

Minimum vs. Essential?: The Translation and Trajectory of Policy into Practice

Stephanie van Hover
University of Virginia

David Hicks
Virginia Tech

Elizabeth Washington
University of Florida

Melissa Lisanti
Radford University

This study examined and traced the relationship between, and the influence of, the official standards documents of the Commonwealth of Virginia, and the related day-to-day lesson planning and implementation of a pair of co-teachers. Using a case study methodology alongside a *conventional content analysis* we traced the processes of how these policy texts (the Standards of Learning [SOLs] for World History) were connected to and activated within the daily routines of these teachers who taught struggling students in a high-stakes testing context. The findings illustrated how the policy texts and discursive practices emerging from the State's SOLs constituted a level of pedagogical governance that saw these teachers organize instruction clearly designed to support student recall on the end of year multiple choice test. Our work recognized the power of policy texts as they interact with teachers. The significance of unpacking policy documents in order to examine issues of power, symmetry and potential areas of negotiation in the planning and implementation of instruction for teacher educators is discussed.

Key words: standards-based settings, curriculum, teaching history, policy documents, co-teaching, assessment

There is widespread agreement that world history is a challenging course for teachers to organize and teach particularly as it relates to balancing the breadth and depth of the content to be learned and the cadence of instruction within the confines of the school timetable (Bain, 2006; Bain & Harris, 2009, p. 33; Cohen, 2009; Marino, 2010; Stearns, 2009). In the Commonwealth of Virginia, the standards-based setting adds an additional challenge. The World History Standards of Learning cover an enormous amount of content, and are assessed by a fact-recall type of end-of-course test (van Hover, Hicks, Stoddard & Lisanti, 2010). In an earlier study (van Hover, Hicks & Sayeski, 2012), we explored how one special education teacher and one social studies teacher worked together in an inclusive World History I course in this high-stakes testing context. The findings indicated these teachers were *ambitious collaborators* (see Grant, 2003; Grant & Gradwell, 2010). They offered an exemplary case of a special education teacher and a social studies teacher developing a positive and productive working relationship, especially in coordinating their pedagogical performance within the classroom. In terms of how they made

sense of instruction, it appeared the content of each lesson they taught singularly aligned with the Virginia Standards of Learning (SOLs), and these activities, packaged for consumption with chunks of deliverable content and supported with explicit strategy instruction, promoted memorization and recall for the end-of-course test. Their approach resembled a stable, durable, “repeatable and recognizable teacher-centered historical narrative presented in today’s classrooms” (Hicks & Doolittle, 2008, p. 206) grounded in “resilient encyclopedia epistemologies” (VanSledright, 2002, p. 144). This manner emphasized teachers’ coverage of content, often through the textbook, in order to prepare students for high-stakes assessments (Hicks & Doolittle, 2008).

These findings added to a growing body of literature in history education indicating high-stakes testing cultures with history assessments emphasized recall of factual content as, “curricular content is narrowed to tested subjects, [and] subject area knowledge is fragmented into test-related pieces” (Au, 2007, p. 258). These teachers’ daily pedagogical routines and activities appeared to be so synchronized and coordinated with the World History Standards of Learning, but we wondered, “*How* did they get that point?” By analyzing available curriculum documents, could we trace the processes of how these policy texts (SOLs) were connected to and activated within the daily routines of these teachers? Would tangible curricular materials and policy documents enable an illustration of the trajectory of translation of policy into practice?

Several studies have explored teaching in standards based settings (see Fickel, 2006; Grant, 2005; Larson, 2005; van Hover, Hicks & Irwin, 2007) and have offered insight into these complex “multiple and interacting influences on teachers’ work” (Grant, p. 119). These studies, however, all focused on individual teachers working alone in a classroom, and not necessarily the documents that informed their teachings. Too often in educational research there is a “blindness toward the question of how educational practice is affected by materials” (Sørensen, 2009, p. 2). Educational materials including (but not limited to) policy and curricular texts are imbued with power and actively shape the nature of everyday educational performances (Sørensen). Such a stance reflects *symmetry* (Latour, 1987) between the interactional effects of human and non-human objects alongside materials (such as texts) in the development of rules, routines, policies, agencies, identities, ideas and activities. This stands in contrast to the typical stances of teacher as a curriculum gatekeeper that assumes humans ultimately exert the power to shape such things. Similarly, Tara Fenwick and Richard Edwards (2010) contend:

While typically treated as a tool even by critical theorists who present texts as ideological vehicles for control and oppression... [texts] exert force themselves.

Depending on their form, they can enact certain pedagogical activities and sequences, limit curricula across space and time, limit teachers academic freedom ... (p. 7)

Aligning with such a stance, we focused this study around a discursive unpacking of state standards documents as a way of tracing the strength of interconnectedness between upper level state-based policy texts and the lower level local curriculum documents of a pair of co-teachers who taught struggling students in a high-stakes testing context.

Ambitious Teaching and Learning in High Stakes Settings

The research on history education has called for ambitious teaching and learning which involves teachers engaging in best practices in a high-stakes testing environment.

Ambitious teaching and learning develops (a) when teachers know well their subject matter and see within it the potential to enrich their students’ lives; (b) when teachers know their students well, which includes understanding the kinds of lives they lead, how

they think about and perceive the world, and that they are capable of far more than they and most others believe; (c) when teachers know how to create the necessary space for themselves and their students in environments that may not appreciate either...

Ambitious teaching and learning develop when smart teachers, curious students, and powerful ideas come together. *Policymakers may assume that standards-based reforms support the efforts of ambitious teachers, but until we better understand how these teachers, and the students in their classrooms, think and act, that assumption is hollow at best.* (Grant, 2003, p. vi) (emphasis added)

Policymakers “place great faith” in new standards, tests, school reform, and professional development activities as the roadmap to better teaching and learning, but “the research on such reforms undercuts a good deal of that faith” (Grant, 2003, p. vi). In 2011, Wayne Au asserted, “modern regimes of high-stakes, standardized testing in the U.S. (are) built upon the curricular legacy of scientific management from the early 1900s” (p. 38). He described, additionally, how standardized forms of teaching in the US stemming from high-stakes testing are related to “issues of control over classroom practices, with teachers’ power being increasingly usurped through both policy and curriculum structure” (p. 38). The concept of teacher as curricular gatekeeper in high-stakes testing context has gained more attention in recent years (Grant & Gradwell, 2010; Grant & Salinas, 2008), with Stephen Thornton (2005) advocating “gatekeeping matters more than curricular change” (p. 10).

Using qualitative metasynthesis, Au (2007) studied the effects of high-stakes testing on curriculum and found contradictory trends in how U.S. teachers understand the connection between high-stakes testing and classroom practice. In the majority of qualitative studies analyzed, he found that in high-stakes testing cultures with history assessments emphasizing recall of factual content, “curricular content is typically narrowed to tested subjects, subject area knowledge is fragmented into test-related pieces, and teachers increase the use of teacher-centered pedagogies” (p. 258). In a minority of these studies, high-stakes tests led to “curricular content expansion, the integration of knowledge, and more student-centered, cooperative pedagogies... Thus, the findings of the study suggest that the nature of the high-stakes test-induced curricular control is highly dependent on the structures of the tests themselves” (p. 258).

Findings from our earlier study (van Hover, Hicks & Sayeski, 2012) reflected many of the dominant trends Au identified. Our study examined a pair of co-teachers making sense of working together in an inclusive World History I course in a high-stakes testing context. In this case study, co-teaching involved the collaboration of a special educator and a general educator, working to address the needs of all students; however, those identified with disabilities were priority (Bawens, Hourcade, & Friend, 1989; Cook & Friend, 1995). “Although collaboration among service providers has been a hallmark of special education almost since its inception, co-teaching... is a relatively recent application” that “has evolved rapidly” because of federal legislation (Friend & Cook, 2010, p. 9). It has been further argued, “the future of co-teaching depends on increasing the quality and quantity of research on it and placing co-teaching in the larger context of school reform and improvement” (p. 9).

In the special education literature, however, very few studies explicitly explore how co-teachers make sense of developing and implementing history curriculum, particularly in a high-stakes testing environment. Our earlier study offered a case of *ambitious collaborators* who provided an exemplary case where, it appeared that the content of each lesson they taught demonstrated a high degree of fidelity as it was directly aligned with the SOLs and promoted

memorization and recall of SOLs for the end-of-course test (See Grant, 2003; Grant & Gradwell, 2010). We contend the materials of education in the form of texts, such as policy documents or curricular materials value what is considered the essential knowledge to be taught within and through classrooms and schools. What is often less clear when studying classrooms and the beliefs and ideas of teachers is the ways such texts work and come together to activate, order, and constitute teachers' daily pedagogical routines. This was highlighted in an attempt to understand the durability of the teaching of history as little more than fact-based narrative of the past:

Where and how do students acquire these encyclopedia epistemologies? Why are some so impervious to change?...School is no doubt an influential factor. The importance placed on literal comprehension of text during emergent reading activities cultivates a belief that the meaning is in the text...As they are learning to comprehend in such a manner, children encounter history textbooks that erase the historian author and produce belief in the reality effect – that all the words in the text map directly onto what's real. Many teachers give these textbooks elevated, but undeserved, epistemological status. Tests that require recall of details and events drawn verbatim from these history textbooks also reinforce their aerial status (VanSledright, 2002, p. 145).

This study expanded our earlier work but shifted our gaze to examine and trace, within the swirl of contextual influences shaping teachers pedagogical activities, the relationship between and influence of the official standards documents of the Commonwealth of Virginia, and the day-to-day lesson planning and implementation of a pair of co-teachers.

Theoretical Framework: Policy Sociology and the Sociology of Translation

Our study was informed by work in policy sociology (e.g., Ball, 1994, 2003, 2012) to examine policy realization in high-stakes settings, the *sociology of translation* (Latour 1987, Fenwick & Edwards, 2010). This was to help illustrate the durability of daily pedagogical routines as they emerged and were enacted at the intersection or points of translation where policy texts *work on* teachers as teachers *work on* policy texts, and institutional ethnography (Nichols & Griffith, 2009; Smith, 2001; 2002). This illuminated the ways *texts in action*—including policy documents—served as critical, though not necessarily visible, mechanisms in the constitution and reconstitution of peoples' regular daily practices and relations within organizations and institutions over time and space. While often generated via professional groups or government policy makers, such texts become nodes within an ever-expanding network through which people within local institutions or organizations dialogically construct, make sense of, and account for how successfully they and others have negotiated and performed their regular daily activities.

“Performativity” is yet another form of state regulation that requires practitioners to “organize themselves as a response to targets, indicators, and evaluations” and to “set aside personal beliefs and commitments and live an existence of calculation” (Ball, 2003, p. 215). He stated:

The new performative worker is a promiscuous self, an enterprising self, with a passion for excellence. For some, this is an opportunity to make a success of themselves; for others, it portends inner conflicts, inauthenticity, and resistance. It is also suggested that performativity produces opacity rather than transparency as individuals and organizations take ever-greater care in the construction and maintenance of fabrications. (p. 215)

Policy texts just like human actors are also “performative; they act, together with other types of things and forces to exclude, invite and regulate particular forms of participation” (Fenwick & Edwards, 2010, p. 7). Policy documents and pedagogy—translate each other—to produce particular forms or chains of actions and activities that makes sense within context. The resulting actions and activities produced, if stabilized because they provided the necessary results, became the norm, the accepted everyday routines of teachers who were successfully negotiating the rules of the game of schooling. In his 2008 book, Stephen Ball indicated that education has been subjected to “policy overload” and “hyperactivism,” with an unprecedented level of governmental activism, regulation and oversight (p. 2). He also analyzed how policies are represented and disseminated through ‘policy texts’:

...that is, the documents and speeches that ‘articulate’ policies and policy ideas, which work to translate policy abstractions, like globalization and the knowledge economy and public sector reform, into roles and relationships and practices within institutions that enact policy and change what people do and how they think about what they do. (p. 6)

While he addressed “the circularity and discontinuity” of many education policy and reform issues, he also acknowledged that “much more needed to be said...about special needs and disability” (p. 9).

Policy texts, though, are neither static, nor unchanging, nor are they necessarily one-sided affairs pushed down, accepted, and implemented by schools or teachers in a uniform way. Changes in context, expectations, and reforms may disrupt the activities and identities that at one point appeared to be so durable. Policy realization or policy translation can be a contingent, localized, and messy process that is “ongoing, interactional, and unstable” (Ball, 2008, p. 7) and dependent on context. Such a position does not mean that policy realization or translation is open to a wide spectrum of site-based interpretations and implementation options (Smith, 2001). Policy texts and documents constitute or frame key expectations, understandings, and actions within and across institutional organizations (Smith, 2001). Within the messiness of policy realization, active policy texts “provide for the standardized recognizability of people’s doings as organizational and institutional as well as for their co-ordination across multiple local settings and times” (p. 160). That is, educational policy texts serve as a technology of pedagogical governance designed to inform and coordinate peoples’ everyday discursive practices and understandings regarding key educational outcomes and institutional expectations, resulting in a narrow range of routinized approved approaches to teaching to accomplish the established goals and outcomes (Davies & Harré, 2000; Smith, 2001). Policy texts do not explicitly tell you what to do within your daily work activities, rather:

they create circumstances in which the range of options available in deciding what to do is narrowed or changed or particular goals or outcomes are set. A response must still be put together, constructed in context, offset against or balanced by other expectations. (p. Ball, 1997, p. 270)

In light of this work, our goal was to observe and trace the extent to which such educational policy texts as Virginia’s Standards of Learning (SOLs) served to organize institutional processes and relations at the local level and orientate history teachers’ daily pedagogical decision-making and activities within a high stakes testing environment.

Method and Data Sources

We used a case study methodology (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Stake, 1995) alongside a *conventional content analysis* (Hsieh and Shannon, 2005) and *discourse analysis* (Harley, 2001;

Hardy, Harley, & Phillips, 2004). This examined the extent to which key policy texts shaped, coordinated, and constituted what teachers began to see as worthwhile historical knowledge. The value of this case was not a function of sample size, generalizability, or randomized selection but of its “explanatory power” (Mitchell, 1983, p. 204) to illuminate how teachers and policy artifacts (texts) encountered each other, as connected nodes within a network that goes beyond the four walls of the school, in the translation of policy into practice.

The participants, identified by the pseudonyms John Logan and Anna Grey, co-taught an inclusive 9th World History I in a diverse high school (Rutherford). At the time of the study, the school was in Year 4 of improvement in terms of Adequate Yearly Progress. Both John, the history teacher, and Anna, the special education teacher, were in their third year of teaching at the time of the study. They co-taught four sections of World History I (Dawn of Man to the Renaissance) and one section of Concepts of World History (a course for students who were designated as most likely to fail the World History I SOL test).

The focus of this study was one section of 9th grade World History I, with an average enrollment of 21 students. At least four of those students had been identified with disabilities and had Individualized Education Plans (IEPs). Virginia has a high-stakes end-of-course exam in World History I; test results effect accreditation and students’ abilities to graduate. These tests are 70-item multiple-choice exams that largely emphasized the recall of factual content.

To explore how our participants engaged with and encountered the standards of learning, we analyzed over 800 pages of curricular materials. We started by reading through the daily curricular materials (termed *packets* by the teachers) and accompanying field notes. We then analyzed benchmark assessments, class handouts, and review packets. Based on this initial analysis, the authors from Virginia (van Hover, Hicks & Lisanti) roused by what appeared to be the pervasive influence of SOL content and vocabulary found in policy documents that were familiar through our work as teacher educators in Virginia. The policy documents included the Virginia Standards of Learning for History and Social Science, the Curriculum Framework, and the Test Blueprints. These standards list, in general terms, what should be taught, and what should be learned. The Curriculum Framework segments the standards into a) Essential Understandings; b) Essential Questions; c) Essential Knowledge; and d) Essential Skills. The essential knowledge catalogs the testable content and the factual information that could appear on the SOL test; information *not* listed on the framework is *not* tested. We also reviewed Testing Blueprints that detail the number of items per topic and sample tests (Virginia Department of Education, 2011).

We initially examined these policy documents, through a systematic conventional content analysis. That is, we allowed for codes, categories, and themes to emerge inductively from the text data as opposed to developing an initial coding scheme and undertaking a more deductive content analysis (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). “Qualitative content analysis goes beyond merely counting words to examining language intensely for the purpose of classifying large amounts of text into an efficient number of categories that represent similar meanings” (Hsieh & Shannon, p. 1278). Guided by our initial analysis, we then identified and mapped similarities and differences as well as points of cohesion, coherences, situationality, informativity and intertextuality within and across texts (White & Marsh, 2006). In order to understand not just what policy texts meant but how in their readings or translations they could invite, regulate, obscure, support, and shape teachers understandings of what was valuable knowledge and when this knowledge was taught. We utilized Dorothy Smith’s (2001, 2006) model of text-reader conversations to discursively

analyze each state policy document's introduction and preface. (A policy text's preface and introduction is designed to orientate readers to the nature, purpose, and intent of the document.) We addressed each of these texts to evidence the ways in which the language and discourses *activated* was designed to help frame and authorize the rules, responsibilities, and processes deemed necessary for implementing the standards at the local level (see Campbell & Gregor, 2004; Smith, 2006). As part of this form of discourse analysis, we specifically examined the policy documents and teachers curricular materials and lesson for examples of 1) intertextuality (as evidenced through recurrent, ongoing lines arguments, stances, topics, actors, or events across texts); 2) recontextualization (as evidenced through the reapplication of established arguments, perspectives within and across texts); and, 3) interdiscusivity (as evidenced through the ways various discourses around performance measures, standardization, and accountability to the standards were woven together within and across texts) (Wodak, 2008).

In order to triangulate our findings, we asked Washington (from a Common Core, non-SOL state) to review our data. Though initially we conducted 20, 90-minute classroom observations and two, 90-minute semi-structured interviews with the teachers, we focused this paper explicitly on the tangible curricular and policy artifacts.

“Lost in Translation” But with “High Fidelity”

In this case study, John and Anna—through the assistance of their district level social studies coordinator and other history teachers within their division—reshaped and translated the state's policy texts and documents into course documents, curricular frameworks, and classroom materials serving to govern, manage, narrow, and control the pace, cadence, and content of the facts and narrative structures to be taught in their classroom (Au, 2007, 2011). No attempt had been made to impose conceptual order and *big idea* thinking on the standards. The curriculum did not reflect ambitious teaching as elucidated by the research in history education. It seemed, instead, the type of ambitious best practices found in the research literature were lost in the focus on testable factual content. Their classroom resources demonstrated a high level of fidelity and congruence with the state's standards documents. The policy documents were a huge influence on the curricular documents created by the teachers. The state policy documents appeared to reflect a high degree of pedagogical governance, particularly in terms of the organization and content of the curriculum. It seemed the teachers did not perceive they had the autonomy to make the standards “better”, broader, or more coherent. To explore these issues, we follow the trajectory of policy documents into practice.

Policy into Practice?

To begin to deconstruct the trajectory of policy documents into practice and to trace the provenance of their thinking about content and instruction, we needed to first examine the nature and intent of key State policy texts made available on the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) website. The VDOE offered a number of policy texts designed to support the implementation of standards and to assist history and social science teachers in curricular planning or test preparation. These standards list what students need to know in a particular course (History & Social Science Standards of Learning, 2008). The introduction to the World History and Geography to 1500 A.D. (C.E.) document stated, “These standards will enable student to explore the historical development of people, places, and patterns of life from ancient times until 1500 A.D. (C.E.) in terms of the impact on Western Civilization” (p. 1). The standards segmented into four *Eras*: Human Origins and Early Civilizations, Prehistory to 1000

B.C.; Classical Civilizations and Rise of Religious Traditions, 1000 B.C. to 500 A.D.; Postclassical Civilizations, 300 to 1000 A.D.; and Regional Interactions, 1000 to 1500 A.D.

The Curriculum Framework for each standard was a complementary policy document that described essential understandings, questions, knowledge, and skills for each standard. The test blueprint for each course sectioned the standards into broad topics and identified the number of test items per category (e.g. 11 items on ancient river civilizations) (World History I Test Blueprint, 2008, p. 2). Sample tests provided examples of types of questions that might appear on the high-stakes end-of-course exam. These items seemed to emphasize recall of content listed in the “Essential Knowledge” column of the curriculum framework. John and Anna were intimately familiar with each of these policy documents. In the following section, we offer an in-depth description of the themes that emerged from an analysis of the introductions and prefaces for each policy document. The findings illustrated the extent to which the language and discourses activated through engaging with these texts could begin to explain the high level of fidelity between policy and practice within John and Anna’s classroom.

The Power and Influence of the State’s Policy Standards as Received Texts

Each document contained an introduction and a preface intended to orient the reader. The preface to the History and Social Science Standards of Learning for all the courses asserted, as a policy document it is not:

intended to encompass the entire curriculum for a given grade level or course nor to prescribe how the content should be taught. It is understood that these academic standards are to be incorporated into a broader, locally designed curriculum. Teachers are encouraged to go beyond the standards and select instructional strategies and assessment methods appropriate for their students. (p. iii)

An implication of such a statement is the existence of a great deal of freedom, at the local divisional and school level, for teachers as autonomous curriculum gatekeepers or decision makers who plan, implement, and assess the curriculum. The next section of the same paragraph began to curtail such autonomous curricular gate keeping by establishing certain responsibilities and parameters facing all teachers in the state as they embark on planning and enacting the standards.

The History and Social Science Standards of Learning, *amplified* by the Curriculum Framework, define the essential understandings, knowledge, and skills that are measured by the Standards of Learning tests. The Curriculum Framework provides additional guidance to school divisions and their teachers as they develop an instructional program appropriate for their students. It assists teachers as they plan their lessons by framing essential questions, identifying essential understandings, defining essential content knowledge, and describing the intellectual skills students need to master. This supplemental guide delineates in greater specificity the *minimum* content that all teachers should teach and all students should learn. (p. iii) (emphasis added)

Within this section of text, teachers were introduced to a complementary and tightly coupled state document known as the Curriculum Framework. The Curriculum Framework was presented as a resource designed to *assist* teachers by *amplifying* with greater specificity the *minimum* content of the standards “that all teachers should teach and all student should learn” (p. iii). Such a statement indicates that teachers across the state should be ready, willing and able to use the Curriculum Framework to construct lessons, and that these lessons *must* incorporate *essential* questions, understanding, content knowledge, and intellectual skills students must

master. What was initially described as minimal content was then positioned as important enough to require detailed amplification for teachers. The minimal content was simultaneously identified as “essential”. It was the responsibility of all teachers to teach it and all students to learn it. Through this standards text, history and social science teachers across the state were therefore provided with an essential body of knowledge that had to be mastered by all students within the year. The subsequent paragraph within the Standards preface further articulated and clarified how teachers and students would be held accountable for teaching and learning these minimal yet essential content standards.

The design of the Standards of Learning assessment program, however, requires that all Virginia school divisions prepare students to demonstrate achievement of the standards for elementary and middle school history and social science by the grade levels tested. The high school end-of-course Standards of Learning tests, for which students may earn verified units of credit, are administered in a locally determined sequence.

The History and Social Science Standards of Learning and the Standards of Learning assessment program form the core of the Virginia Board of Education’s efforts to strengthen public education across the Commonwealth and to raise the level of academic achievement of all Virginia students (pp. iii-iv).

The text identified the end of course test as the most singular important signifier of content mastery by students. The complimentary use of *minimum* and *essential* to describe content required to be taught and tested, carried the implication that to teach content beyond the standards is not necessarily essential, required, nor a good use of class time. By stressing the ultimate indicator of academic achievement for all of children in the state is success on the test, the corollary was, if students did not achieve mastery as measured by the test, then they and their teachers failed in their responsibilities to teach and learn the essential minimum content.

Within the preface, the intended power and utility of the SOL to authorize what should be taught in history and social science was articulated. While initially suggesting local- and teacher-level autonomy beyond the state standards, a deeper reading highlighted a “strong framing [of the curriculum where] teachers and students [were expected to] learn to work within a set of received knowledge” (Sleeter & Stillman, 2005 p. 29). Decision-making opportunities for both teachers and students were purposefully constrained to focus on the prescribed essential standards within their classrooms.

Curriculum Framework & the Test Blueprint

The apparent limited control teachers and students have over content selection and organization, we contend, was further reinforced by the two other linked policy documents that were presented alongside the History and Social Science Standards of Learning courses on the VDOE’s History and Social Science Standards of Learning and Testing website. The Curriculum Framework and the Test Blueprints for each course reinforced the essential knowledge to be taught. Though it provided minimal, if any, encouragement for teaching beyond the prescribed course content. In the introduction to the Curriculum Framework the essential understandings, questions, knowledge, and skills were no longer represented as minimal content to be taught and learned. While mirroring, to a great extent, the introduction to the History and Social Science Standards of Learning, the opening paragraph of the Curriculum Framework for World History and Geography to 1500 A.D. (C.E.) no longer described the content within the standards as the minimum to be taught. The absence of the word *minimum*

accentuated the importance of the Curriculum Framework document as a resource designed to clearly delineate to teachers all that should be taught to students as part of the course:

The *History and Social Science Standards of Learning Curriculum Framework 2008*, approved by the Board of Education on July 17, 2008, is a companion document to the 2008 *History and Social Science Standards of Learning for Virginia Public Schools*. The Curriculum Framework amplifies the Standards of Learning by defining the content understandings, knowledge, and skills that are measured by the Standards of Learning assessments. The Curriculum Framework provides additional guidance to school divisions and their teachers as they develop an instructional program appropriate for their students. It assists teachers in their lesson planning by identifying the essential content understandings, knowledge, and intellectual skills that should be the focus of instruction for each standard. Hence, the framework delineates with greater specificity the content that all teachers should teach and all students should learn. (p. iii)

The final sentence called for a high degree of fidelity to the standards and framework by teachers as it identified the prescribed and “principal” content for all teachers and students.

In orientating the reader to the layout of the Curriculum Framework, the document also stated in terms of the essential understandings, questions, content and skills, the first three columns required a teacher’s attention if they were to successfully teach the course. As detailed below, these included 1) the essential understandings should serve “as a basis for lesson planning” (p. iii); 2) the essential questions “are based on the standard and essential understandings” and may therefore be used in classroom discussions (p. iii); and, 3) the essential knowledge though not exhaustive “is meant to be the principal knowledge defining the standards” (p. iii).

The Curriculum Framework consists of at least one framework page for every Standard of Learning. Each of these pages is divided into four columns, as described below:

Essential Understandings

This column includes the fundamental background information necessary for answering the essential questions and acquiring the essential knowledge. Teachers should use these understandings *as a basis for lesson planning*.

Essential Questions

In this column are found questions that teachers may use to stimulate student thinking and classroom discussion. The questions *are based on the standard and the essential understandings*, but may use different vocabulary and may go beyond them.

Essential Knowledge

This column delineates the key content facts, concepts, and ideas that students should grasp in order to demonstrate understanding of the standard. This information is not meant to be exhaustive or a limitation on what is taught in the classroom. Rather, it *is meant to be the principal knowledge defining the standard*.

Essential Skills

This column enumerates the fundamental intellectual abilities that students should have—what they should be able to do—to be successful in accomplishing historical and geographical analysis and achieving responsible citizenship. (p. iii) (emphasis added)

The test blueprint for each course articulated the tight relationship between what was taught and tested. The blue prints reinforced the importance of using the Curriculum Framework in order to successfully teach the standards:

The History and Social Science Standards of Learning, amplified by the Curriculum Framework, define the essential understandings, knowledge, and skills that are measured by the Standards of Learning tests. The Curriculum Framework asks essential questions, identifies essential understandings, defines essential content knowledge, and describes essential skills students need to master (p. 1).

Any suggestion that the SOLs were minimum standards was once again absent within these blue print documents. The World History and Geography to 1500 test blueprint, acknowledged “the large number of SOL in each grade level content area”, while simultaneously stating, “In World History and Geography to 1500 A.D. (C.E.) there are no SOL that cannot be appropriately tested in a multiple-choice format” (p.1). The blue explained that while every standard of learning could not be tested on every version of the test, each standard was organized into specific reporting categories.

Each of the reporting categories identified the number of multiple-choice questions on the test for each category of standards. Connecting test items to reporting categories helped privilege the “principal” and “essential” understandings, questions, knowledge and skills as identified within the SOL, while minimizing the value of any other understanding, questions, knowledge and skills that are absent from the standards documents.

Against the backdrop of these powerful state policy documents, John and Anna found themselves expected to plan and implement instruction for students identified as at-risk of failing the end of course test. Within the context of their high school, John and Anna were not alone in trying to translate the state’s standards into teachable material all students were expected to demonstrate mastery on the end of course test. In this particular district, a social studies coordinator in central administration supervised district-wide curricular planning and worked closely with the department head and individual social studies teachers in the high school. Much of her work involved the supervision and organization of the translation of state policy documents into manageable scripts and other resources for classroom use. She created an online, password-protected resource repository for social studies teachers that housed all of the VDOE documents and a school-wide quarterly pacing guide developed by content area teams. The site also provided lists of SOL vocabulary terms created by teachers, lists of resources, and teacher-created worksheets and PowerPoints. The following section illuminates their day-to-day instruction through the example of a lesson on “The Phoenicians.”

Into the Classroom: The Phoenicians

The lesson on the Phoenicians was typical of the teachers’ day-to-day instruction. In the teacher-created packet, the lesson commenced with a “K-W-L” referencing what students knew, wanted to know, and what they had learned about the Phoenicians. The K-W-L was followed by a 12-item, fill-in-the blank document (Notesheet #4) entitled, “Phoenicians: A People of the Sea.” Students completed this Notesheet while the teachers lectured from a PowerPoint filled with images and the precise vocabulary students needed to copy onto their Notesheet. The first item, a *review*, asked students: “Except for the Hebrews, what has been the basis of all of these civilizations [Mesopotamia, Egypt, India, China]?” Two blanks were provided. The *PowerPoint*, using pictures and words, identified Rivers and Agriculture as the basis for these four civilizations.

On the Notesheet was a mini-map that asked students to “circle where the Phoenicians originally settled.” The PowerPoint displayed a map with a circle and the following information: “The Phoenicians started in a place called Canaan, located on the western edge of the Fertile

Crescent. Who else lived in Canaan? The Hebrews.” The third item was, “This place is called _____, located on the western edge of the _____.” The students filled in “Canaan” and the “Fertile Crescent” and, in item four, wrote “the Hebrews” in response to the question, “Who else lived in Canaan?” Next, copying from the PowerPoint, the students wrote “West”, “East” and “protection from invasion” into the respective blank spaces to complete statement #5: “The Mediterranean Sea is to the _____ and the mountains are to the _____. This gave the Phoenicians _____”. Statement #6 said: “The Phoenicians were (write in big letters): _____ and _____.” The PowerPoint slides again provided students with the answers “Sea Traders and Sailors.” The remaining questions were similar, focusing on why the Phoenicians were able to dominate the sea, what they sold and brought home as sea traders, the establishment of colonies, and the Phoenician alphabet.

The students then completed a read-aloud sheet about the Phoenicians that included four statements with bolded vocabulary:

1. The Phoenicians established a **maritime** civilization in western Mesopotamia, north of Canaan (the Hebrews). Phoenicia was a civilization of merchants and sea traders. Tyre was the capital city of the Phoenician civilization (and presently is the 4th largest city in Lebanon).
2. The Phoenicians were best known for manufacturing and trade. Among their innovations were glass (from coastal sand) and *Tyrian purple* (a widely admired purple dye). The Phoenicians also used **papyrus** from Egypt to make scrolls (rolls of paper) for books. They carried these goods and many others throughout the region of the Mediterranean Sea, spreading bits and pieces of specific civilizations to distant lands.
3. To promote trade the Phoenicians set up trading **colonies** around the **Mediterranean Sea** to receive their ships and exchange goods.
4. The Phoenicians’ greatest contribution to civilization was the **alphabet**. Traders needed a quick and flexible form of writing to record business deals. The clay wedges of cuneiform were too clumsy, so the Phoenicians developed a system of 22 symbols for consonant sounds. The Greeks would later add symbols for vowel sounds. (emphasis in original documents)

The bottom of the sheet provided definitions for any bolded words. Maritime, for example, was defined as “related to the sea, and a maritime city is a city with many seaports and ships.” This reading sheet was followed by a “Questions about the Reading” worksheet. Questions included: 2) “The Phoenicians were a maritime civilization. What does that mean?” 3) “What was the capital city of the Phoenicians?” 4) “How did setting up colonies help the Phoenicians?” and 5) “What was the Phoenicians’ greatest contribution to civilization?” The packet, finally, included a follow-up activity in which students had to draw representations of the terms in each box, including “The Phoenicians,” “Trading Colonies,” and “Phoenician Alphabet.” This approach (PowerPoint notes, read-aloud, extension activity) was repeated for most topics in the World History I curriculum. Analyses of the related policy documents indicated a high degree of fidelity to the essential understandings, knowledge, and skills identified.

Phoenicians, Policy Documents to Practice?

Standards WHI.3a to WHI.3e in the *History and Social Science Standards of Learning: World History and Geography to 1500 A.D. (C.E.)* stated:

The student will demonstrate knowledge of ancient river valley civilizations, including those of Mesopotamia, Egypt, the Indus River Valley, and China, and the civilizations of the Hebrews, Phoenicians, and Nubians by: a) Locating these civilizations in time and place; b) Describing the development of social, political, and economic patterns, including slavery; c) Explaining the development of religious traditions; d) Describing the origins, beliefs, traditions, customs, and spread of Judaism, and e) Explaining the development of language and writing. (p. 6-10)

To cover this topic, the teachers in our study chose to teach, in the first quarter of the semester, the following units of study: Geography, Dawn of Man, Mesopotamia, Egypt, Phoenicians, Persians, Hebrews (Jews), East Africa, and West Africa. Each unit of study lasted one to six days.

The standard listed above (WHI.3a) describes the Phoenicians as a river valley civilization, but what specific details, according to the state, did students need to know? On what content would they be tested? The “Essential Knowledge” of the curriculum framework provides the following details. According to WHI.3a, students had to know that:

- “These river valleys offered rich soil and irrigation water for agriculture, and they tended to be in locations easily protected from invasion by nomadic peoples” (Curriculum Framework, p. 6);
- “Phoenicians settled along the Mediterranean Sea and the Jordan River Valley (part of the Fertile Crescent in Southwest Asia) (p. 6)”

These two facts aligned perfectly with, the items in the teacher made fill-in-the blank document and map circling activity (Notesheet #4) entitled, “Phoenicians: A People of the Sea” and accompanying PowerPoint described above.

Under WHI.3b-e, facts *specific* to the Phoenicians include:

- Development of economic patterns: increasing trade along rivers and by sea (Phoenicians)
- Language and writing: alphabet (Phoenicia)

This information was directly addressed in the items of fill-in-the-blank notes and in the read aloud sheet. Some information *not* listed in the SOLs was addressed in the teachers’ course packet. Examples included, “innovations were glass and Tyrian purple,” and they used “papyrus” to make scrolls. This lesson was the rule, not the exception. We could have chosen lessons on any other day to trace a similar trajectory. Underlying all of the curricular documents (and the enactment of those documents in the classroom) was the implicit and explicit recognition that the test scores were important and teaching the prescribed but necessary essential understanding and content was what was required if their students were to demonstrate mastery. The policy documents clearly regulated, obscured, supported, and shaped teachers understandings of what was valuable knowledge and when and how to teach it.

Conclusions: Curriculum and Context

The World History SOLs have been described as “awkward, unstable blending of different cultures and western heritage” that include “no clear declarations of the intellectual or pedagogical grounds on which particular topics for study were chosen...[and no evidence] of how the people who drafted them defined world history or conceived world history teaching” (Dunn, 1999, p. 6). A policy text such as this requires imposition of conceptual order and big idea thinking in order to construct a curriculum that even begins to allow for ambitious teaching and learning. John and Anna, however, worked within a context where the standards policy texts

and accompanying assessments in Virginia defined and reified the nature of history and history teaching as “just the facts”. The result was that the policy texts and discursive practices emerging from the SOLs, (alongside the textual interpretations, and expectations of the social studies supervisor) constituted a level of pedagogical governance which resulted in these teachers organizing instruction that was designed to support student recall on the end of year multiple choice test. To meet their expectations and responsibilities, the teachers enacted a repeatable, recognizable, and efficient teacher-centered form of history instruction.

This study yielded insight into the type of curriculum resources available for teachers as it offered a snapshot of how these resources (policy texts) were translated by a pair of co-teachers who taught struggling students who were required to pass the test in a high-stakes standards-based setting. It was evident that the chunking, fragmentation, and literal translation from the standards to the daily instructional *packets* reflected the narrowing of the curriculum detailed in the literature and highlighted the importance of the *type* of assessment and the *stakes* attached. The provenance for John and Anna’s daily instructional activities can be found within the discourse of the state standards that were then reinforced at the scale of the local division and high school. It seemed that, as a received policy text, the SOLs are interpreted as a series of clearly defined and legitimate courses whose provenance is of little importance to school divisions and teachers tasked with the responsibility for teaching the minimal yet essential content presented in policy documents.

Our work recognizes the power of policy texts as they interact with teachers. This paper illuminated, specifically, the points of translation between policy texts and clearly traceable instructional materials for a classroom (Latour, 2005). Such points of translation between teachers and policy texts are the products and effects of a wider network or chain of activities connected over time and space. That is, the SOLs have a history (van Hover, et. al., 2010). The documents have emerged, existed and have value only through their connections to and associations within and through a network of local, state, and national educational stakeholders (Fore, 1998; van hover, et. al., 2010). Our analyses focused on one specific point of translation: between the policy documents and the teachers as they begin to coordinate and organize their instructional activities. We, however, recognize the larger context is infinitely more complicated, as there are many other points of translation that explicitly and implicitly impact the enactment of curriculum. We chose to focus our analysis around the designing and implementation of instruction because that event is experienced daily by many teachers, principals, and educational researchers. Using the SOLs to frame instruction is something teachers do; and curriculum supervisors, superintendents, etc., expect. It is a taken for granted regular activity, in the Commonwealth of Virginia.

Paying attention to the provenance, language, and power of policy texts and how such entities as policy texts and teachers act upon each other on a daily basis is, we contend, of significance to the work of teacher educators working with both preservice teachers and in professional development settings. While such daily events as planning for the standards based classroom may easily and uncritically appear “immutable and inevitable,” the negotiations that brought their instructional practices into being are too often concealed or lost in translation simply because they are taken for granted (Fenwick & Edwards, 2010, p. 10). By asking questions of the provenance and nature of policy texts and the experiences of teachers translating such text in various contextualizations, it becomes possible to make visible the invisible networks of relations and points of translation that shape how teachers work. Through opening a

dialogic space to ask questions and consider how teachers and policy documents push and pull on each other in various context to produce pedagogical possibilities and enactments, we suggest it becomes possible to also think about how teachers may envision pedagogical possibilities that go beyond the fragmenting and chunking of world history content.

Tracing exactly how entities are not just effects of their interactions with others, but are also always acting on others shows that all are fragile and all are powerful, held in balance within their interactions... However stable and entrenched it may appear, no network is immutable... Counter-networks are constantly spring up that challenge existing networks (Fenwick & Edwards, 2010, p. 11).

Shifting the gaze to explore how readers might be able to construct different assumptions and understandings of their responsibilities, we suggest, can be initiated by preparing preservice teachers and inservice teachers to read and unpack policy texts in a more critical manner. Within our methods courses and professional development activities we have sought to do this by pushing teachers to provide a provenance and explanation for their choices in terms of whose histories are being told and whose are not as a point of comparison with the State's standards. This leads to discussions of why such content must be taught, who decided what content should be taught, and when were these decisions made. Raising such questions and exploring the provenance of the accepted standards begins to push against an uncritical position that what is prescribed in the standards is just the way it is and should be. Ongoing discussions help highlight the ideological debates, discourses, and decisions that went into the creation of the standards. By first historicizing the standards and tracing the networks of relations that brought the standards into play, it becomes possible to then model how to engage with policy texts more dialogically in terms of examining how the texts are constructed, connected, and ultimately positioned for their intended audience(s). Such unpacking includes: 1) identifying who and what is represented in the texts; 2) how they are represented; and 3) what kinds of assumptions exist within the texts in terms of what the document is for or about, what the text is designed to provide, and what the texts suggests is desired (Fairclough, 2003).

Examining the policy texts in this way helps teachers consider how readers might construct different assumptions and understandings. Questions to initiate such a process - reflect the type of close reading we employed within this study - include but are not limited to:

- How and to what extent are key policy documents connected together and how do they come together to coordinate instruction?
- How does each policy document describe its goals, purpose, and provenance?
- Do the documents provided details regarding how the subject should be taught or just what should be taught and assessed?
- How are teachers, students, divisions, etc., represented or positioned within and through these documents?
- What responsibilities are delineated within the texts for teacher, school divisions, and students?
- What are teachers given permission to do in the documents and what are they not given permission to do? What is expected of them? How much flexibility is given to teachers in negotiating the standard?
- How much room exists for augmenting the standards in terms of what should be taught and how it should be taught?

- How much room exists for revising or omitting the standards in terms of what should be taught and how it should be taught?
- How are local curriculum documents positioned in relation to the State documents?
- How do local texts or resources reinforce or push against the key assumptions in the State documents?

Unpacking policy documents in such a way offers a deeper and more aware understanding of power, symmetry and potential areas of negotiation in the planning and implementation of instruction. That is, while texts act on teachers and supervisors, opportunities exist for teachers to translate policy texts in alternate ways. This becomes visible when teachers are asked to pay attention to how they and others working with the same state and local standards translate and implement the texts in different ways in their everyday activities. Comparisons of how different groups of teachers within the same school or teachers in different schools engage in the process of translations with policy documents can be initiated through such questions as:

- In what ways are teachers going beyond standards? How?
- Within and across schools and divisions how do teachers talk about the standards and assessment in terms of their role in determining the ways they plan and implement and assess instruction
- What mechanisms or factors allow or inhibit teachers to go beyond the standards?
- What other contextual factors, resources, assumptions, or conditions beyond the state standards intersect with a teacher's planning and instruction?
- What assumptions and discourses at the local level either disrupt or support the key assumptions in the state standards?
- What types of instructional activities, resources, or approaches were used by different teachers to teach the same standards? What accounts for the similarities and differences?
- In what ways do various instructional activities support student learning beyond preparation for end of course tests

What becomes possible in exploring such questions, based on what is observed in cooperating teacher's or colleague's classrooms, is even the smallest differences in teachers' pedagogical performances within the contexts of their classrooms signifies a level of instability in the networks and chains of action within which teachers translate the standards into practice. This, in turn, fosters a recognition that alternative pedagogical possibilities (however narrow) to implementing standards exists; but only if new connections within chain of action develop, gain traction and become viable.

We are currently seeing a number of teacher educators forging new networks and chains of action, that have the potential, or are already, mediating new points of translations between teachers and policy texts in various contexts. Initiatives such as the new AP government course (Parker, Mosborg, Bransford, Vye, Wilkerson & Abbott, 2011), the Stanford History Education Groups curricular work in US History (Wineburg & Reisman, 2015), and the New York Teachers Toolkit (Lee, Swan & Grant, 2015) designed to support the new C3 initiatives, all recognize, as this paper attempts to demonstrate, that texts matter; that resources and artifacts matter and should not be taken for granted in the daily negotiations and production of pedagogical performances. The designing and accessibility of high quality curriculum and resources, alongside teacher preparation, may well be one of the most pragmatic ways for teacher educators to construct alternative networks that invite and encourage the design of pedagogical

activities that reflect more than “resilient encyclopedia epistemologies” (VanSledright, 2002, p. 144).

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Author Bios

Stephanie van Hover is an associate professor of social studies education at the Curry School of Education at the University of Virginia. Her research interests include the teaching and learning of history in standards based settings. E-mail: svanhover@virginia.edu

David Hicks is a professor of education specializing in History and Social Science Education. His research interests include examining the nature and purpose of the teaching of history in a standards based setting; the integration of multi-media and digital technologies to support the teaching and learning of history and social science; citizenship education; and, disability studies and parental advocacy.

Elizabeth Washington is a professor of social studies education at the University of Florida. Her research explores civic education/democratic citizenship education, the teaching and learning of history, wise practice in the teaching of history and social studies, and historical empathy and perspective taking.

Melissa Lisanti is an assistant professor in Elementary Education in the School of Teacher Education and Leadership at Radford University. Her interests include professional learning in education, discourse, inclusive practice, and universally accessible curriculum and instructional design.