COMMON CORE English Language Arts in a PLC at Work™

GRADES 3–5

DOUGLAS FISHER
NANCY FREY

Foreword by Rebecca DuFour

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International Reading Association

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Fisher has written numerous articles on reading and literacy, differentiated instruction, and curriculum design. His books include *In a Reading State of Mind*, *Checking for Understanding*, *Better Learning Through Structured Teaching*, and *Text Complexity*.

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Before joining the university faculty, Frey was a public school teacher in Florida. She worked at the state level for the Florida Inclusion Network helping districts design systems for supporting students with disabilities in general education classrooms.

She is the recipient of the 2008 Early Career Achievement Award from the National Reading Conference and the Christa McAuliffe Award for excellence in teacher education from the American Association of State Colleges and Universities. She was corecipient of the Farmer Award for excellence in writing from the National Council of Teachers of English for the article "Using Graphic Novels, Anime, and the Internet in an Urban High School."

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FOREWORD

The publication of *Common Core English Language Arts in a PLC at Work™, Grades 3–5* could not be more timely as educators across the United States are gearing up to make the new standards the foundation of their English language arts (ELA) curriculum, instruction, assessment, intervention, enrichment, and professional development processes. The authors, Douglas Fisher and Nancy Frey, are not only two of the United States' most highly regarded experts in ELA but are also educators who have a deep understanding of the steps needed to bring the Common Core standards to life in our classrooms. Fisher and Frey recognize that if students are going to learn these rigorous skills, concepts, and ways of thinking that are essential to their current and future success, then the educators serving those students must no longer work in traditional isolated classrooms but rather must work as members of collaborative teams in schools and districts that function as professional learning communities (PLCs). As the authors state on page 20:

> In fact, chances are good that you are interested in this book because it promises to link an important change—implementing the Common Core State Standards in English language arts—with a process you already know to be powerful: professional learning communities.

Picture an elementary teacher working in a traditional school. He or she will likely be provided a copy of the Common Core State Standards document, may receive a few hours of training from someone in the district, and then essentially will be left to work in isolation for the rest of the year to interpret, teach, and assess each standard to the best of his or her ability. The degree to which the students assigned into that traditional classroom learn each standard will almost exclusively depend on that teacher's understanding of each standard, how much time and energy he or she is able and willing to devote to the new standards, and finally, his or her ability to teach the standards effectively.

Now imagine a team of teachers working in a school that embraces the PLC at Work process. Team members will be provided a copy of the Common Core ELA document and will work together collaboratively to develop a common understanding of what the

standards entail. They will be provided time and support to study and discuss each standard in order to clarify, sequence, pace, and assess the standards in a common way across each grade level. Each team will be provided time to collaborate vertically with teams in the grade levels above and below its own to build a strong scope and sequence and a common language for ELA as students progress from one grade to the next. Leadership at the school and district levels will not only provide each team with the necessary time, support, and ongoing training to engage in this critical collaborative work but also put structures in place and empower staffs to build schoolwide systems of intervention, extension, and enrichment for students—providing time and support for each student to take his or her own learning to the next level.

I am confident this book, written by two respected colleagues, will provide you—my heroes working in schools and districts each day—with ideas, strategies, tools, and resources to help you bring the Common Core English language arts standards to life in your classrooms. The students entrusted to you deserve nothing less.

—Rebecca DuFour

INTRODUCTION

The investment of time and expertise by schools and districts to make the transformation into an effective Professional Learning Community (PLC) at Work is about to pay off once again. The adoption of the Common Core State Standards for English language arts (CCSS ELA) represents a significant change in how the education profession looks at curriculum, instruction, and assessment. In addition, the implications for implementation of the CCSS ELA will have ramifications for years to come. As new research on best practices related to the Common Core State Standards is conducted and disseminated, educators will need to interpret these results and determine how best to put them into practice. The PLC process offers an ideal foundational system for doing so. This process provides the necessary conditions and support to accomplish the work of ensuring continuous improvement. Ongoing professional development is embedded into the process, because teachers work as members of high-performing collaborative teams. Becoming a PLC is a process of reculturing a school; the concept is not just another meeting (DuFour, DuFour, & Eaker, 2008; Frey, Fisher, & Everlove, 2009). Effective districtwide or schoolwide PLCs have the following six characteristics (DuFour et al., 2008; DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, & Many, 2010).

1. **Shared mission, vision, values, and goals all focused on student learning:** The *mission* defines why the organization exists; the *vision* defines what the organization can become in the future; the *values* consist of demonstrated attitudes and behaviors that further the vision; and the *goals* are markers used to determine results and assess progress. A thriving PLC immerses itself in the behaviors necessary to the development of these concepts.
2. **A collaborative culture with a focus on learning:** *Collaboration*, an essential ingredient in the PLC process, enables people to work interdependently to improve teaching and learning.
3. **Collective inquiry into best practice and current reality:** *Collective inquiry* is the process through which PLC educators strive to build shared knowledge about research and what works in their classrooms.

4. **Action orientation:** An *action orientation* is characteristic of successful PLCs that learn by doing and recognize the significance and necessity of actions that engage their members in planning learning tasks, implementing them, and evaluating results.
5. **A commitment to continuous improvement:** *Continuous improvement* is a cyclical process that PLCs use to plan, implement, and check to determine the effectiveness of their efforts to improve teaching and learning.
6. **Results orientation:** *Results* are what count for PLCs; they are the measurable outcomes that reveal the success of the collaborative efforts to improve teaching and learning. Results outweigh intentions.

Visit **www.allthingsplc.info** for a glossary of PLC terms.

These six characteristics must be woven into the fabric of the school; they have to become part of the air that teachers, parents, students, and administrators breathe. In creating this culture, PLCs must reach agreement on fundamental issues, including (DuFour et al., 2008):

- What content students should learn
- What common and coherent assessments to develop and use to determine if students have learned the agreed-on curriculum
- How to respond when students do or don't learn the agreed-on curriculum

To accomplish these three tasks, teachers need adequate time to collaborate with their colleagues. We are not suggesting that scheduling time for teachers to collaborate is easy, but without dedicated time, teams will not develop the collaborative structures needed to support student learning, especially if teachers are going to address the Common Core State Standards in grades 3–5. As part of their collaborative team time, teachers in PLCs engage in inquiry into student learning. The following four critical questions of a PLC highlight and provide a foundation for the work of collaborative planning teams (DuFour et al., 2008).

1. What do we want our students to learn?
2. How will we know when they have learned it?
3. How will we respond when some students don't learn?
4. How will we extend and enrich the learning for students who are already proficient?

Professional Development and Professional Learning Communities

Linda Darling-Hammond (2010) summarizes the research on effective professional development as follows:

> Effective professional development is sustained, ongoing, content-focused, and embedded in professional learning communities where teachers work overtime on problems of practice with other teachers in their subject area or school. Furthermore, it focuses on concrete tasks of teaching, assessment, observation, and reflection, looking at how students learn specific content in particular contexts. . . . It is often useful for teachers to be put in the position of studying the very material that they intend to teach to their own students. (pp. 226–227)

In other words, effective professional development is often the opposite of what most teachers receive—it is sustained and embedded within the work of professional learning communities and focused on the actual tasks of teaching using the material teachers use with students. Professional development practices have moved beyond stand-alone workshops to ones that are tied to a school's chosen area of focus. Through the work of researchers like Bruce Joyce and Beverly Showers (1983) and others, educators began to understand that professional development could be linked to the change process. In particular, the value of an agreed-on focus, the need for continued support after the session, and a plan for measuring success have become expected elements of any school's professional development plan. To succeed as a high-performance school, professional development should be part of a teacher's overall involvement in a learning community.

The link between professional development and school change has been further strengthened through PLCs (Eaker, DuFour, & DuFour, 2002). PLCs recognize that teacher collaboration lies at the heart of learning and change. Collaborative planning teams within PLCs are able to bridge theory to practice as they convene regularly to examine student performance data, discuss student progress, develop and implement curricula, and coach one another through meaningful collaborative work between meetings.

The evidence of PLC effectiveness is mounting. A study of elementary teachers in PLCs identifies a strong statistical correlation between their participation in professional learning communities, their classroom cultures, and their use of formative assessments to advance learning (Birenbaum, Kimron, & Shilton, 2011). Robert Bullough and Steven Baugh (2008) find that the conditions created to foster a schoolwide PLC in turn deepened a school-university partnership. In an analysis of nearly four hundred schools as PLCs, Louise Stoll, Ray Bolam, Agnes McMahon, Mike Wallace, and Sally Thomas (2006) note a positive relationship between student achievement, adoption of innovative practices, and healthy learning communities. In fact, Robert Marzano notes that school and district-level PLCs are "probably the most influential movement with regards to actually changing practices in schools" (DuFour & Marzano, 2011, p. x).

Purpose of This Book

We hope we have made the case, however, briefly, that a PLC at the school or district level is vital to school change. Furthermore, collaborative planning teams functioning within the school's PLC provide embedded professional development that sustains change.

In fact, chances are good that you are interested in this book because it promises to link an important change—implementing the Common Core State Standards in English language arts—with a process you already know to be powerful: professional learning communities. The remainder of this book provides collaborative teacher teams with information about the *what* and the *how* of teaching students to master these standards, including how to develop effective formative assessment and respond when students fail to make progress. We expand the Common Core standards so that you and your team can examine them in detail. You will find that each chapter begins with questions for your team to consider, and we invite you to return to these after you examine the standards to discuss implications for instruction, curriculum, assessment, and intervention.

Organization of This Book

This book has been crafted with your collaborative team in mind. Use it as a workbook—mark it up, dog-ear the pages, highlight passages that resonate, underline the ones that raise a question. In the same way that the Common Core ELA standards focus our collective attention on the practices of close reading and argumentation, we hope to contribute to a similar process for your team. The conversation begins in chapter 1 with an overview of the CCSS and the major shifts in our practices as these relate to informational texts, the role of speaking and listening in learning, the development of academic language and vocabulary, and the importance of argumentation in writing. Later in chapter 1, we explain how the standards are organized, so that the thirty-three-page original document and its three appendices become a bit less bewildering. We also discuss what the standards don't say: about English learners, students with disabilities, and those who struggle with literacy. The National Governors Association Center for Best Practices and Council of Chief State School Officers (NGA & CCSSO), developers of the CCSS, provide some general guidelines for students learning English and those who struggle in school, but these are brief summaries and will likely generate a great deal of additional ideas for implementation over the next several years (for more information visit www.corestandards.org/the-standards for the documents "Application of the Standards for English Language Learners" and "Application to Students With Disabilities"). Importantly, these gaps highlight why PLCs are so important. In the words of the NGA and CCSSO (2010a):

> While the Standards focus on what is most essential, they do not describe all that can or should be taught. A great deal is left to the discretion of teachers and curriculum developers. The aim of the Standards is to articulate the fundamentals, not to set out an exhaustive list or a set of restrictions that limits what can be taught beyond what is specified herein. (p. 6)

Chapters 2, 3, and 4 form the heart of this book because they each focus on a specific *strand* addressed in the CCSS. Reading is the subject of chapter 2: each and every standard is examined as it applies to literary and informational texts, as well as the important reading foundational skills of phonics, word recognition, and fluency that are critical in the development of readers in grades 3–5. Chapter 3 turns the spotlight to the Writing standards and similarly reviews each standard as it applies to the major text types students produce: narrative, informational, and persuasive. In chapter 4, we discuss the two sets of Common Core standards that are integral to what we teach and how students learn—through speaking and listening and by understanding and producing academic language and vocabulary.

Chapter 5 returns to the subject of student consideration in the CCSS, including discussion on using formative assessment processes and summative assessment instruments informatively, and designing and implementing interventions for students who are not performing at expected levels.

Know that this book has been designed with you in mind. All of the research cited is specific to grades 3–5. In addition, we've designed scenarios written from the perspective of teachers and students in grades 3–5 to illuminate the standards.

These scenarios are fictionalized accounts of our personal teaching activities and our collective experience working with teachers across grade levels in schools with diverse populations. We have developed these scenarios as a way to make the ELA standards come alive for you, not just in language arts but also in science, mathematics, and social studies. We want you to personalize this experience as you and your collaborative team plan for implementation of the Common Core for English language arts. To begin this process, we encourage you to reflect on and discuss with your colleagues the following questions.

1. What is the status of collaborative teams at your school? Acknowledging the reality of your school's commitment to an effective PLC process is a critical first step that can establish the future direction for collaborative professional growth. Recall the six characteristics of effective PLCs (page 1–2) and consider the extent to which your PLC embodies these characteristics. If you want to delve deeper into your school's PLC status, you can explore where your school would place on the PLC continuum: preinitiating, initiating, implementing, developing, or sustaining (DuFour et al., 2010). Visit www.allthingsplc.info and search the Tools & Resources section for helpful PLC reproducibles, such as the PLC continuum reproducible "Laying the Foundation" from *Learning by Doing* (DuFour et al., 2010).
2. How are your students performing? Are there areas of need in terms of curriculum development? Are there areas of need in terms of instruction? Are there areas of need in terms of assessment? These questions address key topics for your PLC to consider as you focus on the current status of your school's language arts programs in relation to the expectations of the Common Core ELA standards. Discussions with your collaborative team will enable you to gain insight into *where you are* and *where you need to go* to support and advance your students' language development.

We've designed this book to guide the conversations that are necessary to fully implement the Common Core State Standards. As such, it should serve as a resource that you return to regularly to consider the ways in which student learning can be improved. The anchor standards and the grade-level expectations are the outcomes expected of us as teachers. *Common Core English Language Arts in a PLC at Work, Grades 3–5* provides the process to get there.

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CHAPTER 1

Using Collaborative Teams for English Language Arts

KEY QUESTIONS

- To what extent does your team understand the conceptual shifts represented in the Common Core State Standards for English language arts?
- How often are informational texts used in instruction across the day?
- To what extent do teachers at your school use complex texts?
- Do students routinely discuss and develop texts that feature opinions and evidence?
- To what extent do teachers at your school focus on speaking and listening activities?
- In what ways do teachers at your school develop academic vocabulary and language?

A team of fourth-grade teachers is meeting to discuss the results of a common formative assessment it had recently administered. Teachers had previously agreed on a pacing guide for their unit focused on informational texts and had discussed the various ways that they would teach the unit. Unlike most previous state standards, the Common Core State Standards require an integrated approach to lesson development in which teachers build student competence in multiple standards simultaneously. As an example, the teachers' three-week unit had its primary focus on the Reading Standards for Informational Text at the fourth-grade level (RI.4; NGA & CCSSO, 2010a):

- Refer to details and examples in a text when explaining what the text says explicitly and when drawing inferences from the text. (RI.4.1.)
- Determine the meaning of general academic and domain-specific words or phrases in a text relevant to a fourth-grade topic or subject area. (RI.4.4)
- Describe the overall structure (for example, chronology, comparison, cause and effect, problem and solution) of events, ideas, concepts, or information in a text or part of a text. (RI.4.5)
- Explain how an author uses reasons and evidence to support particular points in a text. (RI.4.8) (p. 12)

Of course, teachers always have to consider the complexity of the text and ensure that students are reading appropriate texts. As part of their common formative assessment, these teachers wanted to determine if students could make inferences from what was

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explicitly stated in a text and if they could use their knowledge of context clues and word parts to understand vocabulary. The teachers asked students to read a selection about Velcro (see figure 1.1) and respond to a number of questions.

Velcro

For thousands of years, man has walked through fields of weeds and arrived home with burrs stuck to his clothing. It's amazing no one took advantage of the problem until 1948.

George de Mestral, a Swiss engineer, returned from a walk one day in 1948 and found some cockleburs clinging to his cloth jacket. When de Mestral loosened them, he examined one under his microscope. The principle was simple. The cocklebur is a maze of thin strands with burrs (or hooks) on the ends that cling to fabrics or animal fur.

By the accident of the cockleburs sticking to his jacket, de Mestral recognized the potential for a practical new fastener. It took eight years to experiment, develop, and perfect the invention, which consists of two strips of nylon fabric. One strip contains thousands of small hooks. The other strip contains small loops. When the two strips are pressed together, they form a strong bond.

Hook-and-loop fastener is what we call it today. Velcro, the name de Mestral gave his product, is the brand most people in the United States know. It is strong, easily separated, lightweight, durable, and washable; it also comes in a variety of colors and won't jam.

There are thousands of uses for hook-and-loop fasteners—on clothing, shoes, watchbands, or backpacks; around the house or garage; in automobiles, aircraft, parachutes, spacesuits, or space shuttles; to secure blood pressure cuffs and artificial heart chambers. The list is never-ending.

The only bad thing about hook-and-loop fasteners is the competition they give the snap, zipper, button, and shoelace industries!

Source: Adapted from Jones, 1991, p. 68.

Figure 1.1: Sample informational text.

One question on the assessment asked students about the meaning of a word in the selection, "What are *burrs*? How did you know or figure out the word?" The fourth-grade teachers' collaborative discussion about this item centers on students' problem-solving abilities.

Hadley Campbell notes, "Eighty-eight percent of the students got this definition correct. I'm really impressed with that because I thought that burrs would be hard for them."

Agreeing, Ryan Cruise adds, "Yeah, and look, only 15 percent of them said that they knew it. The rest of them said that they figured it out, that it was a plant with parts that were like hooks."

Rene Andre comments, "I think that our students did really well on this, and I'm thinking about the students who thought it was a hook because of the punctuation. I

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think we might have overgeneralized the lesson on context clues. I'd like to revisit that and remind students that the punctuation does not always give an exact definition. Sometimes, it gives something like an example or analogy."

Later in the discussion, the team notes the students' confusion about the following question: "Why did the author say that 'the only bad thing about hook-and-loop fasteners is the competition for the snap, zipper, button, and shoelace industries'?"

Mr. Cruise starts the conversation saying, "They really didn't get this one. The majority of students focused on the word *bad.* Here's a sample response, 'They are bad because they do not stay closed like a zipper.' As we saw, there are lots and lots of examples of students not understanding the idea of competition for other products and instead thinking that the author thought that Velcro was bad or not as worthy as the other things."

Ms. Campbell asks, "So what do we do about this? Was it something we did that confused them?"

Ms. Andre responds, "I don't think so. I mean, it's not like we taught them something contrary. I'm thinking that we need to do a lot more modeling about inferences. I think that to answer this question, they really have to understand what the author is saying and why. They have to get inside the mind of the author, rather than just focus on the individual words. I'd like to try modeling some more, specifically using inferences when value terms are in the text that might throw off the reader. I'd be willing to find some texts and write some sample modeling lessons, if you think that would help."

Ms. Campbell enthusiastically agrees, adding, "I'm not sure that I would have thought about that. I appreciate our time together and your offer to provide us with resources."

Mr. Cruise adds, "I agree. Thank you so much. I feel like we have a handle on this, or at least a plan. So what else do we see in these data?"

Conversations like this are possible when teachers have the opportunity to work together in collaborative planning teams. To teach the Common Core State Standards well, teachers need to collaborate with their colleagues. In doing so, they can ensure learning for *all* students. It is imperative that collaborative team members work to answer the four critical questions of a PLC as they devote attention to the CCSS (DuFour et al., 2008).

1. What do we want our students to learn?
2. How will we know when they have learned it?
3. How will we respond when some students don't learn?
4. How will we extend and enrich the learning for students who are already proficient?

In other words, teachers need to plan together, look at student work together, identify needs for reteaching together, trust one another, and ask for help when they need it. Figure 1.2 (page 10) provides a tool that we have found useful in helping collaborative

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Collaborative Team Meeting Logistics	
Grade:	Date:
Lead teacher or facilitator:	
Teachers in attendance:	
Focus (Check one.) ☐ Curriculum pacing guide ☐ Strategy implementation ☐ Coaching practice ☐ Consensus scoring cycle + Common assessment development + Item analysis (See Item Analysis Summary.)	
Discussion points:	Questions raised:
Objective for the coming week:	Resources needed:
Implementation steps:	
Item Analysis Summary	
Assessment tool:	
Areas of strength in student work:	
Areas of weakness in student work:	
Teacher practice: What should be preserved?	
Teacher practice: Identify gaps between existing and desired practice.	
Teacher practice: What aspects of existing practice pose a barrier to implementing desired practice?	
Teacher practice: Identify interventions or unit modifications.	
Unanswered questions:	

Source: Adapted from Fisher & Frey, 2007a. Reprinted with permission. Learn more about ASCD at www.ascd.org.

Figure 1.2: Collaborative team meeting record.

Visit **go.solution-tree.com/commoncore** for a reproducible version of this figure.

teams work together. As part of their overall PLC work, collaborative teams focus on the four critical questions and begin to build the culture of the school in which student learning drives the discussions teachers and administrators have.

Over time, teams will modify and change the tool to suit their unique needs, but to start, it is likely useful to focus on each aspect of the tool. At the top of the form ("Collaborative Team Meeting Logistics"), teachers record the grade level, the date of the

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meeting, who was facilitating, and who was in attendance. Given that there are different phases that a collaborative team uses to complete the work, we ask that the team agree on its focus for each of its collaborative meeting times. Importantly, there may be two or more foci during a meeting, and we ask teams to complete different forms for each shift in focus. The reason for this is simple: the team learns to integrate the stages as a habit of interaction when it names each stage each time. It also provides a record that the team can use to review past efforts to improve student achievement. School systems are very good at documenting when things are going wrong and not so good at recording successes. Using a tool like the one in figure 1.2 provides a record of success that team members can review when they need to revisit a successful time in the past.

The remainder of the logistics portion of the form focuses on the discussion that team members have, including the development of pacing guides, teaching strategy implementation, and peer advice and coaching. During some of the meetings, the team will develop common assessments or review the results of an assessment. We recommend that teams use the "Item Analysis Summary" portion when they are discussing assessment results since there are a number of specific decisions to be made in terms of intervention and changes in practice.

Teachers are able to hold these types of conversations because they understand the power of PLCs and the conceptual shifts in the Common Core State Standards for English language arts. They also know the specific standards for their grade level and how these are developed across grades 3–5. In this chapter, we will discuss these major shifts represented in the CCSS, especially their implications for teaching English language arts. In addition, we will highlight what is *not* included in the standards.

The Common Core State Standards

The adoption of the Common Core State Standards for the English language arts extends a trend in U.S. education to collaborate across organizations in order to obtain better learning results. Standards-driven policies and practices have yielded notable results, especially in our collective efforts to articulate purposes and learning outcomes to our stakeholders (Gamoran, 2007). This in turn has led to improved alignment between curriculum, instruction, and assessment. But the years have also exposed weaknesses of this system, many of which are related to the disjointed efforts of individual states trying to put their own standards in motion. No matter how effective the process or product, states simply could not share them with other states, as no standards were held in common. Consequently, states, like Arkansas and Arizona, could not pool human and fiscal resources to develop common materials and assessments.

As standards-based assessments rose to prominence in the 2000s, a mosaic of testing results made it virtually impossible to fairly compare the effectiveness of reform efforts across states. The National Governors Association Center for Best Practices and Council of Chief State School Officers sought to rectify these shortcomings by sponsoring the development of a shared set of standards each state could agree on. Beginning in 2010,

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state boards of education began adopting these standards in English language arts and mathematics. In 2012, nearly all the states adopted them and began work on determining timelines for implementation, as well as methods for assessment.

In an effort to capitalize on new opportunities for collaboration among states, two assessment consortia are developing standards-based assessments. Both the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC, 2012) and the SMARTER Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC, 2012) consist of representatives from states working to develop assessments of the standards. Some states belong to both and will eventually determine which instruments they will use. While these efforts are works in progress, common themes are emerging from both consortia. For one, it is likely that a significant part of the tests will be computer based. In addition, it is anticipated that benchmark assessments will play a prominent role in order for schools to be better able to identify students who are falling behind. But perhaps the biggest shift in these assessments has to do with the ELA standards themselves. In the next sections, we will outline five major changes to how we view literacy teaching and learning.

Shift One: Focus on Reading and Writing to Inform, Persuade, and Convey Experiences

The Common Core ELA standards reflect a trend in elementary literacy that has been occurring since the 1990s: a deepening appreciation of the importance of informational and persuasive texts in a student's *reading diet*, or the range of reading genre and materials students encounter across the year. (For now, we will focus our discussion on informational texts, with further attention to persuasive texts featured later in this chapter in the section on argumentation.) The reasons for increasing informational text usage are often related to the need to improve content knowledge (Moss, 2005), to meet increased demand in digital environments (Schmar-Dobler, 2003), and even to prevent the so-called *fourth-grade slump* (Chall & Jacobs, 2003), which suggests that student achievement stagnates starting in fourth grade. Perhaps reflective of these efforts, access to and use of informational texts appears to be increasing in elementary school. Jognseong Jeong, Janet Gaffney, and Jin-Oh Choi's (2010) study of second-, third-, and fourth-grade classrooms' informational text usage finds that while use hovers at one minute per day in the second-grade classrooms, it greatly accelerates to sixteen minutes per day in third and fourth grades. However, this is still well short of Barbara Moss's (2005) measure of informational text usage on standardized tests—50 percent at the fourth-grade level.

The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), sometimes called "the nation's report card," has steadily increased the use of informational text passages on its assessments of fourth-, eighth-, and twelfth-grade students across the United States. In keeping with this initiative, the CCSS ELA recommend an evenly divided reading diet of literary and informational texts by the fourth grade (see table 1.1), gradually increasing throughout middle and high school. Keep in mind that this doesn't mean that students

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Table 1.1: Grade Distribution of Literary and Informational Passages in the 2009 NAEP Framework

Grade	Literary Texts	Informational Texts
4	50 percent	50 percent
8	45 percent	55 percent
12	30 percent	70 percent

Source: Adapted from NGA & CCSSO, 2010a, p. 5.

in grades 3–5 should no longer be allowed to read narrative text; nothing could be further from the truth. Narrative remains essential as a means of conveying ideas and concepts through story. However, just as a nutritional diet limited to only one or two foods cannot provide sufficient nourishment, neither should we limit the types of texts used (not just stacked on the bookshelves) in the classroom. Furthermore, it is helpful to measure the use of informational text across the school day, not only in the reading and language arts block, in which a greater volume of literary texts are used.

Just as the reading diet of learners needs to be expanded, so does their writing repertoire. A key practice is to link the reading of expository texts with original writing in the same genre, as the link between reading and writing abilities is strong in students (Langer, 1986), and there is an especially strong positive longitudinal effect between grades 2 and 6 (Abbott, Beringer, & Fayol, 2010). In other words, consistent exposure to and use of text genres is positively linked to children's growing ability to write within these same genres. In the same way that narrative texts are used as a springboard for young writers to convey their own experiences, informational texts should be used to teach how one explains and persuades. Students in grades 2 through 6 are not fully aware of audience, especially in recognizing what an unseen reader might need or expect from a text they have written (Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1987).

However, Eliza Beth Littleton (1998) finds that students ages five to nine can be taught to use the oral language rhetorical skills needed to explain and persuade. When purposefully taught, these skills transfer to students' writing ability, and students' capacity to write grows with age and experience.

Similarly, Beverly Cox, Timothy Shanahan, and Margaret Tinzmann (1991) find that advancing reading levels for third and fifth graders' expository writing correlates to more sophisticated control of organizational and rhetorical features. They further note:

> The interesting point in this study is that the more subtle and complex aspects of text knowledge, many of which are experienced primarily in extended, written text . . . or more particularly in exposition (writing more complexly organized hierarchical structures) were only developed by those who were learning to read successfully. (p. 203)

Notably, Victoria Purcell-Gates, Nell Duke, and Joseph Martineau (2007) examine the science reading and writing experiences of second- and third-grade students to

identify effective teaching practices. They discover that explicit teaching of informational writing forms (for example, All About Cats) in science has little effect, while immersion in authentic science reading and writing is strongly correlated to writing ability in this genre. Also, authentic reading and writing immersion coupled with explicit instruction is most effective for science procedural writing (for example, How to Freeze Water Into Ice). In both cases, these effects hold regardless of socioeconomic factors, such the parents' educational level.

The ELA standards for grades 3–5 call for a major investment in the time teachers spend instructing students to raise their ability to comprehend informational and persuasive texts. This may require an assessment of where and when students use these types of texts across the school day. Additionally, there is a renewed expectation that students can also write in these genres. Much of the research on expository writing for grades 3–5 students reinforces what many of us already knew: immersion in these texts, when coupled with explicit instruction, can lead to more sophisticated writing (Duke & Roberts, 2010; Moss, 2004).

Shift Two: Focus on Increasing Text Complexity

Closely related to an emphasis on informational texts is "steadily increasing text complexity" (NGA & CCSSO, 2010b, p. 2). This aspect has received considerable attention as educators figure out how to apply a three-part model for determining how complex a reading really is. In addition, U.S. school teams are working to design methods for accessing complex texts among students who struggle to read, English learners, and students with special needs. The CCSS ELA define text complexity as "the inherent difficulty of reading and comprehending a text combined with consideration of reader and task variables; in the Standards, a three-part assessment of text difficulty that pairs qualitative and quantitative measures with reader-task considerations" (NGA & CCSSO, 2010b, p. 43). In other words, it is multidimensional, with attention given to (1) *quantitative measures*, such as readability formulae; (2) *qualitative factors*, such as complexity of ideas, organization, and cohesion; and (3) *reader and task considerations*, such as motivation and task difficulty.

The issue of text complexity raises the case for backward planning, with the outcome being that graduating high school students are sufficiently prepared to tackle the kinds of texts they will encounter as they enter college and careers. While this may initially seem to be a remote goal for teachers in grades 3–5, keeping it in mind is helpful in identifying what texts are useful for students in the intermediate grades.

Appendix B of the Common Core ELA (NGA & CCSSO, 2010c), a useful resource for teachers, includes an extensive list of text exemplars to illustrate this concept of text complexity. These text exemplars should not be misconstrued as a required reading list for a specific grade. To do so would be to ignore the third dimension of identifying complex texts: reader and task considerations. A necessary complication is that text

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exemplars are arranged somewhat differently across grade bands due to the developmental nature of reading in elementary school. Text exemplars for grades 2–3 are listed together, while a separate list is for use in grades 4–5. An examination of the list of exemplars exposes an important difference between the two: the grades 2–3 list includes stories, poetry, drama, and informational texts that students should read themselves, as well as parallel lists for those that can be used as read-alouds. The grades 4–5 list, on the other hand, does not include a second list for read-alouds. We do not believe that this is an indication that older elementary students should not experience read-alouds; in fact the evidence supporting this instructional practice is strong (Manak, 2011; May, 2011). We interpret this as an indication that interactive read-alouds in grades 4 and 5 are a means for preparing students to comprehend increasingly difficult texts rather than an outcome.

Referenced within the standards document is a *staircase* effect to systematically develop students' capacity for understanding more complex texts (NGA & CCSSO, 2010a). This should be considered at several levels of analysis: within a unit of instruction, throughout a school year, and across multiple grades. That is, the texts a student uses at the beginning of a unit to build background knowledge are more explicit, while those that occur later in a unit to deepen student knowledge are less so. Similarly, the texts students utilize early in a given school year are less complex than those that occur near the end. Additionally, students' capacity and stamina for reading complex texts should build across grade-level bands. For this reason, work concerning text complexity should involve at least two collaborative planning team configurations—as teachers work within as well as across grades 3–5—to articulate a cohesive plan. These horizontal and vertical team collaborations ensure that students experience a cohesive curriculum without gaps or redundancy.

Text complexity poses a major challenge for educators in grades 3–5 as students transition to classroom environments that increasingly rely on texts as a major source of learning. Defining what makes a text complex requires analyzing qualitative factors and quantitative measures, while also considering the characteristics of the reader and the demands of the related task. In addition, the CCSS encourage teachers to look across units, the school year, and grade bands to build a purposeful plan to staircase student capacity for complex texts.

Shift Three: Focus on Speaking and Listening

While oral language development is widely regarded as a key feature of early elementary education, in practice this is more often regarded as being of less importance in grades 3–5, except for students with identified language learning needs. Perhaps this is due to more text-based instruction or to larger class sizes. Whatever the specific reason, there is a noticeable decline in the amount of meaningful discussion that occurs in classrooms after the primary grades. Robert Pianta et al. (2007), in observations of 2,500 elementary classrooms, find that fifth-grade teachers spend less than 7 percent of the school day instructing students for analysis and inference, in contrast to nearly 32

percent devoted to basic skills, 18 percent for managerial instructions, and 17 percent for transitions. Notably, these findings are statistically similar as well in third- and first-grade classrooms. It is difficult to see how students can develop critical speaking and listening skills when a large part of their school day involves listening to low-level directions.

The CCSS place a strong emphasis on speaking and listening in the primary grades. Furthermore, NGA and CCSSO state:

> A meta-analysis by Sticht and James (1984) indicates that the importance of oral language extends well beyond the earliest grades. . . . Sticht and James found evidence strongly suggesting that children's listening comprehension outpaces reading comprehension until the middle school years (grades 6–8). (p. 26).

Speaking and listening skills have a concomitant relationship with reading and writing development. To observe this effect, Virginia Berninger and Robert Abbott (2010) examine two cohorts of students from elementary into middle school, measuring their listening comprehension, speaking expression, reading comprehension, and writing comprehension in grades 1, 3, 5, and 7. They note students' relative strengths and weaknesses vary considerably across the years, supporting the assertion that these language modalities are not fixed but are influenced considerably by experiences and education. They note:

> Some [people] still believe that children learn oral language before they come to school and that the purpose of schooling is to teach written language. . . . When the four separate language systems are well integrated and synchronized, language may be experienced as a unitary construct, much as rain is experienced as unitary wetness rather than as isolated drops. (p. 649)

Berninger and Abbott (2010) advocate for a view of "comprehension and expression via language by ear, mouth, hand, and eye" (p. 635), weaving language experiences into as many instructional events as possible.

The Common Core ELA standards for grades 3–5 call for teachers to nest speaking and listening within the context of literacy instruction. Importantly, these performance-based standards include delivering and listening to the presentations of other students and exchanging information and ideas featured in these performance events. Speaking and listening also extend to a variety of instructional arrangements, especially small-group interactions across content areas. Students are encouraged to collaborate with one another and communicate in formal and informal settings; like shifts one and two, they should not be bound exclusively to the reading and language arts block and should be integrated across the school day.

Shift Four: Focus on Text-Based Evidence for Argumentation

A fourth shift concerns the development of argumentation skills. This is unfamiliar to many elementary teachers who typically have experience at rhetorical reading and

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writing only as college students themselves. Perhaps they recall formal argumentation in writing, such as Stephen Toulmin's (1958) model of argumentation.

- **Claim:** The position being argued; for example, "Our family should get a dog."
- **Grounds:** The reasons given for the claim; answers the question, "What's the proof?" For example, "Dogs have been bred for thousands of years to be good companions and to provide security to their owners."
- **Warrant:** The more formal reasoning or principle that serves as the underpinning for the claim; this links the claim to the grounds such as, "Many families choose a dog for a pet for these reasons."
- **Backing:** The justification for the warrant; for example, "The Humane Society of the United States says that there are seventy-eight million pet dogs, and 39 percent of all households have at least one dog."
- **Rebuttal:** The counterclaim an opponent might assert; such as, "Some parents might worry that they will need to do all the care, but I promise to walk the dog every day."
- **Qualification:** The limits to the claim; for example, "I know I will need help in the beginning because I don't have a lot of experience with dogs. I know I will need to read more about pet care to get really good at it."

Toulmin's (1958) model of argumentation is meant only to illustrate that grades 3–5 students are developmentally capable of laying out a simple argument and supporting it with evidence. While we don't advocate for teaching formal argumentation as Toulmin describes it, the foundations of rational thought are completely within the scope of what students in middle childhood can do. Scott Beers and William Nagy (2011) call this type of thinking *discursive literacy* and consider this a second step for young writers after they have mastered the *linguistic literacy* taught in the primary grades. Indeed, we regularly teach some aspects already: detecting the differences between fact and opinion, recognizing advertising techniques, and even examining propaganda, editorial cartoons, and letters to the editor. Two elements are often missing, however: students rarely engage in formal writing of persuasive essays, and they are seldom required to cite evidence from texts to support their claims (Bransford, Brown, & Cocking, 2000; Davidson, 2011; Leithwood, McAdie, Bascia, & Rodrigue, 2006).

Argumentation as a formal process isn't present in the Common Core ELA until grades 6–12. However, the foundation for it is built in the elementary years through opinion. Importantly, *opinion* doesn't refer to the general definition of the word—after all, everybody has opinions about something—but rather about the academic expectations of opinion. These expectations include stating one's opinion, supporting opinion through evidence and example, and anticipating and addressing opposing opinions. In elementary school, this process is demonstrated through persuasive writing.

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Although persuasive writing has been featured in most states' content frameworks, it is rarely put into practice in a consistent way (Moore & MacArthur, 2012). A national survey of teachers in grades 4–6 finds that nearly 80 percent of participating teachers assign persuasive writing *never at all* (8.25 percent) or *several times a year, but less than monthly* (71.13 percent) (Gilbert & Graham, 2010). Students do not write often enough in school. The amount of writing alone is inadequate for them to become more skilled at writing persuasively. Additionally, this may have instructional implications. Writing is more than just assigning; writing skills must be taught as well. Beers and Nagy (2011) note that the writing development of more than one hundred third graders for five years—through seventh grade—in four genres (narrative, descriptive, compare and contrast, and persuasive) progressed slowly over the course of the study, but was especially slow for persuasive writing. Noting that the syntactic demand of persuasive writing is challenging for young writers, Beers and Nagy (2011) state:

> Children face two steep learning curves in their attempts to develop as writers: they must acquire academic vocabulary and the ability to use increasingly complex syntactic forms, and they also must learn to use these newly-acquired linguistic tools correctly in a variety of different genres. (p. 185)

Persuasive writing requires the use of subordinate clauses, and students inexperienced in using subordinate clauses are unable to adequately develop more sophisticated persuasive-writing abilities. (For example, "Because dogs make excellent watch dogs, families feel more protected.")

A second characteristic of persuasion and argumentation is the ability to cite evidence to support one's claims. The use of evidence is at the heart of science instruction. The National Science Education Association standards (National Research Council, 1996) require elementary science students to use evidence for argumentation in science discussion and writing. Argumentation skills, like persuasion skills, can be taught. However, they require purposeful instruction. For example, Katherine McNeill (2011) chronicles the development of fifth-grade science students' growing ability to use evidence and argumentation in their science writing. The teacher consistently taught about science discourse in discussions and writings using claims, evidence, and reasoning (backing). At the beginning of the school year, most of the students in the study wrote using the limited language of general descriptions, while only 28 percent wrote using argumentation. By the end of the school year, and with instruction coupled with authentic purposes, 100 percent of the students were able to use argumentation in science. These findings further support Purcell-Gates, Duke, and Martineau's (2007) study, which shows that third-grade students' science writing improved significantly when authentic purposes for reading and writing were coupled with explicit instruction on the techniques needed to do so. (See chapter 3 for descriptions of writing instruction practices.) Science is an ideal environment for introducing the concept of argumentation, but these skills can and should be reinforced throughout the school day.

The CCSS ELA encourage the purposeful teaching of developmentally appropriate elements of opinion, argumentation, and persuasion to expand students' breadth and

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depth of writing. These rhetorical skills become increasingly essential as students progress through middle and high school, with the seeds of logic sown in the elementary years. Students gain these skills through reading and writing in small-group discussions and classroom discourse.

Shift Five: Focus on Academic Vocabulary and Language

A final shift in the Common Core standards concerns the development of academic vocabulary and language. As with the other major conceptual changes, this shift's intent is to foster disciplinary links in order to build learning. This approach acknowledges that vocabulary should not be seen as an isolated list of words but rather as labels that we use as a proxy for conceptual understandings. In fact, the language of the standards illuminates this idea. The CCSS note the use of "general academic and domain-specific words and phrases sufficient for reading, writing, speaking, and listening" (NGA & CCSSO, 2010a, p. 25). This underscores two key points: (1) academic vocabulary and language entails the use of a broad range of terms—*lexical dexterity*—and (2) vocabulary development extends beyond teaching decontextualized words (NGA & CCSSO, 2010b).

Much of the research underpinning this view of academic vocabulary and language comes from the work of Isabel Beck, Margaret McKeown, and Linda Kucan (2008), whose familiar three-tier model categorizes words and their instruction.

1. **Tier one:** These words are used in everyday speech, are in the vocabulary of most native speakers, and are taught only in the primary grades. However, students who need more language support, such as English learners, will need instruction beyond the first years of schooling. Examples of tier one words include *clock*, *happy*, and *baby* (Beck, McKeown, & Kucan, 2002).
2. **Tier two:** These words (called *general academic words and phrases* in the CCSS) appear more often in texts than in verbal exchanges. For instance, *maintain*, *merchant*, and *benevolent* are examples of tier two words for fourth-grade students (Beck et al., 2002). In addition, tier two words are used in many kinds of texts, not just those that are found within a specific discipline. These words need to be explicitly taught throughout the school years.
3. **Tier three:** These words (called *domain-specific words and phrases* in the CCSS) are closely associated with a specific content and also require specific instruction. Examples of such words and phrases at fourth grade include *magnetic field*, *decimals*, and *prime meridian*.

While teachers often give tier three words and phrases quite a bit of attention, tier two words are more often overlooked. After all, domain-specific words and phrases are closely tied to a discipline and a unit of instruction, and attention is therefore focused on knowing both the definition of the word and its associated concepts. But by overlooking tier two words in instruction, students can face more difficulty reading complex texts

because these words "are not unique to a particular discipline . . . are far less well defined by contextual clues . . . and far less likely to be defined explicitly within a text" (NGA & CCSSO, 2010b, p. 33). For example, knowing that a character *sauntered* rather than *ran* alerts the reader to the character's mood and intent. A *benevolent* leader enlightens a reader to the intentions of an expeditionary team. But unless attention is also provided for these words, readers of complex texts are not able to comprehend at a deeper level. Similarly, students will not use sophisticated terms in their expressive language.

Therefore, an important shift in the Common Core standards concerns the importance of using academic language and vocabulary throughout the school day. Special attention should be given to the types of academic language students require in order to express themselves and to understand the writings of others. Furthermore, the rush to profile domain-specific words and phrases can overshadow the importance of general academic vocabulary that students encounter in many kinds of texts. The investment in academic vocabulary and language is well worth it, as vocabulary knowledge is a robust predictor of reading comprehension through eighth grade (Yovanoff, Duesbery, & Alonzo, 2005).

Purposes and Organization of the CCSS ELA

In the previous section, we highlighted five major shifts in the way we look at the literacy development of grades 3–5 students across the school day. As noted previously, a primary purpose of the CCSS is to prepare students for eventual college or career choices. All schools aspire to successfully prepare students for the future; however, some argue that starting this in high school is too late for some students (National Education Goals Panel, 1998). However, this doesn't mean that elementary students must start making plans for their adult lives. But insufficient literacy skills do limit one's choices in employment, careers, and postsecondary education. By spotlighting the importance of literacy development across grades K–12, we hope to collectively consider how 21st century instruction factors into students' lives long after they have left our classrooms.

The CCSS spotlight college and career readiness with *anchor standards*. Anchor standards are the threads that tie the grade-level standards together, whether in kindergarten or senior year. Anchor standards frame each language arts strand: Reading, Writing, Speaking and Listening, and Language. Figure 1.3 explains the different elements of the Common Core State Standards for English language arts.

In the next three chapters, we utilize the anchor standards as a means for fostering the work of collaborative planning teams. The following principles for college and career readiness shape these anchor standards and describe the growing capabilities of learners as they progress through school. To be college and career ready, students must do the following.

- **Demonstrate independence:** Students must comprehend complex texts in all content areas, participate as speakers and listeners in academic discussions and presentations, direct their own learning, and utilize resources.

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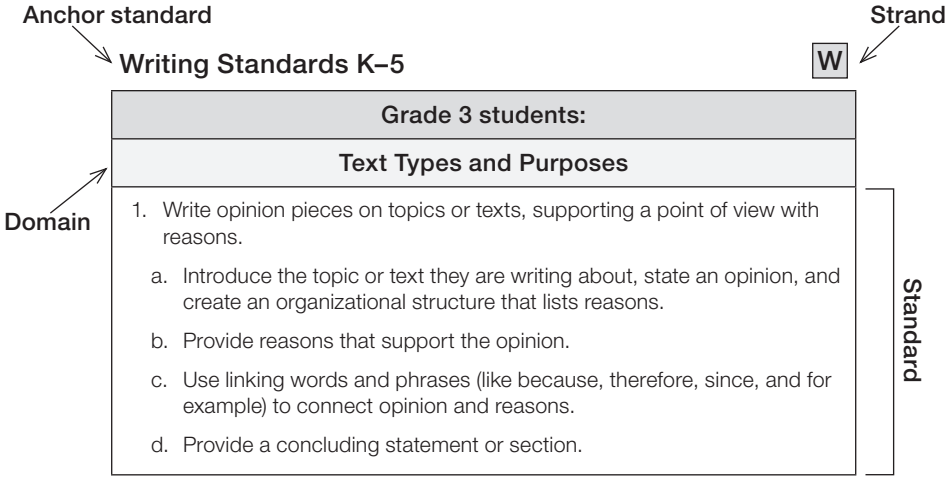
Strands are the categories for English language arts in K–5 and 6–12: Reading, Writing, Speaking and Listening, and Language. Additionally, literacy in history and social studies, science, and technical subjects in grades 6–12 focuses on two strands—Reading and Writing.

College and career readiness (CCR) anchor standards define general, cross-disciplinary expectations for reading, writing, speaking and listening, and language. These anchor standards are designated by strand and standard number; for example, R.CCR.6 signifies reading strand (R), anchor standard (CCR), and standard number (six). This standard is from the domain Craft and Structure, which has three standards numbered four, five, and six. The anchor standards are numbered consecutively, one through ten, in the domains.

Domains define categories of CCR anchor standards for each of the strands in the CCSS ELA—Reading, Writing, Speaking and Listening, and Language. For example, four domains are defined for the Writing strand: Text Types and Purposes (standards one, two, and three), Production and Distribution of Writing (standards four, five, and six), Research to Build and Present Knowledge (standards seven, eight, and nine), and Range of Writing (standard ten).

Grade-specific standards define what students should understand and be able to do. The grade-specific standards parallel the CCR anchor standards by translating the broader CCR statements into grade-appropriate end-of-year expectations.

Grade-specific standards are designated by strand, anchor standard, grade level, and standard number; for example, RL.K.1 signifies Reading Standards for Literature (RL), kindergarten level (K), standard one in the domain Key Ideas and Details.



Source: Adapted from NGA & CCSSO, 2010a, p. 20.

Figure 1.3: How to read the CCSS ELA.

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- **Build strong content knowledge across all subjects and disciplines:** Cross-discipline knowledge is important for students' writing and discussions. In addition, students should engage in the research and study skills needed to build their content knowledge.
- **Respond to the varying demands of audience, task, purpose, and discipline:** College- and career-ready students communicate in speaking and writing with a range of audiences and are knowledgeable about the variances of discipline-specific evidence.
- **Comprehend as well as critique:** Students learn this skill as they read and listen to others. They are able to ask questions, evaluate information, and discern reasonableness.
- **Value evidence:** Students should provide evidence in their own oral and written discourse and expect others to furnish evidence.
- **Use technology and digital media strategically and capably:** As they integrate online and offline resources, students should use critical-thinking and communication skills within their digital lives.
- **Understand other perspectives and cultures:** In order to better communicate with and learn from and alongside people, students should understand a wide range of cultural and experiential backgrounds.

The principles and assumptions that guided development of the anchor standards provide a framework for understanding them and their function in girding the grade-level standards. While the CCSS map the territory for literacy development, they do not pretend to describe every aspect of teaching and learning.

What Is Not Covered in the Standards

Keep in mind that the standards themselves are end-point results. It has been left to educators, instructional leaders, collaborative planning teams, and curriculum developers to design the ways to get there. The CCSS state, "The Standards define what all students are expected to know and be able to do, not how teachers should teach" (NGA & CCSSO, 2010a, p. 6). This is intentional, as it is essential for educators at the local, state, and national levels to engage in dialogue about essential topics related to content and scope, intervention methods and materials, and supports and expectations for English learners, students with special needs, and students who struggle.

The Content and Scope

The Common Core ELA standards describe essential outcomes but do not address all aspects of learning, or even disciplines, that are important for learners. The authors use play as an example, acknowledging that it is critical in the learning lives of young children but is not featured in the standards themselves (NGA & CCSSO, 2010a). Even within the scope of English language arts, not all aspects are featured. For instance,

handwriting is not mentioned, even though every elementary teacher devotes time to this endeavor. Consequently, some states have supplemented the standards with additional content. For example, California added 15 percent of content to the CCSS, such as handwriting, presentation, and recitation standards in grades 3–5 (California Department of Education, n.d.; Sacramento County Office of Education, 2012). The Common Core State Standards are intended to guide the development of formative and summative assessments. It is important for states to cap their additions to ensure they do not undermine this design and make it impossible to develop meaningful assessments that can be used across states. This process will ensure that assessment results based on the CCSS will allow for comparisons of student performance across states. PARCC and SBAC, the two consortia developing standards-based assessments, consist of representatives from states that provide additional opportunities for collaboration among states. Teachers should check their state's department of education website to determine any content that's been added to the CCSS.

Intervention Methods and Materials

The standards should be viewed as end-of-grade expectations, but they do not in any way describe either the approaches for intervention or the materials used to accompany them. In every school, some students are performing well below grade-level expectations, and others are currently benefitting from a response to intervention (RTI) approach to learning. RTI involves identifying whether, and to what extent, a struggling student is responding positively to intervention that has been designed to meet the individual learner's needs. His or her responsiveness (or unresponsiveness) to intervention is determined through dynamic, ongoing assessment that monitors student progress and shapes modifications to the assessment plan. The CCSS ELA do not discuss RTI; however, we will explore this topic in chapter 5.

Supports and Expectations for English Learners

The NGA and CCSSO include people knowledgeable about issues related to English learners. NGA and CCSSO acknowledge that students acquiring English require supports and that these supports should be carefully designed to meet the needs of these students (see "Application of Common Core State Standards for English Language Learners," www.corestandards.org/assets/application-for-english-learners.pdf). They caution, however, that accommodations should not result in a reduction of expectations for fear that the trajectory of these students' educational progress will be severely compromised.

Supports and Expectations for Students With Special Needs

Similarly, the CCSS do not define supports for students with special needs beyond assistive technologies such as Braille, screen-reader technologies, sign language, and so on. Use of such devices is determined through an individual education program (IEP) and supersedes educational standards. These devices and approaches are more commonly

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used for students with sensory or motor disabilities, or in some cases, for those with mild disabilities that involve reading and learning (see "Application to Students With Disabilities," www.corestandards.org/assets/application-to-students-with-disabilities.pdf). What has not been determined is how these supports and expectations might be adapted for students with more significant cognitive and intellectual delays and disabilities. It is likely that development of these systems will continue as general and special educators collaborate. Participation and access are priorities, and the CCSS language mirrors that used in the Individuals With Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 (http://idea.ed.gov): "The Standards should also be read as allowing for the widest possible range of students to participate fully from the outset and as permitting appropriate accommodations to ensure maximum participation of students with special education needs" (NGA & CCSSO, 2010a, p. 6).

Support and Expectations for Students Who Struggle

The Common Core State Standards do not provide specific advice about supporting students who struggle with school. Instead, there is a recognition that expectations are often reduced and students fail to reach high levels of achievement. Support for students who struggle with school should be part of the ongoing conversations within collaborative planning teams. As Richard DuFour, Rebecca DuFour, and Robert Eaker (2008) note, collaborative teams should discuss what to do when students fail to achieve the expected learning targets. During discussions, team members can identify additional instructional interventions to close the gap between students who mastered the content and those who did not. This may involve reteaching content through guided instruction or targeting students for RTI efforts (Fisher & Frey, 2010). A pyramid of RTI that provides teams with systems for intervention can be helpful (Buffum, Mattos, & Weber, 2008). Additionally, in this book we will focus on quality teaching for all students and encourage the development of collaborative planning teams to monitor and adapt instruction to ensure learning for all students. This systematic approach to students who struggle in school has a better potential to result in positive outcomes than reducing expectations or preventing students from accessing high-quality instruction aligned with the Common Core State Standards. That's not to say that teachers should avoid scaffolding or support. As we will discuss in each of the teaching scenarios in this book, teaching Common Core ELA well requires a deep understanding of the content as well as skills in responding to students' understanding and misunderstanding.

Conclusion

The Common Core State Standards for English language arts present grades 3–5 educators with challenges as well as opportunities. The shifts in our ways of thinking about literacy development are considerable and require us to collectively look at our own practices and plan collaboratively with our colleagues. These expectations can pose a major roadblock for schools that do not have a forum for conducting this important work. It is not the kind of work that can be accomplished in a few workshops and some

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follow-up meetings. Determining how these changes will be implemented, as well as identifying the effective practices that have already proven to be successful, will require focused and sustained attention as educators together develop curriculum, design formative assessments, and interpret results. Collaborative teams within a professional learning community are an ideal forum for accomplishing this work. Indeed, the major shifts described in this chapter parallel the characteristics of successful professional learning communities: they emphasize collaboration and communication across disciplines and grade levels, and they reward those who seek to deepen their understanding of their professional practice.

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