test at end, requiring teachers to meet demands of two masters; NI5 status requires pre/post-test grading via Scantron multiple-choice tests	4
Accreditation: Accreditation mandates produce data team meetings on top of planning meetings (3 per week); accreditation mandates require pre/post tests and frequent testing; teachers required to set 4 goals and meet 2, with no evident consequences	3

(Continued)

TABLE 2. (Continued)

STUDENT TEACHING: PEOPLE	
REGIONAL ACCREDITATION AGENCY	
Accountability: Teachers perform for assessors; MT policed Caitlin on assessment performance; police teachers' teaching to standards; all teaching must include essential question linked to lesson based on standards; teachers self-police essential questions when assessors not around (panopticon)	5
PERSONAL DISPOSITION	
RELATIONSHIPS	
Personal Connections: Developed personal relationships with students by meeting them halfway; is personal and "bubbly" and welcomes students; emphasizes to kids that they are in it together; felt she'd "fostered" students and felt worried about turning them back over to the MT; initially fearful at CCHS over challenges of connecting with kids there; comfortable with kids different from herself and learns that she can connect with them; unconditional, nonjudgmental love and care as foundations for understanding kids to teach them better	8
Empathy: Honest with kids about difficulties of engaging affectively with old literature; understands what kids want out of school and post-school life	2
TEACHING IDENTITY	
Self as Learner: Positions self as learner about kids, especially those from different backgrounds from her own; self-described "involved learner" who needs learning to be relevant; visual learner, must be able to see things	4
Persona: Teachers need to be true to "own teacher persona"	1
ORIENTATION TO CURRICULUM	
Relevance: Caitlin had to fake it to make it while teaching British literature to engage students; classics irrelevant to modern kids; classics (1800s British literature) require modern supplements to be relevant; notes what interests kids and builds on it with pop culture; found archetypal correlates between old British literature and current pop culture (knight in <i>Don Quixote</i> /Shrek); used contemporary humor to help kids see humor in old literature; British literature difficult to teach so she found ways she could like it and translated it into pedagogy; used multimodal media (<i>Onion</i> , SNL, YouTube) for current examples; used news clippings/current events to make learning relevant; resistance between DH and some faculty over classical emphasis vs. contemporary/relational emphasis (valuing caring relationships with students); trial-and-error approach to making class participatory	16
Accommodation to Curriculum: To graduate you need to study things you hate and that are hard; questions curriculum while complying (British literature requirement); Caitlin took AP, not British literature, as a senior and doesn't think it should be required; teaching load of 2 freshman, 2 British literature preps	4
Testing: Caitlin critical of burdensome demands and waste of endless testing and bureaucratic data management	3
CAITLIN'S K-12 EXPERIENCES	

(Continued)

TABLE 2. (Continued)

STUDENT TEACHING: PEOPLE	
School Setting: Student in a large suburban school of 3000 students; Caitlin's HS more diverse than PCHS; Caitlin's HS much larger than PCHS	3
9TH Grade English Teacher (Ms. Walsh): Encouraged Caitlin to be a teacher due to her interpersonal skills; stayed emotionally connected and supportive with Caitlin through college	2
Elementary Teacher: Quirky in a good way	1
REFLECTIONS ON UNIVERSITY TEACHER EDUCATION COURSES DURING STUDENT TEACHING	
YOUNG ADULT LITERATURE (TA: ADAM)	
Teaching Style: Didn't mesh in teaching and learning styles; she had to learn his learning style to benefit from the class	2
Curriculum Design: YAL appeals to kids and provides teaching opportunities	1
TEACHING WRITING (TA: SHELLY)	
Curriculum Design: Align instruction with assessment; break writing into smaller activities so it's not overwhelming; have rationale for all teaching decisions	3
Teaching Style: Connect personally and instructionally with Caitlin; safe and fun classroom environment	2
Pedagogy: Teaching method of constructing group narrative through alternating sentences	1
READING COURSE (TA: WANDA)	
Pedagogy: "Dialogic" classroom in which students are accountable and have a say in own learning and all students are equal members; "dialogic" conception from theory and research, which Caitlin finds authoritative	2
Curriculum Design: Research-based knowledge provides a rationale for teaching decisions that is authoritative, more so than testimonies from experience	1
SEMINAR (TA: MELANIE)	
Role in Program: ST Seminar for "decompression" "to keep us sane and check in"; influence recedes during student teaching because they only met every couple of weeks	2
SERVICE LEARNING (PRE-PROGRAM ELECTIVE) (TENURED PROF)	
Relationships: Differences in kids took Caitlin out of her comfort zone; hard exteriors, difficult to penetrate; poverty and circumstances different from Caitlin's life experiences	3
Teaching Style: Developed personal relationships with students	1
TEACHER ED FACULTY (GENERAL)	
Relationships: Cared about TCs as people; close-knit cohort with TCs and profs; supported TCs emotionally with encouragement; infuse TCs with trust and confidence	3
Curriculum Design: Emphasize standards to guide teaching	1
Pedagogy: Learned instructional strategies from each; discourage cookie-cutter teaching and encourage individuality true to self	2

TABLE 3. Year 1 at Argos HS, Fall Semester Codes

PERSONAL BELIEFS	
High expectations produce rigor and relevancy and juices students' motivation and engagement, yet her inexperience makes rigor difficult to assess	3
Not a Classics Nazi because they are often not relevant to kids and mainly allow for teaching about literary elements; pop culture perks kids up	2
APPRENTICESHIP OF OBSERVATION	
Many high school teachers did not teach her how to make class relevant, interesting, fresh, inspiring	1
High-level English classes taught by smart teachers in active and engaging ways, inspired Caitlin to be a teacher	2
SCHOOL SETTING	
OBSERVATION	
ADMINISTRATIVE	
<i>Evaluative Criteria</i>	
Rubric requiring wait time	1
Looking for order and structure in classroom management; administrators might interpret her openness as disarray	3
Useless nitpicky observations focused on superficial and irrelevant organizational issues (word wall)	1
State in process of changing teacher eval rubrics so Caitlin got different criteria with each observation	1
<i>Problematic Issues in Evaluation</i>	
Principal & assistant principal observe occasionally; small sample too limited to gauge her overall effectiveness	2
Kids perform for observation so it's not accurate as sample	1
Principal & assistant principal feedback impersonal and perfunctory rather than conversational and useful	1
Uncertainty and anxiety among veterans over new means of assessment and relation to merit pay	2
Ideally, Caitlin likes being observed and given feedback but problems compromise value of evaluation	1
OFFICIAL MENTOR TEACHER	
Oversees formal, state-mandated, two-year teacher eval for Caitlin; 5 hour-long observations followed by typed observation notes that Caitlin reflects on, whole package submitted to administration; evaluation process viewed by Caitlin as bureaucratic requirement, feedback generally unhelpful; lacks conversation about teaching she got from Wanda during student teaching observations, yet good personal relationship with Caitlin	6
CURRICULUM	
COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS	

(Continued)

TABLE 3. (Continued)

PERSONAL BELIEFS	
Transition to CCSS: Adopted by state, transition from old standards to CCSS requires staff development for veteran teachers new and resistant to CCSS that Caitlin finds unnecessary because she’s already acculturated to them during student teaching; interpret CCSS for other subjects because English regarded as foundational; Caitlin ignores state standards to DH’s displeasure	10
Problems: Uncertainty over how students will be tested after transition to CCSS; graduation writing test is not aligned with CCSS	2
Ventriloquating Discourse of CCSS: Values application over memorization; applies curriculum to life skills, based on writing and research requirements; expects more of students; tests require explanation of multiple-choice answers	6
INSTRUCTIONAL UNITS	
Unofficial Mentor Teacher	
Quality Exemplar: Relies on unofficial mentor for curriculum and ideas like tying Vietnam era songs to contemporary issues; daring, picks controversial texts in conservative community; hands-on; Caitlin meshes well with her and considers her a superhero	6
Bless Me, Ultima	
Controversy: Controversial because of Catholicism, Native American spirituality, voodoo, and witchcraft require parent permission, yet school’s latitude allows her decision-making in spite of controversy	3
The Things They Carried (with Unofficial Mentor Teacher)	
Appeal and Risk: Caitlin and kids loved it; themes, language, violence make it risky for tenth grade	2
Research Component: Required research project component meets CCSS research emphasis; integrated with research requirement including drafting and peer editing; evaluating source reliability without plagiarizing is a research and life skill; scaffolding research more for regular than honors-level students	7
SCHOOL CHARACTERISTICS	
DEMOGRAPHICS	
Religion: Caitlin loved rural conservative Southern Baptist students without sharing their beliefs such as questioning Catholicism as non-Christian	4
Parochialism: Most faculty from the area, many from the school itself	1
Racial Composition: School virtually all white, with wealth extremes weighted to less affluent; segregation makes other district HS more racially diverse	3
SIZE	
Enrollment: Smaller than student teaching site and much smaller than the suburban HS Caitlin attended; 600 students; Caitlin teaches 70 percent of all tenth graders; small size allows Caitlin to know her students and others in the school and produced tight-knit community	6
PEDAGOGY	
Classroom Conduct/Environment: Messy, loud, busy, respectful kids sit where and how they want if working; open-ended yet orderly	3

(Continued)

TABLE 3. (Continued)

PERSONAL BELIEFS	
Engaged Student: Active; enabled by choice of where/how to be while reading	3
TEACHER EDUCATION COURSES	
Textual Choices: Gave her confidence and methods for teaching outside the classics; learned that YAL can teach same themes as classics; important to connect between contemporary social themes and older social themes/events; perspective on relevance of texts unavailable in other TE programs/colleges	4
Relevance: Learned to inspire students to care about learning; teach beyond independent reading and questions; teach in interesting and exciting ways; teach so learning is fresh and not outdated; teach what is relevant to kids; students must see usefulness for teaching to be relevant, real, and worth caring about	5
Sustained Relationships: Maintained relationships with some faculty; one TA especially helpful even after graduation	2
Instructional Modeling: Taught by experienced HS teachers who prepared her exceptionally well for teaching compared to other beginning teachers; peer editing of lessons model for peer editing in first job; wait time emphasized	4

TABLE 4. Year 1 at Argos HS, Spring Semester Codes

CONTEXTS	
UNIVERSITY PROGRAM’S ABIDING INFLUENCE	
Caitlin’s Fit: Caitlin sees self as good fit with university program; university program “put theories and pedagogy and philosophies behind who I think I already was”; believes that program fostered beliefs she held prior to entry—student-centered education, students should have choice, students aren’t numbers, monitor and differentiate and do things and meet your students’ needs.	3
Philosophy: No governing epistemology or umbrella philosophy Caitlin could name; university program’s emphasis on people’s humanity goes against core foundations of US education system and numeric approach	3
Student-Centered Approach: Student choice emphasized across coursework; student-involvement in decision-making (type of assessment, what to read, how to conduct class); TA Shelly emphasized that persuasive writing needs to be on topics kids care about; student-centered emphasis elided attention to classroom management and gave no tools	4
SCHOOL & COMMUNITY CONTEXTS	
Community Context: Low commerce, high drug/alcohol use, high teen pregnancy rates, no movie theater or bowling alley; politically and religiously conservative; teachers and students (not Caitlin) all go to same church; white, rural low SES mill town; kids rarely leave their community so can be resistant to other perspectives; conservative religious/political values limit discussion topics and reading assignments; students do not know any Jewish people	7
Teaching Assignment: 4 CP English 2 (sophomore), 1 English 3 (juniors)	1

(Continued)

TABLE 4. (Continued)

CONTEXTS	
<p>Testing/Accountability Context: No state exams or standardized tests for junior English; exit exam requires persuasive writing that can be taught through things they want to persuade you of; five-paragraph theme required for standardized testing; HS Assessment Program has writing component; tests aren't too hard because low pass rates would reflect poorly on school</p>	5
PERSONAL FACTORS COMPLICATING TEACHING	
<p>Wedding Planning and Other Duties: Kids facetiously blamed Caitlin's moods on wedding planning; married in June 2013; personal and professional lives intertwined; Y1 teaching compounded by wedding planning, cheerleading coach duties, home purchase</p>	4
CAITLIN'S PERSONAL CHARACTERISTICS	
POSITIONING AS TEACHER	
<p>Outsider Status: An outsider because she doesn't profess a Christian life; believes her intersectional identities should not matter in her teaching; never felt liberal before moving to this conservative community; wants to connect to kids but feels rejected to the point of wanting to quit</p>	4
TEACHER DISPOSITION	
<p>Traits: Wanted to be teacher early in life; her own passion about books creates passion for them in students; Caitlin considers self a control freak; Caitlin not a disciplinarian at heart</p>	4
CAITLIN'S PERCEPTIONS OF HER STUDENTS AS LEARNERS	
<p>Expanding Students' Horizons: People (students) are products of their environments in often limiting ways; G&T teacher should expose kids of parochial socialization to new experiences and perspectives because otherwise they'll never get them; English should help students learn about themselves and being a human being in their community, not about answering questions in the textbook; kids, not subject, are the focus and way to impact the community</p>	5
<p>Student Investment: When kids are invested they care about learning more than grades; student choice of materials makes them, not her, responsible for their enjoyment; student learning should be realized in a physical product representing achievement and accomplishment; hopes to instill love of reading and writing rather than being a "Nazi" about any one part of the curriculum; involving students in decision-making promotes investment and engagement and puts kids in charge of their own learning; instruction designed to get kids to believe in themselves and that they can do things they couldn't do before (e.g., junior project); connections to text produce emotional response, response from kids produces emotional response</p>	7
TEACHING PRACTICE	
STRUCTURAL & ADMINISTRATIVE FACTORS	
<p>Schoolwide Structure: Block schedule designed for English taken in one semester with 90-minute classes, which she feels are too long; kids tested at end of year; kids take English first semester and Caitlin is accountable for their scores; system can be supportive while people can break you; administration valued her test prep instruction, but Caitlin hated herself for it; administrators</p>	13

(Continued)

TABLE 4. (Continued)

CONTEXTS	
made “idle threats” to get her to focus on test prep; Caitlin needs to keep quiet on school politics when she feels like an outsider; G&T certification workshop; colleagues and administrators can crush your spirit; block schedule changes enrollment at semester disruptively; American literature in one semester on block schedule not possible to cover; high test scores produce job security even as Caitlin believes they’re not important; wants to make a daily difference but can’t because of excessive conflicting demands	
Curricular Structure: Taught chronologically in the textbook; Caitlin isn’t a fan; no tests means latitude, yet constrained by textbook’s chronological approach; collection project allowed in-depth investigation of topics thought most important; collection project done in pairs yet flexibility available; collection project organized around timeline topics, e.g., Puritan poetry, Founding Fathers, ravages of war; junior project constrains time for collection project; junior project required as prep for senior project; include Native American myth and contemporary authors to show they still have a voice and it’s different	8
STUDENT FACTORS	
Relevancy & Student Choice: Collection project involved kids choosing topics, researching them, and teaching the class; she and colleague used “time period collections” that kids individually researched and taught to the class; a required curriculum can be taught so that kids buy into it through materials they find relevant; Caitlin’s teaching concerns did not always map onto students’ learning goals; Caitlin wants to connect with kids whose socialization might be at odds with hers; making argumentation fun and funny can lead to good writing instruction; memoir writing helps teachers know kids’ personal lives and feelings; pop culture can be a source of material for teaching about figurative language; relevant topics can only be decided by kids, not teachers; finding connections with old literature because relevant connections are the only way kids will care about their reading; finding relevant connection with early American literature; resolving tension between curricular focus on texts and Caitlin’s focus on kids	12
Maturity & Human Development: How to train students to exercise choice when they’ve been socialized 9–10 years into passive roles; tenth graders not ready for satire; twelfth graders are; tenth graders not ready for social issues (propaganda); American literature is her niche; she and her students connect with the literature; they are awakening to social and political surroundings; having kids historicize literature in collections project teaches them how the evolution of literature reflects the evolution of America literature “shapes us” and “becomes who we are”	5
Management: Not prepared to handle 25 rowdy teenagers; rowdy classrooms lead to less learning; wants to blame teaching challenges on “crazy stinking kiddos” second semester but accepts responsibility; first semester kids more intelligent and motivated so required test prep; semester 1 students learned more; semester 2 students got better test scores	5
Student Accountability: Accountability helped “slackers” feel guilty about delivering late; at first was punitive (answer questions in book) when collection project students were unprepared, felt guilty later but angry and betrayed at	4

(Continued)

TABLE 4. (Continued)

CONTEXTS	
the time; collection project allowed for accountability through due dates, yet some procrastinated; Caitlin needed backup plans to fill space when collection project students weren't prepared	
INSTRUCTIONAL FACTORS	
Initial Reliance on Mentors: Project developed by friend/colleague, borrowed by Caitlin; chalk talk & freewrite (from mentor teacher); first semester borrowed colleague's curriculum; second semester modified plans to suit own style	4
Sequencing & Scaffolding: Break large research project into small manageable chunks done one step at a time [earlier said learned from TA Shelly]; better plans don't produce better reception among students; kids can learn initially through current events and issues, then link that understanding to historical periods; order of sequencing texts can produce greater and lesser empathy	4
Value of Teaching Experience: Repeating preparation allows for reflection, improvement, and growth; the more you teach the better you find your niche and that of kids	2

TABLE 5. Argos HS, Year 2, Fall Semester Codes

PRIOR EXPERIENCES	
UNIVERSITY PROGRAM'S ABIDING INFLUENCE	
TA Shelly: [writing, emotional support] Affinity with both writing and Shelly made Shelly greatest influence; emphasized need for student buy-in during writing instruction; Caitlin values writing so Shelly's class was especially important to her; modeled humor as key teacher stance; shared "sarcasm" or ironic wit; source of many writing pedagogy practices; still calls Shelly when she's having difficulty; taught Caitlin techniques for writing instruction; taught ways of making writing for assessment more authentic	9
Overall Teacher Ed Program: Effective with teaching Caitlin to teach; more rigorous than those in her new state; provided her the models she bases her teaching on; source of effective teaching practices; year-long placement advantageous in starting new job	5
TA DAWN: Helped reignite love of YAL; taught Caitlin how to teach to make personal connections with texts; teacher should be guide on the side	3
TA ADAM: Taught Caitlin how to teach to make personal connections with YAL	1
LIFE & EDUCATION	
Own Education: Great HS teachers who helped overcome student apathy toward end of HS	2
Own Life: Recall of how she improved her foul shooting as a HS basketball player; writing important way to express herself and process feelings	2
DECISION-MAKING PROCESS	
MENTORS	

(Continued)

TABLE 5. (Continued)

PRIOR EXPERIENCES	
Mentor-Provided Resources: Provided worksheet on narrative perspective; worksheet for mapping characters' relationships and chronology of multiple-narrator story; worksheet solely focused on protagonist's trajectory	3
Moving Toward Independence: In Y2 is becoming more her own teacher and less in survival mode through borrowing curricula; freedom to make instructional decisions independent of mentor guidance; world lit curriculum derived from colleagues and adapted	3
DECISIONS WITHIN CURRICULAR LATITUDE	
Curricular Adaptation: Latitude allows her to develop into the teacher she wants to be; culminating assignment involving research on US states possibly visited by protagonist following novel's conclusion to produce persuasive research report; chose YAL novel <i>Whirligig</i> (because it fit with <i>Night</i> , per prior interview); book with nonlinear plot and multiple narrators used to break kids out of comfort zone; strategic instruction in narrative perspective; taught formal language concerning narrative perspective prior to reading; might teach Shakespeare to other types of students, but not hers; would not teach her students Shakespeare if given a choice	8
Relevance & Engagement: Make projects real-life-like to promote excitement and engagement; competition is fun and not everyone wins; Caitlin anticipates including competitive dimension to <i>Whirligig</i> travel project as students role-play being travel agents persuading a client to go to a destination	3
Departmental Structures: Curriculum not mandated; teachers should not teach texts taught by teachers in other grade levels; textbook provided but Caitlin doesn't use it; has freedom to choose texts within broad curricular structure; has latitude to slow down instruction in complex novel	4
Delegating Authority: In Yearbook Caitlin is a guide/facilitator who delegates responsibility, oversees work, ideally doesn't do the work (an ideal not realized); in Yearbook Caitlin oversees producing a product, still hands-on; boss/employee relationship with Yearbook staff where Caitlin delegates responsibilities and teaches how to do them; in contrast to Yearbook, wants students to be in charge of own learning, not force them to learn, even as she maintains oversight rights and responsibilities & in World lit Caitlin does not delegate as much as in Yearbook	5
Care: Good teachers care about students and find ways to meet their needs; Caitlin loves kids as motive for teaching; humor is an important dimension of classrooms; Caitlin believes kids will need to write the rest of their lives so should learn how in English class	4
Student Disengagement: Kids have been socialized in school to hate English; student boredom and disengagement hurt her and invalidate her teaching; wants to know source of students' disengagement so she can adjust her teaching; even writing test prep can be enjoyable and useful	4
REFLECTIVE PRACTICE	
Soliciting Student Feedback on Teaching: Surveyed students on their perception of a project; surveyed students on their perception of her as	6

(Continued)

TABLE 5. (Continued)

PRIOR EXPERIENCES	
a different sort of teacher; surveys students’ interests and engagement periodically to adjust instruction and evaluate own teaching; tells students she’s learning from them as much as they from her, so needs their feedback so they enjoy class; students said they liked competitive games so she developed a competitive assignment; Caitlin’s students motivate her curriculum development	
Caitlin’s Evaluation of Effects of Her Teaching: All good teachers monitor students’ academic development; <i>Whirligig</i> travel project produced trivial reports, Caitlin rethinking it; revises project to include competitive dimension so students buy in (important factor to her)	3
STRUCTURAL AND ADMINISTRATIVE FACTORS	
COMMON CORE STATE CURRICULUM SHIFTS FOR FOLLOWING YEAR	
CCSS and Instructional Freedom: CCSS may give Caitlin less instructional freedom than in the past; CCSS will restrict instructional freedom and produce uniformity across teachers; concern that CCSS will force decisions not relevant to students; not oriented to specific texts but standards specifying a linear progression of text complexity; prior to CCSS she has instructional freedom, fears CCSS will take decisions out of her hands; complex texts are measurable [ventriloquating CCSS discourse] and can be sequenced for increasing complexity; mandates of standardized tests related to CCSS shift	7
CCSS Professional Development: 50–60 percent of professional development meetings related to CCSS shift; shift to CCSS requires meetings with math and English faculties to anticipate CCSS changes; “brainwashing” produced through constant CCSS language (complex texts) preparation both during student teaching and now on the job; professional development disassociated from Caitlin as person or educator and from her students	4
TECHNOLOGY	
Faculty Support: Inservicing for tech-mediated education	1
Resource Constraints: Schools tell teachers there’s little money available to support teaching or pay raises, though the district did invest in iPads; Caitlin uses limited tech—three computers and some laptops that don’t always work—to produce yearbook; wireless network expanded to allow more internet activity; school not tech progressive yet has computers, laptop carts to check out, and computer labs, yet “not a very progressive district”	4
Social Concerns: Caitlin recognizes benefits of smartphones but also collects them if kids are using them inappropriately; kids can use devices in class if teacher approves; school concerned what kids will access with tech; teachers lack access to YouTube, which Caitlin feels shows lack of trust in their decision-making	4
DATA & ATTENDANT BUREAUCRACY	
Futility of Data Demand; Deprofessionalization Effects: School is data driven in all realms; teachers required to submit monthly reflections on an assessment and how students performed to produce a “growth” chart; feels judgment is distrusted by administration that requires burdensome	12

(Continued)

TABLE 5. (Continued)

PRIOR EXPERIENCES	
paperwork; feels she knows how to assess her own teaching but still must be accountable in ways she finds questionable; data substitute for teacher judgment about students' academic progress and at-riskness; knows how to assess her teaching without required reflective motions; Caitlin jaded in Y2 over requirements to collect and analyze data that nobody ever looks at; has strong opinions that others might not appreciate; Caitlin required to do monthly summative assessment of students (unit test, project), which she must reflect on to evaluate the assessment; yet admin doesn't read them; good teachers don't need data charts to track formative assessments and don't belong in the business if they can't	
Disassociation of Data and Teaching/Learning: Data serve CYA purpose more than teaching and learning; education very bureaucratic, with documentation serving to CYA; faults assessment when it's not meaningful to students; bureaucratic paperwork takes time that she could spend on planning; Caitlin must teach to the tenth grade five-paragraph writing test without thinking it's good teaching; data analysis not concerned with caring for students' well-being but with test scores; disagrees with accountability imperative while believing teachers should be accountable	7
Data Addressing At-Risk Students: Response to Intervention system for at-risk students; RTI interventions required for students so they pass standardized tests; at-riskness identified by teachers according to factors including ethnicity, gender, free/reduced lunch, test scores, discipline record, attendance	3

TABLE 6. Argos HS, Year 2, Spring Semester Codes

RELEVANCE AND ENGAGEMENT	
Student-Centered Practices: Caitlin switches up texts based on what works for each group of students; personal connections prerequisite to understanding literature; Caitlin focuses on students, desire for students to enjoy learning through a relevant curriculum, instructional value beyond classroom via a focus on real-world skills and critical thinking; Caitlin varies her curriculum across semesters to be responsive to each particular group of students; Caitlin lets her students read her college writing to get to know her better; Caitlin's departmental faction can teach both classics and YA via an engaging curriculum that students can connect to	7
Instructional Materials: Caitlin finds her own texts and resources at her own expense (she exceeded her \$250 supply allowance and had to buy her own paper); not bound to a textbook, which she hasn't used in her two years at the school; because they are working with class sets of texts, Caitlin has students use Post-it Notes for annotation; Caitlin prioritizes text that will hold student attention, and this often means she opts for shorter texts; Caitlin works with class sets of every text to cut down on material needs	7
Literary Pedagogy Alternatives: Caitlin departs from departmental practice of multiple-choice assessment in teaching theme; once students are comfortable with identifying themes in movies, she moves on to fairy tales, etc.; Caitlin	4

(Continued)

TABLE 6. (Continued)

RELEVANCE AND ENGAGEMENT	
prioritizes what she finds important and then makes the standards fit her instructional goals; continually asks what and why something is taught	
Classroom Structure: Transitions every 15 minutes to keep students engaged; students have responsibility from the beginning with lots of modeling, group work, and independent work; teaching theme in short chunks with lots of practice over a period of 3–4 days is more meaningful than 90 minutes of drills to reinforce theme as umbrella concept; Caitlin finds teaching a whole course in a semester is challenging	4
Student Traits: Caitlin sees students as entitled and constantly connected to cell phones; sees generational gap in values and attention even as she is considered within their generation by demographers; not all students have the desire to go to college; money and parent involvement are helpful for students’ success but not the only thing that dictates success	3
Literary Pedagogy Traditions: Caitlin teaches complex concepts, like theme, by breaking down the word, offering examples, identifying theme in movies that her students love, and building from there; there are more ways of teaching than reading a textbook and answering questions; Caitlin can teach a student to understand and identify themes without opening a textbook	2
LIFE AND EDUCATION	
University Teacher Education Program: Relationships: Caitlin didn’t feel “nurtured” by her MT, but got the nurturing she was looking for from her program coordinator; felt own teacher prep better than that of other beginners; still relies on program faculty for emotional support and professional advice; Caitlin wants to be a good teacher to serve her students but also to reflect those who taught her at the university	5
Disposition: Caitlin doesn’t have a handle on nuanced grammar knowledge but doesn’t consider it a crucial aspect of teaching English so doesn’t teach it much; she is strong in ELA content but could teach anything and be happy; defines good teaching by how students remember how they were cared for; Caitlin imagines she might be like student-centered yet rigid colleague who still experiments with curriculum when she has been teaching for 20 years	5
University Teacher Education Program: Practices: Literature circles (worked better in Y2); Caitlin’s notes from the program inform her instruction; still relies on program for practices (e.g., learner’s autobiography)	4
University Teacher Education Program: Student Teaching: MT modeled using humor, pop culture, songs as poetry, and “nontraditional” supplementary texts in the classroom; rocky initial relationship worked out eventually	4
Apprenticeship of Observation: Caitlin disheartened that she was more motivated in HS than her students are, part of year-long comparison between her teaching and her HS experiences; Caitlin recalls texts more than practices so focuses on big things like what they taught her about herself, how they made her feel, and the encouragement and guidance they provided	3
SCHOOL AND DISTRICT CONTEXT	
Departmental Politics: This year has gone smoothly in the department because factions have stayed out of each other’s way instead of battling; one faction	16

(Continued)

TABLE 6. (Continued)

RELEVANCE AND ENGAGEMENT	
valued textbook, worksheet drills, classic literature, standardized tests and EOCs, graduation rates, data, or administrative expectations; the other valued student-centered teaching designed for lifelong literacy skills, even as both factions say they love teaching; department head resigned in conjunction with this power struggle; department is getting a new teacher who had been a student teacher and will be in formalist faction; DH presents self as teacher advocate but is administrative flunky; factional tensions predated Caitlin's appointment on faculty; Caitlin respects incoming DH as fair and a teacher advocate; the conflict displaced conversations about working conditions	
Authoritarian Administration: Principal silences Caitlin by telling her that her second-year opinions about school improvement are invalid; principal threatened to revoke her certification if she didn't change her attitude; principal reprimanded ELA faculty for opposing policies and concerns about their lack of voice in school operations; Caitlin feels working environment is hostile and knows this enmity has an impact on students; adults in building make Caitlin want to quit; teacher complaints designed to improve environment yet taken as insubordination; faculty interviews and hiring done by administration rather than department; Caitlin treated as a "troublemaker" who bullied her DH into complaints to administration, Caitlin had to teach without revealing the emotional experience she just had; department meeting about low morale over mandated data paperwork resulted in DH ratting out department to principal; principal planning to leave; Caitlin thinks morale will improve; DH planning to step aside	14
Data: Caitlin is skeptical of district's data emphasis while acknowledging that teachers' personal data collection and analysis can be important; teachers collect data but don't participate in or get feedback on analysis; Caitlin feels like data "puppet" not trusted to assess her students; time spent on data collection and reporting could be better spent; how data are used by the administration is a mystery; Caitlin resists perpetually quantifying student achievement and believes she can better assess needs and growth based on her own observations; department meetings devoted to test data waste time given the confusion about which tests will be administered	9
Colleagues: As a new teacher, Caitlin has friends in every department that she relies on for general teaching advice (e.g., discipline); three departmental colleagues she feels aligned with collaborate with her on curriculum and instruction in English amidst a philosophical divide in the department; Caitlin admires a 20-year veteran with student-centered values though the colleague is more controlling and structured; other simpatico colleagues were available through district PD sessions; Caitlin values collaboration as part of her process of learning to teach and develop a teaching identity; as a new teacher, Caitlin struggles with classroom management/discipline and seeks advice from more experienced teachers	8
Professional Learning and Development: PD typically centers on data, mandates, and standards but Caitlin believes that PD should be teachers sharing stories, advice, and curriculum as happened once spontaneously in a district meeting; ACTQC mandate required attendance at useless PD training session; Caitlin finds PD helpful only in the opportunity to think with teachers in another school;	4

(Continued)

TABLE 6. (Continued)

RELEVANCE AND ENGAGEMENT	
department meetings devoted to data generative when they talk about other things	
Administrative Support: Caitlin feels discipline is a struggle because she doesn't have adequate support from administration; teachers get \$250 at the beginning of every year for supplies, but teachers are required to supply their own paper for copies; Caitlin doesn't trust DH for support in difficult situations	3
Student At-Risk Construction: Caitlin required to assess student risk by looking at attendance, discipline, and a third factor she can't remember rather than race or ethnicity, which are automatically considered risk factors for non-white students along with free/reduced lunch status; classifying students by demographic risk factors prevents kids from being seen as whole people; Caitlin disputes this system as insensitive to personal trajectories that defy assumptions about potential	3
STANDARDS AND STANDARDIZED TESTS	
Standards and Testing: ACT Quality Core is connected to CCSS but has its own standards that come with benchmark assessment banks that teachers can adapt and produces more scripted curriculum and increased focus on assessment and data; department had a meeting to get familiar with the ACT quality core program, which was presented as a "supplemental kind of resource" to the current curriculum which is less of a new scripted curriculum and more of a "brand-new way of assessing our kids"; Caitlin feels like "a temporary teacher" and doesn't know what the end goal of standards-based instruction is; teachers in her school have a difficult time justifying instructional time for things that aren't on the test, whose priorities reduce time for writing instruction that Caitlin values, esp. writing instruction that follows the writing process; tests don't assess writing very much, and when they do, Caitlin is critical of the kind of writing they include	9
Standardized Curriculum: Shift from CCSS involves considering ACT's standards called "Quality Core"; district adopted ACT Quality Core after a brief demonstration of materials in Nov 2013 without knowing what the state planned; state's vacillation over curriculum confusing within school; shift from CCSS to ACTQC confusing because they share the same standards but not the same assessment, and the curriculum lacks clear standards and guidelines; Caitlin fears loss of autonomy with adoption of ACTQC; district shift to ACTQC a gamble without knowing state's plan	8
End-of-Course Test: District has considered using the ACT as an EOC, but that is logistically complicated; eleventh and twelfth grade are piloting ACT quality core because those grades don't have their own EOC exams; tenth grade takes the ACT Quality Core online assessment to replace the state high school assessment program; Caitlin is unsure about what the next test will be or if she'll need to teach to it	4
Data: Teachers who collect ample data are praised in meetings and held up as examples for other teachers; AYAP computed by comparing annual EOC scores and predicting future high-stakes assessments	2

(Continued)

TABLE 6. (Continued)

RELEVANCE AND ENGAGEMENT	
Resistance to Testing: Tension between teaching to test for student success and teaching in ways that are more interesting without mirroring the test’s construction	2
TECHNOLOGY	
Resource limit: Caitlin has two/five working student computers in her room, which makes teaching journalism/yearbook difficult; media center has 30 student desktop computers and a MacBook cart and iPad cart for checkout; two computer labs have 30 computers each; teaching computer skills displaces writing instruction	5
Platform shift: District move from Windows to Mac produces frustration because the expense of costly new computers and software has reduced the number of devices to 20 percent of the previous amount, creating competition for limited resources; the administration believes that Macs are flashier; iPads are flashy but not effective for teaching English; completing the yearbook (Caitlin’s domain) required computer cart with “rejected” Windows laptops to accommodate students, but district recalled them in the platform shift	5

TABLE 7. Argos HS, Year 3, Fall Semester Codes

Caitlin 12-30-2014	
CURRICULUM AND ENGAGEMENT	
CURRICULUM SOURCES	
English Department Curriculum Structure: No formal structure or scope/sequence, although there’s a textbook they needn’t use, yet some canonical texts and experiences are expected at each grade level, unlike other districts that structure the curriculum more clearly, a form of freedom initially scary for beginning teachers	5
Judgment from Experience: With more experience, now Caitlin has “developed units that I feel really strongly about that are thematic with sentimental resources when applicable”; characteristics like students’ ability, behavior, and awareness of world/history affect Caitlin’s curricular decisions so she can fly on her own in third year	3
Colleagues’ Lessons/Units: Caitlin can take materials from experienced colleagues and “tweak” them to “fit” her teaching style	2
Online Resources: Caitlin finds resources online and is able to make unlimited copies within copyright laws	1
RELEVANCE AND ENGAGEMENT	
Tests and Meaning: Caitlin doesn’t change teaching to match the test, if it is an effective test, it should be able to measure what she is teaching her students; Caitlin doesn’t think about concepts or skills in terms of the test structure and finds multiple choice questions unfair; Caitlin focuses on content that students need to know, not only what will help them in future grades; Caitlin interprets and teaches test concepts in ways that are meaningful to kids beyond the English	5

(Continued)

TABLE 7. (Continued)

Caitlin 12-30-2014	
classroom; “We’re just kind of flying by the seat of our pants. With that said, I think I teach things that matter. Do I teach the canon? No.”	
Literary Engagement: Specific materials (e.g., novels) don’t matter, but how students relate to them does; Caitlin teaches theme with familiar texts such as music videos and song lyrics and then builds to working with longer texts like novels; Caitlin wants them to understand theme and be able to recognize it on their own but also understand why themes matter in the world; Caitlin makes a strong impression in the first week when she reviews concepts using methods from MT that are designed to set students up to be successful	4
Humor: Humor can make students feel comfortable, create intersubjectivity, and help Caitlin be more like her favorite teachers; starts with a PowerPoint for teaching literary terms and then brings in humor for practice with applying concepts	2
Communication: Good communication skills are important for success beyond education.	1
CHARACTER/WORK ETHIC	
Assessment: Pre/post assessment on meaningful skills informs both students and Caitlin about their growth	4
Accountability: Caitlin sees grading as preparation for evaluation in the workforce, failure to do work has negative consequences, yet not failing allows possibilities to recover	3
Caitlin thinks the school teaches students to be entitled and lack work ethic because there aren’t strict expectations, rules, or consequences, particularly regarding discipline or attendance, which concern her more than their literacy skills	2
Self-Regulation: Students may not be learning self-regulation at home or getting what they miss out on at school at home	2
Communication: Communication skills include verbal communication, punctuality, respect for those in “higher positions” and peers, and the ability to refrain from complaining	1
SCHOOL AND DISTRICT CONTEXT	
CONSERVATIVE IDEOLOGY OF COMMUNITY	
Conservative Ideology: Community members come from conservative background; Caitlin sees the conservative community restricting what she can teach because the community prefers to avoid discomfort; Caitlin doesn’t feel comfortable challenging community conservatism and restrictions because she isn’t from the community; Caitlin feels that the conservative expectations and ideologies don’t belong in public schools; Caitlin is planning to leave the district and is “looking forward to no longer being in this district because it makes me weak and it makes me fearful and I’ve always been kinda ballsy.”	6
Parental Intervention: Parent petitioned colleague to remove <i>Bless Me, Ultima</i> because of magical realism even though the parent hasn’t read it; other parents threatened book-burning in front of school	1
ADMINISTRATIVE INFLUENCE	

(Continued)

TABLE 7. (Continued)

Caitlin 12-30-2014	
Katie's Resistance: Admin “counteracts a lot of things I do” because of differing beliefs; Caitlin resists admin focus on test scores by choosing to do her job well and expects her quality teaching to be reflected in test scores; Caitlin doesn't think her experience with admins is unusual for other teachers	3
Policies: Administration allows kids to make up hours for missed classes, which leads to lax approach and devalues class time; middle school is like “prison” with restrictive behavior policies, so students aren't sure how to navigate the less-restrictive environment of high school	2
Accountability: Admin focuses on graduation rates, test scores, etc., at the expense of other things like teaching kids	2
VALUE ON EDUCATION	
Academic Readiness: Caitlin sees that students aren't academically ready for tenth grade and need remedial work to prepare; Caitlin finds students disengaged, and they tell her they haven't learned in past ELA courses; Caitlin thinks students are missing out on valuable skills including and beyond reading/writing	3
Life After High School: Caitlin feels that students aren't prepared for post-secondary life; many students don't go to college or vocational or technical schools	3
STANDARDS AND STANDARDIZED TESTS	
Exit Exam: There is a long history of exit exams in EOC, but the current one has been rolled back; the state is in limbo until next exam is selected; exit exams aren't a reflection of what Caitlin taught, but “concepts that they expect tenth-grade students to know” like theme or vocabulary words; Caitlin believes that the exit exams are too easy and out of date; ACT is different from CCSS in that it is supposed to “seem more rigorous than the HSAP” and it is timed and online; Caitlin is unsure how to evaluate this test in comparison to the old one; Caitlin's school has been doing PD around possible new accountability measure of ACT, but that measure isn't going to be adopted by the state; old EOC tests graded writing based on voice, grammar/conventions, organization, and content; problematic topics didn't lose student points, hypothetically; when prompts didn't match students, Caitlin told them to lie and write a well-constructed essay	10
Teacher Experience: Accountability is big word with some anticipating teachers being graded for students' test scores; Caitlin thinks her colleagues in the department feel the way she does about data policies and high-stakes testing; Caitlin just does what admin tells her regarding testing but finds constant change frustrating; Caitlin is unnerved by not having a test; accountability is different for teachers vs. students vs. schools; “I don't want to say the way I teach because that will never change, but I'm having to mold myself into different categories of accountability”; grading teachers based on test scores isn't going to change who Caitlin is as an educator; local admin tried to implement their own EOC; Caitlin tired of the changes	8
Standards: All standards seem fairly similar, and Caitlin wonders if those in charge notice the similarities; Caitlin believes that [state] community members worried about the CCSS “turning our children into socialists”; not thrilled	3

(Continued)

TABLE 7. (Continued)

Caitlin 12-30-2014	
about standards but doesn't understand the negativity in the state based on experiences in her home state	
LIFE AND EDUCATION	
University Teacher Education Program: Caitlin felt lucky to have been taught by highly qualified individuals; the [university] program shaped the teacher and person she is today; Caitlin thinks other people didn't have as much field experience as she did; Caitlin reported that she learned a lot and felt overwhelmed during the final year of preparing to be a teacher; Caitlin learned to value student openness and feedback for creating a "dialogic classroom" that feels safe	5
Professional Changes: Caitlin is moving back to her home state to be closer to family after taking risks and growing in the state of her first full-time job; the decision to move was partially because she didn't love her school environment and struggled with the principal; Caitlin hasn't found a job in her home state yet	3
Mentors: Caitlin developed her sense of humor from high school and college experiences and mentors; Caitlin still keeps in touch with the MT from her student teaching; Caitlin felt deeply connected to TA Shelly, who helped her become a brave teacher who pushes limits to follow beliefs.	3
High School: Caitlin feels similar to current students because she couldn't have been prepared for the enormous size and complexity of [her university] and the important stuff she would be learning	1

TABLE 8. Argos HS, Year 3, Spring Semester Codes

AUTHORITARIAN ADMINISTRATION	
Teacher Powerlessness: Teachers diminished while doing the school's most important work; teachers feel powerless and voiceless on a grand scale; teachers never consulted in top-down administration; Caitlin feels like a "little minion," disheartened, demoralized, disinvested in teaching; disheartening for teachers to feel devalued; hierarchical with teachers at bottom; incompetent administrators have more authority, make more money; superintendent controls everything in district; teaching no longer about kids but about "bull crap"; teachers complain about "bull crap" and not kids; teachers' indignation over work conditions is not received well by the public	11
Abuse of Power: Administrators could barge into classrooms at their pleasure; administrators on power trip; principal has authority to interrupt classes for non-academic purposes; administrators treat teachers like dirt; administration would rather alienate teachers than high-status students; intrusions leave kids wondering who is in trouble, them or teacher; hopes that next job will be less authoritarian; sad for future of schools because they are poorly run; students' best interests not among administration's concerns	9
Gendered Hierarchy: Almost all administrators male; good old boy mentality in district allowed male administrators to act inappropriately toward women teachers; English teachers all women, administrators nearly all men; male administrator inappropriately touched women teachers; male administrators	7

(Continued)

TABLE 8. (Continued)

AUTHORITARIAN ADMINISTRATION	
made crude jokes and other verbal sexual harassment; women lack “magic appendage” that produces range of privileges (dress code, coaching absences, camaraderie with principal)	
Micromanagement & Surveillance: Micromanaged faculty all the time; micromanagement available from both conservative and liberal perspectives; micromanagement from everyone above her (kids, administration, parents); superintendent surveils campus via cameras in his office; kids part of school surveillance system, but good relationships can minimize their role in disciplining teachers; school mission statement on student-centered quality education not realized in classrooms	6
Suppression of Dissent: Good teaching evaluations overruled by negative label from offering constructive criticism; teachers who make suggestions are labeled troublemakers and their jobs threatened; silencing teachers lowers job morale; suppression of teachers leads to turnover; Caitlin’s disposition—needs to speak up in meetings to advocate for herself	5
Administrative Transition--Principal: Authoritarian principal fired over poor treatment of faculty [discrepant with previous interview account where he resigned]; new principal fair even as controlled from above; superintendent makes teachers feel they are being heard by soliciting their input on principal; teacher feedback to superintendent contributed to termination	4
Administrative Transition--Department Head: Old DH colluded with administration, plotted against teachers, produced departmental division; new DH better listener and more collaborative than predecessor	2
Families	
Conservative Values: Community members more authoritarian than Caitlin, less interested in developing critical thinkers, more interested in producing compliant children; conservative political values implicated in micromanagement; Bible Belt values shape what is considered profane; Caitlin doesn’t reveal her religion or politics due to conflict with community values; racism and homophobia present in community, unacceptable in classroom	5
Student Manipulation: Some sweet, privileged, or prominent kids can get away with anything with adult support; small school more conducive to manipulative students than large schools; students could complain about teachers directly to principal to get their way; collude with principal to keep teachers in line	4
Teaching After Resignation	
Liberated Curriculum & Student Thinking: Explored gender issues in literature more deeply than before with no fear for job; liberated to take risks (add supplemental texts, <i>Hunger Games</i>); have students consider both sides of issues as critical thinkers who decide for themselves; kids have right to own opinions but can’t express them hurtfully; racial slurs, derogatory language inappropriate in safe classroom space; some controversial topics available (transsexuality) but not others (Confederate flag, gay marriage)	6
Liberation from Administrative Judgment: Resigning gave feeling of liberation; allowed her to be better, more fearless teacher; resigning produced feeling of no fear; tolerated mistreatment because she was leaving; resigning allowed her	6

(Continued)

TABLE 8. (Continued)

AUTHORITARIAN ADMINISTRATION	
to feel she was herself; resignation allowed her to understand who she was as a teacher and a person	
Continued Commitment to Students: Students make teaching meaningful; resigning did not change her attitude 100 percent; resignation hard on Caitlin because she loves the kids, and so the school will have a special place in her heart	4

TABLE 9. Bulloch HS, Year 5, Spring Semester Codes

ASSESSMENT	
School Level Testing: All teachers encouraged/expected to have same number of daily grades, quizzes, tests so gradebooks are even; common assessment by multiple choice, Scantron-graded tests; common assessments across teachers, which Caitlin finds dumb and unethical because kids are on different levels; Caitlin feels standardization of curriculum, instruction, and assessment to be “robotic”	4
District Testing: Local standardized testing; county-wide end-of-course test; no teacher input in high-stakes test content; district midterm at quarter mark; test questions only available a few days before exam, which makes backward planning impossible; not much writing instruction because it’s not tested till tenth grade; seniors not accountable to high-stakes tests; senior year is British literature, but many teachers teach what they want because there are no tests; British literature teachers may choose own texts	9
State Testing: Teaching to state writing test	1
AUTONOMY	
Professional Agency: Reflective teaching enables Caitlin to recognize when something doesn’t work; created short story blind date activity that uses pop culture to pique interest in stories; teaches by theme and not genre like colleagues; took extra time with <i>Night</i> because it requires extra care and activities; used literature circles for discussion while colleagues gave homework and a multiple-choice test; using small groups using different grouping methods; less than in her previous job where she could do what she wanted as long as she met the standards (different from what she said at the time); Caitlin wants to do what’s best for kids, so wanted to teach such things as paragraph construction before being told to write for prompts; Caitlin inserts personality, “not a scripted person”; Caitlin follows county schedule but also provides extra support in class for kids who struggle with assigned texts on their own; some wiggle room—adjusts when things aren’t working	12
RELATIONSHIPS	
Obstacles to Relationships: Block schedule alternative days makes learning students’ names and personalities difficult; Caitlin questions commitment to teaching because of how students are treated; student load of roughly 200 including Academy mitigates against personal relationships; large class size makes developing relationships difficult, makes writing instruction difficult because she can’t provide feedback on 200 essays, and undermines enjoyment	8

(Continued)

TABLE 9. (Continued)

ASSESSMENT	
of helping kids read and write; compared to previous school with class size as low as 12 students	
Knowing & Understanding Students: Crucial to get to know students because school is about more than academics; teachers should be alert to warning signs of behaviors; Caitlin out of step with pace of colleagues because she pays attention to kids and not pacing chart; many colleagues were good students, often don't understand why kids tune out	4
Unconditional Love for Students: Kids are what keeps her coming to work, no matter what their problems; students need unconditional love; feels she can love kids and not lose soul; loves kids more than English but teaches English because she was good at it in school	5
SCHOOL SETTING	
ACADEMY APPROACH/ACADEMY SCHOOL	
Problems in Implementation: Academy "not pure" because of enrollment leakage across academies, upsets team planning within academy; insufficient resources, county increases expectations while cutting funds	2
Design: Academy class for 25 minutes a day on academy theme/emphasis; Caitlin's academy class students are also mentors to freshmen; Caitlin in Multimedia/Fine Arts Academy; assigned to M/FA Academy because she advised yearbook, which is a form of media; four sectors/career pathways (health & life sciences, global business, multimedia fine arts, STEM); part of new school structure every year since school's inception; entering students declare for one of the four academies and stay in it for career pathway	7
Ideals/Realities: When ideal doesn't work, teachers blamed for failures; looks fabulous, brilliant, innovative, wonderful on paper but doesn't work; assumed that all teachers and students share same projects, work together toward mutual interests; county and school administrators want school's "flagship model" to succeed, pressure teachers to make it work, but it doesn't	4
Inequitable Status Among Academies: STEM Academy advantaged among the academies; STEM Academy classes aligned with plan so enroll only STEM students, can do projects properly; STEM Academy get field trips and guest speakers	3
Academy Project Requirement: Academy class must work 25 min. daily, 4 days weekly on big Academy project for fair for community members; students stressed and overwhelmed by project that doesn't count, isn't working, isn't helping, is a waste of time, causes students to panic; non-STEM Academy classes required to present projects to community, putting pressure on teachers and students; non-STEM Academy teachers do extra prep and weekly meetings after school; project work is ungraded and so disincentivized for students; huge time commitment to project as ungraded, uncredited work; change to A/B block schedule took time away from required projects with only 25 devoted to Academy work; Academy project overworks and overwhelms students to point of shutting down, "we're causing good kids to do bad things."	7
CORPORATE APPROACH	

(Continued)

TABLE 9. (Continued)

ASSESSMENT	
Appearance of Quality: Among state's highest paying districts; approach wins awards for district; county looks like a good place to teach from the outside	3
Bottom-Line Approach: High performance expectations for all, no matter the circumstances; students treated like numbers; county developing merit pay based on scores; education a big business; teaching compromised by bureaucratic demands	5
Expectation of Compliance: Caitlin doesn't drink the Kool-Aid; district people monitor school daily, perhaps due to test scores or Academy status; district requires three years of service before transfer, those who quit can't return	3
CURRICULUM	
Lack of Autonomy: All teachers teach the same materials without using own judgment; Caitlin misses having choice in teaching, doesn't follow others in lockstep well; Caitlin thinks she could plan a better curriculum than what she has to teach	3
Scripted Curriculum: Many teachers in district only know scripted teaching so don't teach creatively; many teachers prefer scripted curriculum, so they don't have to plan; all level classes do same curriculum though pace varies by level; all students subject to same curriculum regardless of status (special ed, gifted, college prep, honors); county provides calendar of concepts to be covered on schedule; scripted curriculum makes kids tune out; scripted in that texts selected at district level; some teachers like scripted curriculum because it makes teaching easy	8
HOMECOMING	
Poor Fit: Can't continue teaching this way, because it's "just not who I am"; round peg in square hole; feels disheartened by corporate environment; had looked "for something different . . . but not this"	3
False Sense of Familiarity: Caitlin's old middle school remodeled as Bulloch HS; felt like coming home, at times felt like seventh grader again	2
INEQUITABLE STATUS	
Resources: Bullock HS has fewer teachers than other county schools, and more students per teacher; Bullock HS is the red-headed stepchild of the county system	2
Gerrymandering: Gerrymandering assigns schools by wealth and not geography; gerrymandering produced majority populations; less wealthy African American and Latin, some Asian; gerrymandering produced impoverished student population; real estate builders want new homes in wealthy school's zone; schools two miles apart have radically different demographics; among smallest schools in big county system	6
Competitiveness: Inequity sustained by test-score competitiveness between district schools; Caitlin's school has low SES and thus low test scores; academic expectations the same for all county schools regardless of demographics	3
SOURCE OF TEACHING IDEAS	
Previous Job School Mentors/Colleagues: Informal mentor in previous job with content expertise greater than Caitlin's; mentor teacher from previous	5

(Continued)

TABLE 9. (Continued)

ASSESSMENT	
job; prior teaching in adjacent state; mentor Lisa—gave her solid curriculum kids liked, was relational and relevant; mentor Lisa—project-based learning, innovative, creative, and showcased student work	
University Courses: SL class book clubs; TA Shelly—life guru, spirit animal, energetic, positive, funny, sarcastic; university teacher ed faculty modeled good teaching	3
Student Teaching MT: Fights the power, pop culture references, revised plans, tried to reach all kids	1

TABLE 10. Bulloch HS, Year 5, Spring Semester Codes

HOME STATE SCHOOL	
CLASS SIZE	
Effects on Teaching: Class size of over 40; felt like bad teacher because too many students reduced feedback on essays; hard to give individualized, personal attention to 40+ students; having nearly 200 students makes grading essays burdensome; class size much larger than in previous job; loved teaching writing but couldn't do it right with so many students; burdened by excessive work brought home nightly; student load led to eliminating writing process steps (drafting); hopes for better environment dashed by pressures for testing, too many students, no free time; class size fluctuated in relation to schedule changes over first six weeks of school; teaching <i>Beowulf</i> to 40 seniors frustrating and not engaging; all time spent on "the other stuff" rather than creative teaching; teaching demands made her "want to be a normal person"	14
Effects on Relationships: Frustration, sadness over challenges of teaching huge classes in personal ways; hard to form relationships with over 40 students in class; kids who didn't care left out because she couldn't get to know them personally; large size strips her of identity as caring teacher; so many students she couldn't form attachments with them; in loco parentis, "adopted" senior who wasn't getting love at home but got consumed by the demands of the relationship	7
CURRICULUM	
Centralized Curriculum: Centralized, standardized curriculum strips Caitlin of chance to be brilliant teacher; centrally developed with little faculty agency; curriculum centralized and scripted down to vocabulary words and multiple-choice tests; district views centrally developed curriculum as unquestionable formula for success; hurt that she wasn't trusted to create own curriculum; "I felt I was nothing" after curriculum had stripped her of her identity and agency; felt she was better teacher than curriculum let her be; less autonomy in this job than in her previous job; loves planning classes, denied opportunity to create own plans	10
College & Career Emphasis: College and career Academy model, career pathway in ninth grade, good in theory; test-driven, classics-oriented, college prep; career-based curriculum presumably builds on students' interests so is more engaging	3

(Continued)

TABLE 10. (Continued)

HOME STATE SCHOOL	
FACULTY	
Morale: Low overall faculty morale lowered enthusiasm for teaching; many teachers don't want to be there, don't love kids, don't love the school, are bad at their job; pervasive negativity on faculty left Caitlin feeling down and disengaged; some faculty don't drink county Kool-Aid; reduce students and teachers to numbers, deny their individuality; didn't feel like a teacher anymore, felt like a robot	7
Administrative Pressure: District emphasizes testing; merit pay based on test scores; apply "crippling" pressure to teachers to produce high test scores with non-affluent kids; pressure on principal from above about test scores, pressure in turn applied to teachers; pressure to achieve in Caitlin's school at level of district schools enrolling rich white and Asian kids; teachers who resign can't return to whole district	6
Composition: Faculty built from schools that cleaned out bad teachers and sent them to new school (Caitlin's school); faculty a "hodgepodge" including younger cohort; many forced transfers on faculty leading to unhappiness and not good environment	4
LOW-STATUS SCHOOL	
Inequity: Gerrymandering produced different demographics for different schools, and so produced students of different orientations to school and performance on tests; Caitlin's new, unresourced school expected to produce same test scores as established schools in district; schools two miles apart enroll radically different students in terms of affluence due to gerrymandering; Caitlin's school lacks resources that affluent schools in district have; battles over who gets to go to what school due to real estate values tied to test scores	5
Reputation: School is "red-headed stepchild" in county system; school not "high flyer" in county; principal fought for school's reputation and supported teachers; casual environment for clothes relative to other district schools	5
STUDENTS	
Student Disaffection: Don't buy into school; kids accept that school isn't fun; kids in system since age 5, don't question impersonal emphasis on numbers; kids socialized to schooling that is meaningless, rote, formulaic, unengaging, and are resistant to efforts at engagement; kids don't buy in to impersonal schooling, disengage, which disengages teachers; if kids "don't do it for you" you should try something different	6
Student Demographics: School incredibly diverse, which Caitlin was looking for	1
QUITTING TEACHING	
Emotions: Felt bad she was no longer giving back; felt like failure, quitter; guilt, felt she'd let professors down; teaching had become disheartening to the point she had to go on a different path; follows from belief that familiarity would produce comfort (same principal, same school building); job looked perfect at entry, producing high hopes that were not realized; high hopes returning to school district attended as youth; thought her return home would be awesome and she'd be there forever, didn't happen; own schooling experiences at other	12

(Continued)

TABLE 10. (Continued)

HOME STATE SCHOOL	
school in district included great teachers, college prep, diverse students; misses relationships with kids, renewed certification as backup plan	
Identity: After stepping away, Caitlin needed to figure out who she was outside teaching, still doesn't know; teaching is an identity because you don't walk away from it at the end of the day; wanted to be a teacher since age 7; disposition to work, must be doing something; resigned early to allow process of replacement; not a quitter, wants to uphold contract; desire to be best teacher she could be in spite of resignation	7
Practicalities of Transition; Financial: Husband's income allowed her to resign without a job in place; impossible to job hunt while teaching; job change to return closer to family; pay through August gives her time to job hunt after moving; would work at Starbucks as stopgap	5
REFLECTION ON PRIOR SCHOOL	
Administrative Environment: If she had stayed, she would still be a teacher (different interpretation from negative view upon departure); less emphasis on standardized tests, more agency to design own curriculum; not allowed to fail kids, forced to change grades; very casual faculty dress code; small classes in first job allowed Caitlin to learn names and help kids feel they mattered	5
Student Demographics and Dispositions: Not necessarily college prep given demographics; very white, not accepting of others; struggled with testing, disengaged kids, underperforming kids; kids not free to be themselves, made Caitlin sad about teaching there	4

TABLE 11. Davenport HS, Year 7, Fall Semester Codes

PRIOR EXPERIENCES	
Student Teaching Mentor teacher: Didn't get along but learned more than she realized at the time; cared enough to step outside comfort zone and try new things; develop relationships with kids so they like and respond favorably to you; fun and engaging, not just assigning texts; provided good foundation for teaching in engaging and relevant manner	5
Prior Teaching Settings: Class size of 40, can't know students, can't give feedback, can't control classroom, can't make them better; teaching in three schools with 3+ types of kids is beneficial to her perspective; assumption that all kids are college material and can succeed academically; too rigid and structured, didn't recognize individuality of student or teacher, too factory like but it produces good test takers	4
Colleagues: Lisa in first job established good relationships with students, lent Caitlin a syllabus for initial support, taught academic curriculum well	3
Exemplary Teachers In Caitlin's School Experiences: Teachers who invested in Caitlin as a student, allowed her to grow and be creative and learn things on her terms; taught kids before subject matter	2
Education Faculty: Emphasized relationships and caring; taught her how to teach	2

(Continued)

TABLE 11. (Continued)

PRIOR EXPERIENCES	
Caitlin’s Beliefs, Traits, And Life	
Critique of Standards: Standards don’t make much of a difference in standardizing people; two standards, one for life, one for school, not necessarily the same; earning a HS diploma has to meet a standard, but that standard doesn’t necessarily prepare kids for life; college doesn’t ensure success and isn’t for everyone; doesn’t care about test scores	5
Imposter Syndrome: Nominated for TOY even though she doesn’t teach canonical curriculum so worries that people will find her inadequate; does admire teachers who prepared her for college, creating ambivalence over her lack of concern for college among her students; now realizes she doesn’t have all the answers but is working on it	4
Future Plans: Aspires leadership, administration might be “crossing over to the dark side” maybe instructional coaching	1
School Setting	
Mission: Non-traditional school, “failing school” to government, includes its own alt school; phased out as charter school, now a non-traditional school of choice; position kids for workforce with diploma, vocational certification, rarely college or juco; not concerned if kids can’t pass EOC, perfect fit for Caitlin; allows credit recovery, a school selling point	5
Administrative Systems: Not perfect, needs change; degree of top-down control for accountability via report card, in relation to federal funding; no attendance policy	3
Class Size: Small class size (as small as four compared to 40); class size of four and nine; allows relationships and experimentation	3
Reputation: Rebrand through effort to recruit more career tech/vocational certificate kids rather than alt school kids; considered the district’s “red-headed stepchild” because it houses the alternative school	2
Schedule: Shorter days to accommodate students’ work schedules; new block schedule this year	2
Student Traits	
Immigrant Status: Hispanics half US-born, half immigrants; mostly bilingual after being in US schools most of their lives; immigrants often not literate in own language (lack of grammar knowledge, etc.); school gets most of district’s immigrants (Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras); many parents deported; have no one, family in Mexico, live with distant relatives, need teachers who care; US-born students have immigrant parents; support families (especially “Hispanic” students); college doesn’t serve interests or meet finances of Latin students; Latin students raised with value of getting job, working hard, taking care of family; can age out of system and be deported	11
Socioeconomic Status: Most have part/full-time jobs to support selves and families; underprivileged, free/reduced lunch; faced incredible hardships whole lives	3

(Continued)

TABLE 11. (Continued)

PRIOR EXPERIENCES	
Faculty: ESOL teacher who doesn't speak Spanish (problematic to Caitlin); one part-time Spanish teacher who teaches Spanish to Latin students for grammar to prep them for English	2
Credit Status: Ninth-grade students are 16 or more because they are behind in credits; 18 year olds in ninth-grade class, one 14 year old; students rarely finish classes originally enrolled in because of drop out or transfer	2
Caitlin's Teaching	
Teaching	
Caitlin's Interpretation of Assignment: Caitlin the only full-time English teacher; English, three preps but eight in reality; orientation to kids leads to planning each class uniquely	4
Instructional Support: Co-teacher available for some classes; ESOL teacher helps with some groups	2
Reflective Practice and Differentiation: Old plans had to be jettisoned, "We're starting from scratch every day"; abandons much formal pedagogical knowledge and reinvent the wheel every day; Caitlin observed that students didn't know story structure so she taught it; "innate" ability to know students' needs and teach appropriately; students are "behind" in learning what curriculum specifies (story structure); Caitlin can split class into smaller groups for individualized/differentiated instruction; Caitlin differentiates by class rather than individual	7
Hunger Games Unit: Originally designed in first job; revised unit for DHS setting; high interest, engaging material; kids took initiative to watch movie at home if they missed class because they liked the novel; read novel aloud in class due to limited copies (13) and in relation to students' reading opportunities; tedium for her from reading same text 15 times; changed mind about reading novel before watching movie to help kids follow the story; combination of reading/analysis/discussion, reading summaries, watching film	9
Serial Podcast Unit: Forensics guest speaker; listened, took notes, discuss case, no reading; free material, students could catch up at home; not teachable in "normal public school" because of content; includes profanity, sex, drugs; she gets administration approval, sometimes sends permission form home without getting it back	6
Emotional Demands of Students: Can't take emotional burden home to own family; can't be students' mom (full-time care) but feels good that she matters to them; emotional burden heavy at first, then she got settled and understood nature of kids; Caitlin is fulfilled when needed by students, more here than at previous jobs; students need her, not necessarily as a teacher	5
Standards: Tenth grade not EOC tested so is fluid in structure; Caitlin relieved of much bureaucratic trivia because school is focused on care, not data or test scores; focuses only on standards she believes are reachable	3
Immigrant Culture: Can't teach immigrant population and ignore cultural factors; is more attentive to literacy development in English than students' home cultures as driver of curriculum; students' culture shapes instruction	3

(Continued)

TABLE 11. (Continued)

PRIOR EXPERIENCES	
Emotional Fulfillment from Students: Motivation to teach to give back; at DHS can effect change more than at other places; in spite of hardships, Caitlin has never seen kids understand more than her students; she has found where she belongs	3
Influence of Students on Teaching: Transiency of students affects curriculum choices and possibility for continuity; adjusts instruction to kids' literacy levels	2
Student Characteristics	
Culture Shock: Nothing could have prepared her for school's diversity of life experiences (including SL tutoring teen mom in alt school); some students on probation with threat of jail, had good attendance; fourteen and twenty-year-old in same class because it's driven by credit recovery; high dropout rate; immigrant students tend to congregate together for safety and familiarity and language	5
Literacy Rates: Teaching reading big part of job but not teacher ed; many kids read at third- through sixth-grade levels; assigned 18-year-old students who can't read; taught "foundational building blocks" of literacy; maintains high standards relative to kids' English-language literacy developmental levels; had to adapt/jettison EOC standards to teach kids literacy skills appropriate to their development	6
Families: Chicken-plant employee families; high immigrant, transient; many students don't have parents who read to them; students not affluent; roughly half of her students aren't native English speakers; 30 percent African American, 40 percent Hispanic, 30 percent white	7
Emotional Toll: Emotionally draining because she's attached to students who need her emotional support; Caitlin solely responsible for being the adult who believes in the kids, which is draining	2
School Structure in Response to Student Traits: No attendance policy because of "at-risk population" which leads to planning challenges; School Resource Officer (SRO) stationed at all times for kids roaming halls; nursery on campus but won't be in same location as Caitlin's baby	5

TABLE 12. Davenport HS, Year 8, Fall Semester Codes

School Setting	
Validation: Feels valued and trusted to exercise own judgment; feels validated by administration's respect and treatment as having worth when extension was provided for maternity leave; superintendent loves students and backs up teachers and makes them feel supported; relationships valued above all else, part of why they hired her and why she took the job; Caitlin entrusted with exercising judgment about what her students need	5
Alignment/Misalignment: Co-principals who are aligned with each other; principals aligned with Caitlin's values on relationships over test scores; it's OK to disagree with administrators and colleagues; type A, organized, structured, unlike the school; as a control freak she worries about handing off her classes during maternity leave	5

(Continued)

TABLE 12. (Continued)

School Setting	
Relationships Over Testing: Less pressure at Davenport than other Sidney Co. schools, which are under less pressure than most counties for test scores; relationships are the primary concern; relational emphasis very different from prior job where test scores and graduation rates mattered most; student traits; Caitlin knows kids won't pass EOC, principals emphasize relationships and Caitlin's love of kids; motto of The Most Caring Place on Earth; respected, admirable superintendent, emphasized students over testing; to actually learn something relevant to students' needs testing; pressure not there; ninth grade literature is an EOC course with standards and canonical texts; kids do poorly on EOC but administrators more concerned about relationships than scores	10
Credit Recovery: Credit recovery school after failing classes; credit recovery structure allows students from other county schools to pass year-long class in semester; Caitlin can teach whatever and however she wants because the point is credit recovery not curriculum mastery; 45 minute block schedule allows year-long course in one semester; no tracking, students take courses they failed previously; Caitlin enjoys the non-age-dependent enrollment; lack of stable enrollment made planning difficult	7
Stigma: Trying to end stigma about being kids' last chance for a diploma after leaving mainstream school; alternative HS for Sidney Co.; school known as last-chance academy; enroll at-risk students, e.g., teen parents, recently incarcerated, full-time employed because they support themselves; career academy and thus school of choice, formerly charter school	5
Dual Enrollment: Dual enrollment available at local CC; kids can take core classes at other school, then career classes at Davenport HS in Sidney County; students get in trouble in zoned school that affected attendance at alt school and made planning unpredictable	3
Broader System	
Oppressiveness: Beats learning out of kids; the overall system creates apathy among students; kids aren't to blame	2
Testing: NCLB emphasizes standards and tests and not individual kids; testing of kindergartners may kill confidence and love of learning; without testing, kids aren't aware that they're bad at things so they not as frustrated or disheartened as HS kids; kindergartners learn enthusiastically, not driven by testing demands; testing prioritized over actual learning and critical thinking	6

TABLE 13. Davenport HS, Year 8, Spring Semester Codes

CAITLIN'S RETURN FROM MATERNITY LEAVE	
SUB'S TEACHING	
Teacher-and-Text-Centered Teaching: Teaching what you like and not what kids need; teachers who don't tailor curriculum to students; teachers who emphasize form and classics; had ambitions to return to teaching so rewrote Caitlin's personalized curriculum; taught by genre, not theme like Caitlin; text-based rather than person-based, impersonal vs. personal approach to	8

(Continued)

TABLE 13. (Continued)

CAITLIN'S RETURN FROM MATERNITY LEAVE	
literature; couldn't adjust to kids' lack of readiness; taught mythology, which kids had no background in except Percy Jackson (pop culture movie)	
Relationships: Clocking in and out; doesn't care about kids, kids won't work for teacher; didn't develop a rapport; didn't seem to like people; sarcastic in a way kids didn't like; kids adjusted poorly to new authority figure; students gave up	7
Chaotic Classroom: "A little OCD" and "very organized"; "worst freaking thing that can happen" to a teacher; disruption in relationship with Caitlin; Caitlin returned to chaotic "circus" with nonexistent expectations and 70 percent failure	4
CAITLIN'S RETURN AFTER TEN WEEKS	
Challenges of Returning: Emotional time that made return to "hell hole of a situation ... miserable ... so bad"; long-term sub was awful and a wakeup call; aftermath of bad teaching reaffirmed her commitment to teaching kids more than curriculum; when Caitlin returned had to reteach concepts and make up work (a disaster)	4
Relationships: Fewer discipline issues and challenges; would dropouts have left if Caitlin had been there to sustain the relationships?; fewer discipline problems suggests her kids were happy to have her back; some kids had dropped out or been in trouble; disheartening to Caitlin to have enrollment shuffled	4
Work-Life Balance: Reprioritization of work-life balance; not willing to sacrifice personal life for work life anymore; frustrations of teaching lead to thoughts of other options; conflict between love of work and love of baby	4
Empathic Framing: Feels her students' needs and jettisons the curriculum to meet their needs of the day; pitied kids so started from ground zero to build back trust and learning in last seven weeks; during student teaching Caitlin compared kids unfavorably to herself when they were disengaged with school; at this point she responds empathically to understand the root causes of their disengagement (in their home lives); relational emphasis and empathic framing are school-wide; perhaps the school itself helped account for the student teaching lack of empathy	4
CAITLIN'S APPROACH TO TEACHING	
Materials: No classics or myths; "Most Dangerous Game," "The Landlady" (Roald Dahl), part of <i>The Odyssey</i> , multicultural literature because it's flexible; Sherman Alexie, <i>Bad Indian</i> by Ryan Redcorn; Soto's poem "Oranges" first, helps kids break down and understand how poems work and what their themes are; sometimes reading a difficult text is beneficial	9
Themes: Race relations; contemporary issues; no set curriculum; pop culture and current events; unit on scary stories (Neil Gaiman, "Click-Clack, the Rattlebag")	5
CAITLIN'S ORIENTATION TO TEACHING	
Reflective Practice: Failure rates suggest need to change teaching rather than judge kids; feels like failure when kids don't "learn anything today"; she had	4

(Continued)

TABLE 13. (Continued)

CAITLIN'S RETURN FROM MATERNITY LEAVE	
never been hungry, HS was her job and means to college and a better life unlike present students	
Future in Administration: Questions if she'll be classroom teacher for whole career; administration work would make her voice heard and enable change; considers administration the evil team, the devil, under a dark cloud, fears crossover to admin; possibly administrator so she's not told what to do	4
Focus on Relationships: Relationships more important than curriculum; build rapport prior to sarcastic witty banter; got pregnancy advice from her students, which Caitlin interpreted as reciprocation for her care for them	3
Calling: Sees teaching as her calling, "it is what I was made to do"; students are her life force so no leaving education	2
SCHOOL CONTEXT	
POSITIVE SCHOOL ETHOS	
People-Oriented Climate: Most accepting place Caitlin has ever been; Caitlin appreciates administration and thinks they try to do right; "pretty happy family across the board"; being respected and trusted rather than seen as a superior; the right place for her because it's about people, not scores; fewer extra requirements than at previous job allows for work-life balance	6
Focus on Disenfranchised Students: Faculty focused on reaching kids who aren't reached in public schools; forming real relationships with kids who need it; meeting kids' needs, including providing love and material lacks in their lives (backpack); relationships and providing a caring adult who looks after them; making impact on lives of kids whom she believes get little support outside school; Caitlin gets satisfaction from kids who are good people who work hard and value honesty	6
Emphasis on Human Development: Faculty really care about the kids more than scores or grad rates; helping kids become functioning adults and achieve their own success, more than passing EOC; personal needs more important than curricular needs; seeing real progress in ESL students' English "language development"; when students are better than they were before	5
Whole Faculty Traits: Teachers there "for the right reasons"; many faculty are second-career teachers who want to give back	2
NEGATIVE SCHOOL ETHOS	
Decision Making: People making decisions don't know the classrooms; teachers have very little voice, are "the techs"	2
Systemic Problems: Standardized tests serve as assessments but are useless; even school that tries fails with some kids	2
Professional Development: Useless professional development; systemic problem that professional development is the tool for fixing problems but is useless	2
SCHOOL STRUCTURE	
Goals: To graduate students; goal is to get students "functional" i.e., develop basic literacy; catch kids falling through the cracks and help them succeed;	4

(Continued)

TABLE 13. (Continued)

CAITLIN’S RETURN FROM MATERNITY LEAVE	
with graduation a goal, and credit recovery, getting grades up was important after maternity leave	
Constraints: Little collaboration because departments are small; block schedule with new students at semester	2
Curriculum: Given curricular autonomy (which the sub should have taught but didn’t); curriculum not set for college expectations; canonical literature not relevant to kids’ interests	2
STUDENT CHARACTERISTICS AND TRAITS	
Destinations: Not college-bound but bound for workforce or military to support selves or families; aspire to make living wage, have own home, sustain family, afford groceries; not college-bound, going straight to workforce	4
Disengagement from School: Don’t arrive to class ready to work; not paying attention to teachers	2
Demographics: Population of non-native speakers; transient population	2
Home Lives: Have “real-life concerns” not shared by Caitlin; difficult situation at home; students living on own; working opposite shift as parents; having no adults invested in their lives	2
INFLUENCES FROM TEACHER EDUCATION PROGRAM	
Relationships: At university, less about teaching methods, more about disposition to develop relationships; Shelly provided model, similar to Caitlin in personality; learned how to relate to students; positive presentation of instruction; not about texts or English but about helping kids be whoever it is they see themselves being as long as it’s productive	3
Relevance: At university, used relevant material, needs of students, students’ culture; learned how to create own curriculum through reflection on teaching; mentor teacher different in personality, but used relevant materials, valued students primarily	3

TABLE 14. Davenport HS, Year 9, Spring Semester Codes

CAITLIN’S TEACHING	
Tensions Between Notions of Success and Students’ Literacy Rates: Between functional literacy and meeting curricular standards; between helping students become successful citizens of the world and also literate (human vs. academic development); between rigor and relationships (care); kids need “basics” (grammar and paragraphing) to become literate; kids need to know how to read and write and communicate (basic level of literacy); students can’t write grammatical sentences or paragraphs so aren’t functionally literate; disheartened by low pass rates on EOC, which count even though the school doesn’t value them; disheartened that kids do poorly on formative assessments; test scores not a reflection of her teaching but of kids’ performance; her students do poorly on EOC and also in classroom	14

(Continued)

TABLE 14. (Continued)

CAITLIN'S TEACHING	
High-Interest Reading: Students beaten down by senior year by canonical literature; multicultural literature—feminist, Latin, Sherman Alexie (now problematic); “Yellow Wallpaper” is the only “classic” literature she teaches because kids find it creepy and like to discuss it; Adnan Syed podcast unit about murder, requires knowledge of legal jargon; beloved author turns out to be a #MeToo violator	6
District Factors: Relationship and love oriented from the top on down; good administrators work within problematic system; honeymoon over; Caitlin struggles against the bureaucracy; kids’ progress not tracked, which produces foundational knowledge gaps that unprepared teachers are tasked with fixing	6
Work in Progress: Caitlin sees self as always trying to improve; requires continual revision in subsequent teaching; sees self as change agent beyond classroom to improve how schools are run	3
Co-Lab Teacher: Difference in style made instructional cohesion difficult at times; co-teaching with someone different is hard; co-lab teacher’s reticence to push boundaries required Caitlin to respect her diffidence/inhibition	3
UNITS	
<i>The Hate U Give Unit</i>	
Relevance to Students’ Lives: <i>THUG</i> based on real events witnessed by youth (innocent friends shot by cops); <i>THUG</i> is set in a city near the school, called the “ghetto” by protagonist; new material (<i>THUG</i>) may be interesting to students; students begged her to continue reading <i>THUG</i> when she stopped for the bell (comparable to <i>Hunger Games</i> unit where kids watched at home); <i>THUG</i> enables critical discussions of relevant social issues generally not available in school; students relate to poverty, feeling they have no choice but to be in gang and sell drugs like parents; texts with real-life situations that are on the news, relevant and current; <i>THUG</i> depicts events that shock kids (violence) but that they have to live with; different race (Hispanic students, Black characters in <i>THUG</i> , but common experiences with poverty, drugs, gangs, family traditions and pressures, neighborhood environment, lack of options); Caitlin loves developing the human side of students as #1 priority	12
Controversial Topic: Need to be confident in self to have uncomfortable conversations with teenagers; race is the “elephant in the room”; co-teacher thought Caitlin went too far with MTV <i>White People</i> and <i>THUG</i> , led her to scale back; some white students consider her to be pushing a liberal agenda (liberal Nazi); to teach controversial topic, research and preparation are necessary; personally driven professional development, researches topic before teaching it	8
Writing Reluctance: Daily warmup journal writing to reflect on latest reading; Caitlin reads the students’ writing so they’ll do it (accountability issue); kids don’t see purpose in writing their thoughts; kids with much to say often don’t have much to write; tries to see students’ writing reluctance from their point of view and not force it; Caitlin is accountable to her students by making sure she only assigns and grades relevant reading and writing that they wouldn’t do otherwise	6

(Continued)

TABLE 14. (Continued)

CAITLIN'S TEACHING	
Additional Materials: CNN memorial video on Emmett Till; MTV documentary <i>White People</i> used as unit introduction—MTV documentary called <i>White People</i> ; MTV <i>White People</i> chosen because it would “push some buttons”; <i>THUG</i> father in 10-step Black Panther program	5
Reading In Class: Read <i>THUG</i> aloud to students, students wanted her to read even with bell approaching; reading <i>THUG</i> independently in class; not enough time for 400-page novel (<i>THUG</i>); jigsaw literature circle	5
Language Use: <i>THUG</i> allowed Caitlin to say the F word out loud every day; <i>THUG</i> depicts code-switching from Black diction to white diction in ways that privilege white diction; profanity legitimated in <i>THUG</i> and kids can relate	3
<i>Humans of New York</i> Unit	
Unit Basis: Photojournalist taking pictures and talking to people; followed from unit in world lit on human connections and impact; students photographed and interviewed kids based on <i>Humans of New York</i>	3
Student Resistance: Caitlin heartbroken because one-third of class did assignment and fantastic plan flopped; socially distraught kids took zeros; students opt out of assignments (presentations, interviews) where kids feel uncomfortable	3
“Yellow Wallpaper” Unit	
Feminist Theme: Breaks up monopoly by white men in her students’ school reading; Caitlin interpreted as man-hater for using feminist text; Caitlin not concerned if some students don’t like it because she believes the feminist themes are important; story prompted discussion of modern pay gap and #MeToo movement; theme of the repression of women; many students like it because it’s creepy and disturbing, and they like to talk about it	6
Story basis: 1892 story relevant to modern times; based on author’s post-partum depression	2
Co-Teacher Effect: With co-teacher it “bombed miserably” because it was not cohesively presented; awareness that different teaching styles may not match and may produce different effects on students	2
STUDENT TRAITS	
Low Literacy Rates: Some 18-year-olds read on second-grade level; Caitlin assumes kids in HS should be able to read; Caitlin investigates kids’ schooling histories to trace developmental issues (not knowing how to read or write); Caitlin never anticipated students’ illiteracy and wasn’t prepared to teach students who can’t read or write; most have IEP or 504	6
Negative Construction of Students: Nontraditional in that they have been unsuccessful in other schools; labeled failing students before they arrive at Caitlin’s school; DHS is their last chance academically	3
Demographics: Many in poverty, in gangs along with family members; most “Hispanic” and smaller numbers of Black and white	2
Trajectories: Some attend for career path, certification, and early graduation	1
PAST EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES	

(Continued)

TABLE 14. (Continued)

CAITLIN'S TEACHING	
Teacher Education Program: No preparation for teaching 18 year olds who can't read; teacher ed readings are interesting but often out of touch with real problems; Caitlin values research and pedagogical publications even when they are not applicable to her classroom	4
First Job: Kids secure enough she could focus on curriculum and not their life needs; relationships important; emerged organically rather than deliberately	3
Second Job: "Dreadful machine"; all rigor, no relationships	2

APPENDIX B: METHODOLOGICAL CHALLENGES OF LONGITUDINAL RESEARCH

Peter Smagorinsky

Writing a research report covering nine years of data collection has presented a lot of challenges. For this study, let's think of them as obstacles. Here, I'll review some of what we had to address to collect the data, reduce it for a focus on a single study, and write it up within the space allocations provided by journals that typically allow no more than 10,000 words.

The study we report represents the culmination of my decades-long line of inquiry into beginning teachers' development of a conception of teaching within institutional constraints over time. The focus of these studies has been cultural-historical and is grounded in scholarship concerned with mediated human development as articulated by Vygotsky (1987). The studies rely on the contextualization of each teacher's maturation in relation to teacher education in universities, experiences in schools, apprenticeship of observation, developments in personal life, mandates from national, state, and district imperatives, and other factors. These prior studies in this line of inquiry have focused on much shorter periods than the current study, with the typical span of data collection being two academic years, encompassing student teaching and first jobs. The current study is designed to trace one beginning teacher's experiences through nearly a decade of teaching and exposure to school contexts, greatly extending the longitudinal period and providing a deeper study of teachers' development, albeit with a focus on a single case. Research of this duration is unusual and more the province of senior scholars who are under less pressure than early-career researchers to publish frequently lest they perish, unless other lines of inquiry are underway simultaneously or unless the data enable both periodic reports and a later cumulative report. I next detail some of the issues that we faced in conducting and writing this study.

Recruiting and Retention

This longitudinal research originally began with six volunteer participants, half of whom withdrew within a couple of years. The other three remained in the study; the study reported here is the first of the set to be published. But it's a challenge to ask participants to continue participating in interviews for many years. We're grateful to

Caitlin and the other stalwarts for sticking it out. After several years, when Caitlin took time away from teaching to work in a health spa, we thought she was done with the study. Her return turned out to provide a denouement to the report that was relatively uplifting after the discouragement she felt following one spirit-crushing year in the district from which she had graduated. Had she remained at the spa, the report would have been downright depressing, if informative about why people are leaving teaching in alarming numbers during the 2000s. One of the other participants who persisted followed her husband's career to another city, where she left the classroom and began a doctoral program, a very different sort of destination that remains yet unanalyzed. The point is that recruiting people for longitudinal research involves the risk that they may drop out or change careers for reasons that were unanticipated at the outset of the data collection.

A second point that reflects uncertainty is the length of the study. In this case, the data collection concluded with the first author's decision to retire during the COVID shutdown, which coincided with the recognition that the collection had to end if the reports were ever to be written. The analysis of Caitlin's case had begun by then, a project I undertook with Stacia Long during her doctoral studies in what originally was a research apprenticeship and what eventually was a long-term collaborative analysis that extended beyond her graduation.

Another challenge of conducting longitudinal research concerns the mobility of the participants. Many of the early interviews, when the participants were still undergraduate students, were conducted in person, often at my house. After graduation, their careers took them to more far-flung locations—two of the three began with jobs in other states, one of whom ended up on Canada, and the third took a job in-state but at a distance—so we shifted to video-conferencing platforms. Their lack of proximity created a limitation for the study, that being the lack of corroborating evidence in the form of classroom observations and interviews with additional personnel. The study relies on the participants' subjective report of their experiences and our trust in their reliability.

Longitudinal research with people beginning a career fraught with uncertainty, then, is unpredictable and somewhat risky, especially if no other lines of inquiry are underway to provide a safety net should there be attrition among participants. I was fortunate that Stacia's determination to see the study through to completion made her an avid analysis and collaborator, and not everyone has access to a research partner with whom to talk through the data and draft reports. There are also very few exemplars to draw on. I know of no other near-decade studies of a single teacher's career path, and so we had to develop the methods used for this study as we worked, which is much to my personal preference rather than relying on methods textbook recipes. But not everyone is so well suited to building the plane while flying it, or has accrued the experience that helps to anticipate and adjust to heavy weather that develops along the way.

Researcher's Role as Critical Friend

My twice-yearly conversations with the three persisting volunteers were always something we looked forward to. After a few years, the participants would open with something like, "I've been thinking about the things I want to talk to you about..." suggesting that the interviews provided them with a structured way of reflecting on their recent experiences. The interviews occasionally included points when I made suggestions, such as supplementing *Romeo and Juliet* in a school with a high Mexican immigrant population with the story of the "Mexican Romeo and Juliet" I had learned about during my work with *Letras Para Volar* in Guadalajara; as described in Wikipedia, "Popocatepetl and Iztaccíhuatl are the Aztec Romeo and Juliet—denied their love while alive but destined to spend eternity together. Now, as two volcanoes that set the backdrop for Mexico City, Izta and Popo, as they are affectionately called, are a symbol of love everlasting." These diversions, I believe, made the interviews more conversational and reciprocal, allowing me to contribute something to people who were giving so much to me.

I don't view these occasions as "contaminating" the data or leading the witness. Rather, I view them as an opportunity to share possibilities with teachers, especially when they say they aren't quite sure what to do, as in the example of the Mexican Romeo and Juliet. The advice I give can also be ignorant. In the first report I wrote from this line of inquiry (Smagorinsky, 1999), the focal first-grade teacher said she was struggling to find a good autumn-themed topic, and I suggested Thanksgiving, to which she said, "I don't do Thanksgiving. I'm an Indian" (p. 61). There's much for me to learn in conducting research into open-ended situations, which is among the reasons I find my own growth to follow from the investigations. Some traditions are built around the testing of hypotheses that can produce yes/no questions and answers, which I don't find terribly interesting. Conducting a longitudinal qualitative study is laced with uncertainty, and that is part of its appeal and its many difficulties.

Case Study Approach

Some might find the case study method to be a limitation as well, in that the participant's idiosyncratic experiences and subjectivities might allow for few, if any, broad generalizations. These concerns have emerged in questions about the reliability and validity of case study research (Quintão & Andrade, 2020). A case study of one teacher is surely limited in the generalizations it can provide to guide the profession, especially when logistics limit data collection to interviews uncorroborated by other data sources. Yet a case study can be valuable in providing a detailed portrait of an individual who represents a segment of a larger population.

Case studies enable a view of particularity that makes situations unique (Bloome & Bailey, 1992), with exceptions often providing insights into the lives of those from outside those generalizations. Valsiner (in Valsiner et al., 2021; cf. Valsiner, 1998) argues that "the notion of single case and single event [is] central for our understanding of psychological phenomena" (n.p.). Vygotsky (1998) argued on behalf of a single-case comparative method that studied a child's progress through

developmental stages so as to “compare the child with himself at different stages of development [via] a comparative-genetic method in its study” (p. 40), with “genetic” in this sense referring to development rather than a biological inheritance. Case studies, especially of a longitudinal design, thus have value in understanding the developmental experiences of sub-populations and the particular ways in which an individual grows within broad mediational means.

Although case studies have a long and respected history in the social sciences, I have heard distinguished scholars refer to them as “just stories” and say that an “N of 1” allows any argument to be made. Undoubtedly they take caution if the goal is generalization to larger populations. Caitlin’s case does not explain all teachers. But many teachers would surely resonate with the narrative we have produced in terms of the frustrations of the “bull crap” of teaching within restrictive contexts. Single case studies thus can provide both analytic understandings of teachers’ experiences and emotional connections following from shared frustrations of a line of work cluttered with obstacles beyond resolution.

Narrative Approach

We present the findings of this study in narrative form, which follows from the role of chronology in studying development. The duration of the study has required an economy of reporting, resulting in a decision to avoid excessive quoting from the interviews and to relate Caitlin’s perspectives as a storyline interspersed with quotes. Every narrative is selective in its choice of material to include and serves the broader purpose of emplotment (Ricoeur, 1983), which involves three functions: it weaves together an assortment of events into a meaningful, plot-driven narrative; it follows an established narrative structure; and it provides the episodic structure of a narrative, editing out what doesn’t fit and configuring the salient events temporally. Given that the abundance of data has required selectivity to tell a coherent story, we focused on Katie’s engagement with obstacles and how we interpret them to produce a path that was at times developmental, at times obstructed. Like any story, ours is subject to concerns about fitting the material to our authorial assumptions and preferences and, critically, to fit it within the parameters of journal article page lengths. We could never tell this story in its entirety in a journal article, or even a book, since it’s not possible to know the entirety of a decade. This limitation is especially in place when the data themselves are limited to interview data requiring recall, which can be selective and unreliable. Our narrative thus includes the limitations of any story, along with others detailed in this review.

Reporting Method

Awhile back, I wrote an article on the Method section (Smagorinsky, 2008) in which I emphasize the need for a detailed account of the collection, reduction, and analysis of data, and the need to align the Method section with the other areas of an APA-style research report. Reporting a longitudinal study, however, requires sacrifices so that the whole article fits within a journal’s page maximum. One question we struggled with was how to include enough without including too much.

One workaround was provided by the *RTE* editors, who suggested putting the Tables (which themselves occupy more words than many journals permit for whole articles) in an online-only Appendix, along with a second Appendix for this broader methodological rumination. We appreciate the editors' creativity in providing a way to supplement the print article with these texts without occupying too much journal space, and we hope that if others see this study as an exemplar, their editors would be flexible in acknowledging the distinctive challenges of publishing longitudinal research and seek ways to lighten the page load with online supplements.

Finally

The publication of longitudinal research presents unique challenges, many of which follow from the space limitations of most scholarly journals. Fitting the article to page limits produces an imperative for an economy of language in every sentence, requiring very careful reading and rereading and continual eyeball-scrunching to ferret out unnecessary words and phrases. It's a good practice for much writing but can be exhausting. We were fortunate that the *RTE* editors were open-minded about how to present this study and generous in the space allocated. We hope that the final product is satisfying and edifying for readers. It has surely been edifying for us to produce it and grow through our engagement with the many obstacles we encountered.